Cooperation in Contention:
The Evolution of ASEAN Norms

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Introduction

In the immediate post-Cold War years, as the founding states were undergoing political reform and enjoying economic growth, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was praised as an exemplar of regional cooperation in unlikely circumstances. Member states had, since ASEAN's inception in 1967, managed to prevent intra-regional disputes from escalating into armed conflict. Analysts thus described the Association as a 'community' of states with converging interests and increasing integration.

Since the Asian economic crisis in 1997, however, enthusiasm for ASEAN's model of regional cooperation has waned. As Southeast Asian states struggled with financial decline and associated political and social instability, questions were raised about the relevance and credibility of the Association. In addition, membership expansion posed further challenges to its principles and practices – ASEAN's 'norms.' The admission of less developed, semi-authoritarian states contributed to an altered security environment. ASEAN's image was tarnished as it appeared ineffective in responding decisively to regional problems.

Critics question ASEAN's efficacy and legitimacy, suggesting that it is merely a façade constructed by a group of self-interested states. They refute the notion that it is a community, and thus vindicate realist expectations. However, such criticism tends to focus on a *static* notion of ASEAN norms.

This paper is motivated by several questions: what is the impact of recent challenges on ASEAN's 'experiment' in regional cooperation? Does the Association represent a vehicle for effective cooperation, or are its declared aims merely rhetorical? More specifically, to what extent do member states identify with each other and regard security as interdependent? In exploring these questions, this paper demonstrates the ongoing *evolution* of ASEAN norms. Analyses of the Association's development should recognize the dynamic nature of its principles and practices, as member state behaviour responds to changing circumstances.

The evolution of ASEAN norms is particularly evident with respect to the Association's handling of new member states. The most challenging of these is Burma, an international pariah.[1] Burma's admission in 1997 has provoked tensions both within the Association and with extra-regional actors. ASEAN has grappled with how to encourage political reform in Burma given the principle of non-interference.

However, ASEAN's founding member states appear increasingly willing to be critical of Burma's military regime. This was demonstrated in the months prior to the Thirty-Eighth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM)

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[1] Burma's military regime changed the English version of the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. The use of the name Myanmar remains controversial given the regime's lack of political legitimacy. Some states (including the US and Canada) continue to refer to the country as Burma, as I will do in this paper. However, some of the quotations I use refer to Myanmar. In accordance with common practice, I will refer to citizens of the country as Burmese, and to the majority ethnic group as Burmans.

in July 2005, at which Burma announced it would not assume the position of ASEAN chair in 2006. Foreign ministers from the founding states had stated publicly that it was in ASEAN's interests for Burma to decline. Some representatives also met with Burma's leadership and persuaded it to step aside. This episode appeared to indicate a significant departure from the norm of non-interference. Certain foreign ministers seemed willing to place pressure Burma to alter its domestic circumstances and mitigate the potential damage to ASEAN's reputation.

Developments (or perhaps, the lack thereof) since July 2005 have not really advanced this departure; criticism of Burma during official ASEAN dialogue remains constrained (although the issue has been more directly addressed in official statements). Further, the question arises of how significant the pressure on Burma was; the military junta has apparently not changed its stance and the stalemate has continued.

Nevertheless, the norm of non-interference has been challenged and modified. ASEAN ministers can now be more frank, albeit outside official ASEAN circles, in regard to matters such as Burma's political situation. Further, there is more open debate by ministers about the meaning and relevance of the non-interference principle, which was less acceptable in the past. The 'ASEAN Way' of quiet, informal diplomacy and closed-door meetings has begun to give way to a more open discourse. The question remains as to whether criticism by individual ministers will gradually translate to more explicit discussion in official ASEAN statements.

ASEAN is undergoing a community-building process as the interests of the founding member states converge, and they increasingly conceptualize their security as interdependent. However, the role of the newer members is uncertain. The manner in which ASEAN proceeds will depend on the interplay of evolving and sometimes conflicting norms.

ASEAN thus poses pertinent questions in regard to state cooperation in a regional context. Cooperation cannot be assumed to be facilitated by a regional intergovernmental organization. Interstate relations are fraught with myriad interests and concerns, which may or may not be congruous. As such, an organization's declared objectives and principles may not necessarily amount to more than rhetoric.

While this paper is not explicitly oriented toward a particular theoretical paradigm, certain concepts developed in constructivist approaches to international relations assist its analysis. Constructivist approaches emphasise the social context of the international states system (see Wendt 2000; Finnemore 1996; Katzenstein 1996). State interests and identities are not taken as given, but as continually evolving as a result

of interaction with other states and the influence of international 'norms' of behaviour.[2] To be sure, states' interests may diverge as well as converge, but the important point is that they are not simply a product of the desire for survival in a self-help environment.

As such, states may choose to cooperate not simply to avoid conflict, but to facilitate sustainable conditions of peace. In so doing, they may foster an emerging sense of 'community.' The notion of community relies for its conceptual basis on a sense of 'collective identity.' As Alexander Wendt (1994) points out, "by engaging in cooperative behaviour…actors are simultaneously learning to *identify* with each other – to see themselves as a "we" bound by certain norms" (390, emphasis in original).

This recalls Karl Deutsch's (1957) notion of "we-feelings" as underscoring the so-called "security community." A security community is formed when norms are established that renounce the use of force to settle intra-group disputes. As such, states refrain from preparations for war against each other, such as arms acquisitions. Moreover, the Deutschian security community is a group that has "become integrated,": where "integration is defined as the attainment of a sense of community, accompanied by formal or informal institutions or practices" (Acharya 2001: 16). Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (1998) have reinvigorated the "security community" notion in the post-Cold War period, which distinguishes between the nascent, ascendant and mature phases. As will be discussed, some scholars characterized ASEAN as a "nascent" security community before 1997.

This paper is organized into three sections. The first section explores ASEAN's origins and normative principles, and the challenges posed since 1997, particularly in regard to the norm of non-interference. The second section focuses on ASEAN's management of Burma's membership and potential chairmanship, in the light of its dynamic normative context. The third section examines empirical developments since July 2005, and their implications for the non-interference principle. ASEAN is constrained from taking more decisive action on Burma, but its gestures towards pressure on the junta indicate the desires of some ministers to reinterpret the meaning of non-interference. The paper concludes by considering the tensions between ASEAN norms, particularly that between non-interference and the norm of appropriate governance. Such tensions are a potential source of divisiveness among member states, but it is in ASEAN's interests to become (or at least appear) more cohesive.

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[2] Martha Finnemore (1996) provides a widely cited definition of "norms" as "shared expectations about behavior held by a community of actors" (22). In this paper, 'ASEAN norms' refers to the 'shared expectations' about member state behaviour as articulated by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and the ASEAN Way (to be discussed). These 'declared' (and sometimes written) norms are articulations of 'shared expectations about behaviour' that existed before the formation of ASEAN. Moreover, as this paper argues, these norms have evolved over time, and are not constrained by their original conceptualizations.

ASEAN's Normative Principles

ASEAN has made probably the most successful attempt at regional cooperation in the non-Western world. Despite considerable political and cultural diversity, the Association has provided a forum for dialogue between Southeast Asian states, and the opportunity for cooperation. The Association was established in 1967 by five Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines), to institute the renunciation of the use of force to settle interstate disputes. ASEAN members intended to pursue regional stability following a period of intense inter-member disputes, most notably *Konfrontasi* and the Malaysian-Philippine feud over the Malaysian state of Sabah.[3]

ASEAN's founding members faced the characteristic problems of newly independent post-colonial states: ethnic secessionist demands threatening territorial integrity, and communist insurgency challenging regime security (Collins 2003: 128). As such, they supported mutual nation-building efforts by recognizing each other's independence and sovereignty, and agreeing not to interfere in each other's internal affairs. While ostensibly ASEAN was not itself a "security-oriented structure," it served to promote and protect regime security (Narine 2002: 15). Further, ASEAN was intended to facilitate trade between member states, in recognition of the potential economic growth in the region.[4] At this stage, Amitav Acharya (2001) argues, "the founders of ASEAN had little conception of a regional identity. But they clearly hoped to develop one through regional cooperation" (28).

ASEAN's formation was also propelled by concern about Great Power rivalry in the region, particularly amongst China, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Regionalism was seen as a useful way to "enhance the bargaining power of small and weak states in their dealings with the Great Powers" (Ibid.: 52). ASEAN has sought to balance the desire for engagement with China and the US with trepidation about external influence. In particular, member states have been concerned with "how to handle an assertive China" (Mauzy 2000: 264-5).

ASEAN's norms were articulated at the First ASEAN Summit in Bali in 1976, at which the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) was signed. The TAC sets out the following principles: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; the "settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means"; the renunciation of the threat or use of force; and effective

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[3] The ASEAN Declaration (often referred to as the *Bangkok Declaration*) was signed in Bangkok on 8 August 1967. It asserts that, given the "existence of mutual interests and common problems," the Association "represents the collective will of the nations of South-East Asia to bind themselves in friendship and cooperation." ASEAN's aims in the Declaration include the promotion of regional peace and stability, and "active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest" (ASEAN 1967).

[4] Intra-regional economic cooperation was an important part of the founding states' vision, as they began to shift from import-substitution to export-led development in the 1960s (Ibid.: 25).

cooperation.[5] These norms, described by Acharya as "legal-rational" and by others as "behavioural," form a code of conduct for the interaction of member states (Acharya 2001: 25; Busse 1999: 46; Collins 2003: 131). They had already emerged as "shared expectations of behaviour" (Finnemore 1996: 22), but the TAC documented them.

The non-interference principle is a particularly significant aspect of this code of conduct; it effectively underpins the other TAC norms and has been frequently invoked in ASEAN affairs. As originally conceived, it was intended to preclude hindrance of the mutual preoccupation with insurgency.[6] It also requires the renunciation of public criticism: an agreement to refrain from "criticising the actions of a member government towards its own people, including violation of human rights, and from making the domestic political system of states and the political styles of governments a basis for deciding their membership in ASEAN" (Ibid.).

A second set of norms is embodied by the so-called "ASEAN Way," which emphasizes decision-making by consensus and informal dispute resolution. These norms have been referred to as "socio-cultural" or "procedural" (Ibid.: 25; Busse 1999: 47). ASEAN member states consciously reject the "legalistic," formal style of Western institutional structures, favouring a private and informal political culture ruled by small elite networks. ASEAN thus embraces Westphalian principles while seeking a unique approach to regional cooperation through culturally appropriate decision-making processes. Moreover, as Brian Job (1999) notes, the ASEAN Way also reflects "the practical requirements of holding together such a diverse group of states" (10). Member states are spared the embarrassment of dissent, through closed-door dialogue that precedes formal meetings (Acharya 2001: 68).[7]

ASEAN as a Security Community?

The absence of interstate conflict among member states over four decades since the Association's formation appears to vindicate the notion that some semblance of order and stability has been achieved in the region. Intra-regional disputes have certainly occurred, but have been managed without resorting to interstate war. This has motivated Acharya and others to describe ASEAN as a "nascent security community" (Acharya 2001; Busse 1999; Khong 1997). Writing in 1995, he argues that "taken together, the practice of

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[5] These clearly reflect Westphalian norms, which is unsurprising considering that the founding members of ASEAN were newly independent states, keen to assert their sovereignty in the international system (ASEAN 1976).

[6] The founding states agreed not to provide refuge to rebel groups threatening to overthrow neighbouring regimes, and to generally support each other's efforts to eradicate challenges to regime security (Acharya 2001: 58).

[7] The components of the ASEAN Way are not formally articulated by the Association. However, in 1992 the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamed described the '5Cs' of the ASEAN spirit: consultation, consensus, caring, cornerstone, and consolidation (Mahathir 1992: 1-4).

multilateralism, the ASEAN norms, the ASEAN Way and the principle of regional autonomy constitute the basis of ASEAN's collective identity" (Acharya 1998: 213). ASEAN norms have a constitutive effect that, through interaction and socialisation, serves to redefine the interests of member states. It should be noted, however, that Acharya initially made this argument prior to 1997; he later tempers his position, describing ASEAN as undergoing a "security-community-building project."[8]

It is interesting to note that ASEAN has made conscious gestures toward cultivating a sense of 'community.' At the Ninth ASEAN Summit in Bali in October 2003, member states declared their vision of an ASEAN Community, with three pillars: political and security cooperation, giving rise to the ASEAN Security Community (ASC); economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. They articulated their desire to pursue a "closer and mutually beneficial integration" to ensure "peace, stability and prosperity" (ASEAN 2003: Clause 10).

This depiction of ASEAN as a (possibly) 'nascent,' rather than 'mature,' security community reflects the limits to its regional cooperation experiment thus far. The declared norm of the renunciation of force to resolve disputes fulfils one of the basic criteria of the security community, given that compliance with this norm has been fairly stringent.[9] However, the satisfaction of the criterion of states' abstinence from preparations for war against each other is more ambiguous. ASEAN member states continue to undertake arms acquisitions, which, while not necessarily a response to intra-regional tensions, suggests that there are "limits to community-building" (Ibid.).[10]

Moreover, ASEAN does not fit the other criteria of a mature security community.[11] Member states have often not had common threat perceptions, given their traditional focus on internal security and political diversity,

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[8] Acharya's chapter in Adler's and Barnett's (1998) volume was written before the Asian economic crisis, the fall of Suharto in Indonesia, and the completion of ASEAN's membership expansion (Ibid.). In his 2000 work, Acharya (2001) notes that, while ASEAN could be described as a nascent security community in the early 1990s, these later developments cast doubt on this argument. He describes ASEAN as engaged in a "security-community-building project," but warns that it is "in serious need to reinvent itself" (204, 206).

[9] Indeed, the "absence of war among the ASEAN members since 1967" is the starting point for Acharya's application of the security community concept to ASEAN (Ibid.: 200).

[10] For discussions of Malaysia's and Singapore's arms acquisitions, for example, refer to Ahmad 2005; Carpenter 2005: 262). Alan Collins (2003) goes further, arguing that ASEAN is not a security community because "the use of force to resolve member disputes is not inconceivable" (132).

[11] For Adler and Barnett (1998), these are shared identity, greater institutionalization, multilateralism. and a high degree of military integration (55-7).

and their rejection of collective defence.[12] Realists would clearly be sceptical that concepts such as 'common threat perceptions' and 'shared identity' could be applied to any group of states, much less Southeast Asia.[13] Nonetheless, amid the changing circumstances following the regional economic crisis, ASEAN norms continued to evolve in the face of significant challenges, partly as a conscious attempt to assert a collective identity.

Post-1997 Challenges and Criticism

The regional economic crisis highlighted ASEAN's lack of concrete institutional mechanisms, but also an inability or unwillingness to cooperate (Job 1999: 1). In addition, membership expansion between 1995 and 1999 has been somewhat of a mixed blessing; it has achieved the Association's 'One Southeast Asia' vision, but has also increased the burden on the founding states to accommodate a wider variety of security concerns.

The post-1997 challenges to ASEAN norms pertain to three realms of regional security: arms acquisitions, conflict management, and the altered security environment. The first has been discussed: the build-up of arms by some ASEAN states may test the adherence to the principle of non-use or threat of force. Secondly, the ASEAN Way began to appear an outdated style of conflict management; the lack of formal dispute settlement mechanisms has led the Association to seek assistance from international organizations. Thirdly, the altered security environment has precipitated divergent threat perceptions among member states. These aspects of member state behaviour have tested ASEAN norms as they were originally conceived. Collins argues that the developments after 1997 "fueled doubts about the practicality of the principles and processes behind ASEAN's success, and indeed raised doubts about the continued viability of the association itself" (Collins 2003: 140-1).

Of primary importance are challenges to the non-interference principle, as it is central to ASEAN's normative context. It directly impacts conflict management, the renunciation of force, effective cooperation and the procedural norms of the ASEAN Way. It is effectively an indicator of the nexus between regime and regional security.

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[12] ASEAN states have traditionally rejected formal multilateral security cooperation in favour of bilateral arrangements. This originally reflected the efforts to pursue insurgents across mutual borders, and was continued after ASEAN's formation (Acharya 2001: 62).

[13] The late Michael Leifer was one of the more prominent doubters, preferring to describe ASEAN as a "diplomatic community." He conceded that the Association had been able to prevent the escalation of intraregional disputes. However, he regarded this as simply the product of informal intergovernmental dialogue, rather than the development of any definitive institutional mechanism for the *resolution* of disputes (Leifer 1995: 132; Leifer 1999: 26).

For some scholars, inconsistent adherence to ASEAN norms by member states undermines its credibility. Nicholas Khoo argues that the non-interference norm is regularly violated, indicating that ASEAN norms have a "tenuous connection with reality." In fact, he perceives a contrary norm of *interference* in other states' affairs as characterizing member state behaviour. As such, he emphatically refutes the notion that ASEAN is a nascent security community, regarding it instead as a group of states that prioritize their national interests ahead of regional autonomy (Khoo 2004: 40). Similarly, Samuel Sharpe argues that the norms of non-interference and non-use of force have been inconsistently upheld by member states. He questions ASEAN's ability to construct a "significant security identity," and thus a security community (Sharpe 2003: 248).

Going further, David Jones and Michael Smith perceive not simply a lack of norm compliance, but a fundamental pretence in ASEAN's very existence, dismissing it as an "imitation community."[14] They argue that is merely a "rhetorical shell" with form but no substance. They do not, however, adequately explain the motivations of ASEAN members in constructing this "shell."

ASEAN's relevance and utility has also questioned in instances where international bodies have been required to address a particular dispute or crisis in the region. Khoo (2004) argues that "since 2001, ASEAN members have increasingly ignored the ASEAN mechanisms for conflict resolution and looked to international institutions to settle bilateral disputes" (53). Indeed, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations (UN) have all been called upon at various times in response to regional disputes and crises.[15]

However, such criticism tends to be based on a conceptualization of ASEAN norms as static. It interprets the emerging disparity between the original declared norms and contemporary practices as evidence of the hollow nature of these norms – of their lack of significance beyond *realpolitik*. Khoo (2004) laments the fact that member states fail to consistently adhere to ASEAN norms, and argues that "if principles associated with the ASEAN Way really matter, we should see them working when it counts – when states have disputes" (53). However, he fails to acknowledge that this indicates a constraint in ASEAN's *modus operandi*: its norms effectively prevent decisive responses to many regional crises, because they preclude intervention,

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[14] Jones and Smith (2002) adapt the term "imitation community" from Michael Oakeshott's term "imitation state" (used to describe the incomplete nation-building of newly independent states). They regard ASEAN as having been constructed to give the *appearance* of a regional organisation, with annual ministerial meetings, a secretariat and a bureaucracy. However, it "makes no decisions and enforces no rules" (93-109).

[15] The ICJ has assisted the resolution of territorial disputes, such as that between Malaysia and Indonesia over the Sipadan-Ligitan islands off the Malaysian province of Sabah in December 2002. The IMF provided assistance during the Asian economic crisis in 1997, and the UN effectively governed and began the reconstruction of East Timor following Indonesia's withdrawal in 1999.

interference or even criticism.[16] The apparently inconsistent compliance with the original understanding of ASEAN norms may in fact indicate that these norms are being reinterpreted, as member states adapt to new security priorities. ASEAN norms should thus be regarded as *dynamic*.

ASEAN norms are also tested by the more diverse array of security threats brought about by the Association's admission of less developed, semi-authoritarian states. Newer members (the so-called 'CLMV' states) have brought with them internal problems such as secessionist movements and communal violence.[17] To be sure, internal security threats persist in the founding member states (some prominent 'hotspots' being southern Thailand, southern Philippines, and Aceh, and West Papua in Indonesia). However, membership expansion has increased the breadth of security issues among member states, that often have spillover effects that heighten the potential for bilateral tensions. Further, political instability and poor governance in the new states have consequences for their neighbours.[18]

The regional security environment has also been altered by the increased salience of nontraditional, transnational security threats. These include drugs trafficking, illegal migration, piracy, and various other forms of transnational crime (Dupont 1999: 434). In addition, ASEAN member states are increasingly concerned about environmental degradation, resource depletion and energy scarcity (Snitwongse and Bunbongkarn 2001: 150).[19]

Of course, certain traditional security concerns have persisted in the post-Cold War period. ASEAN remains concerned about a rising China. Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have provoked tensions with member states (particularly Malaysia), and motivated ASEAN to engage China in private diplomacy (Whiting 1995: 28). Member states also want to ensure US military presence in the long term while resisting

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[16] Further, a resort to international bodies does not necessarily indicate ASEAN's ineffectiveness in dispute resolution. The Association was established with a consciously informal approach to conflict management. Disagreements requiring legal tribunals are outside the capacity of ASEAN's institutional framework.

[17] Cambodia (admitted in 1999), Laos (1997), Myanmar (Burma, 1997) and Vietnam (1995). Brunei Darassalam was admitted in 1984. In Laos, for example, Hmong tribesman and other insurgent forces have resisted the communist government since it took power in 1975, and violent conflict is ongoing (Carpenter 2005: 162). Burma has long struggled with clashes among ethnic minorities and the military junta, with the latter brutally suppressing expressions of ethnic nationalism in an effort to instill national unity.

[18] Cambodia, for example, exhibits lawlessness, corruption and human rights abuses. It is ostensibly a democracy but the fairness of elections is highly questionable (Grove 2005: 83). While Vietnam is more politically stable, it also suffers from official corruption, and from the government's willingness to crack down on organized dissent. Such crackdowns have instigated a flow of refugees into Cambodia, causing tensions between the two states (Manyin 2005: 310, 315).

[19] A prominent environmental threat in recent years has been the 'haze' that spreads from Indonesian forest fires across the region each year, due to mismanagement of Indonesia's logging industry.

excessive US influence with respect to immediate issues. ASEAN has thus sought to balance both China and the US using 'soft power.' An important aspect of this strategy is engaging them in multilateral security dialogue, primarily through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which was established in 1993.[20]

ASEAN's dynamic normative terrain is characterized by an apparent interplay between norms, that sometimes compete and conflict. Khoo laments what he regards as a constructivist tendency to focus on so-called "positive" or "benign" norms, and is concerned about the effect on the research agenda. He argues that Acharya and others thus tend to assume a teleological stance on ASEAN, viewing it as progressing toward a more cohesive, effective Association. Instead, he argues, ASEAN is better explained by acknowledging "negative" or "perverse" norms (Khoo 2004: 43-4). Leaving aside the motivations for Khoo's claim, this debate highlights an interesting and crucial point for research on ASEAN. As Alice Ba (2005) points out, Khoo and Acharya simply disagree about which norms are most relevant. In fact, there are multiple, sometimes conflicting norms underpinning ASEAN, and their interactions have complex effects (265).

Burma's Membership and the Chairmanship Issue

Burma has been the most controversial and problematic of the CLMV states. This stems from the political illegitimacy of the ruling military junta and its poor human rights record, which have attracted international condemnation for a number of years. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has ruled Burma under martial law since 1988.[21] Its legitimacy crisis arises, firstly, from this seizure of power by way of a coup staged by the military following violent crackdowns on demonstrators (Ferrara 2003: 305). Secondly, the military junta refused to recognize the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 elections, and its imposition of house arrest on the NLD's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, for most of the subsequent period.

Her incarceration, and those of numerous other political prisoners, has provoked international criticism and ongoing campaigns by groups such as Amnesty International. The SPDC has also been condemned for its coercive subdual of the populace, its repression of ethnic minorities, and the military's permeation in all aspects of socio-political life. Some governments, including the US and Canada, refuse to recognize the SPDC as legitimate (and thus continue to refer to the country as 'Burma' rather than 'Myanmar'). However, the SPDC remains determined to retain its grip on power, in the belief that the military is the only body capable of maintaining national unity (Smith 2001: 20).

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[20] Tobias Nischalke (2002) argues that "the creation of the ARF hinted at the convergence of security perspectives among ASEAN members. Leaders in Indonesia and Malaysia realized the need to engage China and became more inclined to accept an American role in the new security structure" (100).

[21] When it took power in 1988, the regime was known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). It became the SPDC in 1997. Robert Taylor (2001) notes that while there were several ministerial changes made at the time of the SPDC's succession of the SLORC, there was no significant change in policy (3).

Burma's admission to ASEAN in 1997 thus provoked controversy and tensions with extra-regional actors. The CLMV states were granted membership during the late 1990s to make ASEAN truly representative of Southeast Asia, and thus to enhance its international standing.[22] The founding states wanted ASEAN to facilitate the development of a regional identity – their vision of 'One Southeast Asia.' There were also pragmatic motivations: an increased market size and thus potential economic benefits. Burma had begun since 1998 to open its economy to foreign investment. Moreover, ASEAN members had strategic concerns: the balancing of increasingly influential neighbours.[23] Burma's admission was motivated by the perceived need to counterbalance the influence of China – an important source of investment, aid and military support for Burma. Narine notes that during the 1990s, member states frequently responded to Western criticism by asserting that isolating Burma "would only drive it more deeply into China's embrace" (Ibid.: 114-5).

ASEAN justified Burma's membership by invoking the non-interference principle; its position was that excluding Burma on the grounds of political repression would amount to interference in its internal affairs (Acharya 2001: 108). This clearly contrasted with its handling of Cambodia's inclusion.[24] However, this inconsistency did not appear to be particularly problematic for ASEAN member states; it was overshadowed by strategic concerns. Burma's domestic political situation *was* regarded as relevant, indicating evolution of the norm.

Constructive Engagement and Non-Interference

However, ASEAN did recognize that Burma would be a problematic member. As such, its admission was supposedly undertaken on the condition that the SPDC must implement political reforms.[25] During the process of Burma's admission, which it achieved in July 1997, ASEAN responded to criticism of its policies towards Burma by arguing that it was pursuing 'constructive engagement.' This implied quietly encouraging the Burmese junta to change, while avoiding *public* criticism, exclusion or embarrassment (Acharya 2001:

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[22] The founding states had apparently always envisioned an inclusive organization; the Bangkok Declaration stated that "the Association is open to participation to all states in the South-East Asian Region," providing they subscribe to its aims and principles (ASEAN 1967).

[23] As Shaun Narine (2002) points out, an expanded ASEAN "has a better chance of being an economic and political counterweight to the large powers of the region, China, Japan and India" (113).

[24] In 1997 ASEAN postponed Cambodia's admission due to Hun Sen's violent coup, and demanded a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Cambodia was eventually admitted in 1999 after an 'ASEAN troika' (comprising Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand) effectively brokered a resolution through elections and installation of a coalition government led by Hun Sen (Ramcharan 2000: 67). While Cambodia was not a member of ASEAN when this action took place, it was inconsistent with the understanding that domestic political circumstances would not be considered a criterion of membership.

[25] At the 1994 AMM, to which Thailand invited Burma as its guest, ASEAN Foreign Ministers conveyed that they wanted Burma to join "but stipulated that conciliatory gestures on the domestic front were necessary before accession was possible" (Narine 2002: 115).

110).[26] As such, it made gestures towards avoiding violation of this aspect of the non-interference norm (while challenging it in another sense through *internal* discussion).

However, constructive engagement has not been a success. The resulting debate among member states since Burma's admission has indicated that the non-interference norm is in contention and evolution. The first significant challenge came from the then Thai Foreign Minister Dr. Surin Pitsuwan in 1998, who proposed that ASEAN instead adopt a policy of "flexible engagement" that permitted public criticism.[27] At the June 1998 Asia-Pacific Roundtable in Kuala Lumpur, he argued that "ASEAN members perhaps no longer can afford to adopt a non-committal stance and avoid passing judgement on events in a member country, simply on the grounds of "non-interference"…much can be said in favour of ASEAN members playing a more proactive role" (Pitsuwan 1998). However, at the Thirty-First AMM in July 1998, ASEAN rejected Surin's proposal in favour of a watered-down policy known as "enhanced interaction."[28] Member states could supposedly be more open in discussion of regional issues, but public criticism was still to be avoided. In the wake of ASEAN's overt interference in Cambodia's internal affairs, most member states sought to reinstate the non-interference principle "to its former sacrosanct position" and repair the political damage (Ramcharan 2000: 76). Such sentiment may have delayed more decisive action on Burma.

Nevertheless, such debate reflects the evolution of the non-interference norm. The ostensible reaffirmation of non-interference did not prevent public criticism from the Philippines and Indonesia regarding the arrest and detention of Anwar Ibrahim in 1998. In addition, Collins points out, an "un-ASEAN-like squabble" regarding Cambodia's admission broke out at the Sixth ASEAN Summit in Hanoi in December of the same year (Collins 2003: 145). These episodes indicate an emerging trend: a certain incongruence between official reaffirmation of non-interference in ASEAN meetings and statements, and the behaviour of member states.

Regional Management and Internal Fragmentation

Since Burma's admission, official ASEAN dialogue has encouraged it to make reforms, and applauded apparent progress in a non-critical manner. During the first few years of its membership, Burma did not

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[26] The policy of constructive engagement originated from Thailand's foreign policy towards Burma, which was motivated by security concerns along the Thai-Burmese border (notably, the influx of Burmese refugees into Thailand following the 1998 crackdowns). This was despite indications as early as 1996 that Thailand's policy had failed (Collins 2003: 143-4).

[27] This proposal built upon the suggestion, made in July 1997 by Malaysia's then Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, that ASEAN consider "constructive intervention" in relation to Cambodia. Anwar argued that "ASEAN should accept the dawning reality that with the entry of new members…new problems will emerge… So much is at stake that ASEAN cannot afford to remain uninvolved" (quoted in Ramcharan 2000: 74).

[28] The then Philippines Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon was the only foreign minister to support Surin's proposal at the AMM ("ASEAN Ministers Adopt Policy of 'Enhanced Interaction'" 1998).

receive much attention in official statements (although this does not indicate that it did not feature in official *discussion*).[29] However, following a violent attack on a convoy of NLD members by government supporters in Depayin on 30 May 2003, and Aung San Suu Kyi's subsequent re-imprisonment, Burma began to feature more prominently on the agenda of ASEAN meetings – itself an indication of the changing normative terrain.[30]

Such statements maintained, however, an encouraging tone. At the Thirty-Sixth AMM in Phnom Penh in June 2003, the Joint Communiqué "noted the efforts of the Government of Myanmar to promote peace and development. In this connection, we urged Myanmar to resume its efforts of national reconciliation and dialogue among all parties concerned leading to a peaceful transition to democracy." The Foreign Ministers "looked forward" to the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD members (ASEAN 2003: Point 18). The statement was clearly carefully worded and attempted to avoid public criticism. However, the sentiment underlying the statement is clear, albeit tempered by the constraints of official dialogue. Shortly after the AMM, in July 2003, the then Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamed stated that Burma may need to be expelled from ASEAN if Suu Kyi was not released.[31] This was particularly salient given that Mahathir had been the staunchest supporter of Burma's admission. It was the first prominent instance of criticism by an ASEAN minister.

Following the 30 May 2003 incident, the SPDC made gestures towards reform, declaring a 'roadmap' to democracy. Thus, at the Ninth ASEAN Summit in Bali in October 2003, the ASEAN leaders 'welcomed the recent positive developments in Myanmar'(ASEAN 2003: Point 15). They also agreed that 'sanctions are not helpful' to such efforts. Member states resisted the efforts of extra-regional powers to isolate Burma; they refused requests by dialogue partners to exclude Burma from meetings.[32]

Unfortunately, this approach has not made much impact. The SPDC has become known for making hollow conciliatory gestures, releasing small groups of political prisoners or declaring the intention to implement democratic reforms. At the time of writing, the military junta has not made any substantial moves towards holding free and fair elections, or implementing a power-sharing arrangement with the NLD (Ibid.: 174-9).

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[29] No mention was made in AMM Joint Communiqués to Burma's domestic political situation, apart from at the Thirty-Fourth AMM in July 2001, where ASEAN foreign ministers noted "encouraging developments" and "reiterated support for ongoing reconciliation" (ASEAN 2001: Point 17).

[30] In the sense that Burma's domestic political situation came onto the public agenda.

[31] Myanmar might have to be expelled from ASEAN (Mahathir 2003).

[32] For example, in 2004 the EU attempted to prevent Burma's participation in the ASEM meeting. However, ASEAN member states stood by Burma, and the EU relented after the SPDC announced that it would only send low-level officials to the meeting (Kyaw 2005: 178).

The longevity of its illegitimate rule, and its use of coercion to resist opposition, suggests that the prospect of regime change must now invoke fear within the leadership.[33]

Indeed, the SPDC may be becoming fragmented and exhibits signs of power struggles. The dismissal and prosecution of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt in October 2004, along with the entire military intelligence sector, precipitated "the fifteenth cabinet shakeup in seven years" (Aung-Thwin 2005: 73).[34] The leadership's apparent preoccupation with an internal political battle suggests that ostensibly positive developments, such as the release of political prisoners and the National Convention, should be regarded with scepticism rather than as an indication of imminent political reform.[35] Further, according to Narine, Burma "has strongly rejected the idea that "constructive engagement" was ever meant to influence its domestic politics"(Narine 2002: 115).

Nevertheless, the implicit pressure on Burma seemed to be somewhat relaxed following the appointment of Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in January 2001, and his elevation to a "leading regional figure" following Mahathir's retirement in October 2003. Thaksin's policy towards Burma appears to be much more accommodating, and his foreign policy priorities sometimes "appear focused more on regional economic integration than national security concerns" (Wiencek 2005: 300).

The Chairmanship Issue
In accordance with the system of alphabetical rotation, Burma (as 'Myanmar') was due to take up the chair in July 2006. As such, it was scheduled to be nominated as the Vice-Chair to Malaysia (the 2005-06 chair) at the Thirty-Eighth AMM in Vientiane in late July 2005. The chair hosts the principal ASEAN meetings, including the annual Summit, AMM, Post-Ministerial Conferences (PMCs), and the ARF. It is thus a significant role, requiring the chair to host both regional and international dignitaries. The prospect of a

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[33] Their personal fortunes are at risk, given the regime's control of the most lucrative sectors of the economy, and its apparent involvement in the drugs trade and money-laundering operations (International Crisis Group 2001: 9; Dupont 1999: 445).

[34] In July 2005, Khin Nyunt was sentenced to forty years' imprisonment for bribery and corruption (among other charges). His allies in the now-defunct military intelligence agency have also been tried and jailed, a symptom of the long-standing rivalry between the intelligence and army units ("Former Myanmar PM Charged with Corruption: Unofficial Sources" 2005; Kyaw 2005: 176).

[35] The junta announced in November 2004 that it would reconvene the National Convention, originally devised in 1993 to draft a new constitution as part of Burma's 'roadmap to democracy.' It was duly reconvened in July 2004, but was boycotted by the NLD. The results were not made public, but they certainly did not include favourable political reform. In July 2005, the junta released 249 political prisoners, shortly before the chairmanship issue was to be considered at the Thirty-Eighth AMM. While international figures such as United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan welcomed the move, they pointed out that Aung San Suu Kyi and many other dissidents remained imprisoned, and reiterated calls for their release ("Burma to Relaunch Democracy Talks" 2004; Kyaw 2005: 175; Reilly 2005).

pariah state holding this position was predictably contentious. The issues of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest and political prisoners gained renewed salience in the regional and international media.

In the months prior to the Thirty-Eighth AMM, representatives of some ASEAN member states indicated their desire that Burma decline the chairmanship. Jürgen Haacke (2006) describes this as Burma's "most significant ASEAN-related decision since joining the Association" (55). Pressure accumulated on the SPDC to voluntarily step aside and enable the position of chair to pass to the Philippines a year ahead of schedule. Foreign ministers and parliamentarians made public statements about the potential damage to ASEAN's image and reputation should Burma assume the chair.

Some ASEAN member states engaged the SPDC leadership in dialogue and encouraged it to decline the chair. Adhering to the ASEAN Way of informal diplomacy, they attempted to persuade Burma to accept a 'face-saving' solution, sparing it from further international criticism. In April 2005, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirajuda, met with his Burmese counterpart, U Nyan Win, on the sidelines of the Asian-African Summit in Jakarta. Marty Natalegawa, the spokesman for Indonesia's Foreign Ministry, later reported that Burma was expected to announce its decision at the Thirty-Eighth AMM, and was likely to decline. He claimed that Burma was "now more aware of its collective interests in ASEAN" (quoted in Osman 2005). After meeting with Wirajuda at the Summit, Thailand's Foreign Minister, Kantathi Suphamongkohn, told reporters that "we have impressed upon Myanmar the concerns of the international community" (Ibid.). In the same month, Singapore's Foreign Minister, George Yeo, reported that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had also met with Burmese leaders. They had expressed to Lee that "Myanmar was not a 'selfish' country and would take into account ASEAN's views and consider ASEAN's interests" (quoted in Baguioro 2005).

Some ministers were careful to emphasize that the decision was up to Burma. At the news conference following a foreign ministers' meeting on 11 April 2005, Yeo reported that "we reaffirmed that ASEAN cannot interfere in the domestic affairs of Myanmar…ASEAN is in danger of being dragged into Myanmar's internal politics because of the chairmanship issue" (Ibid.). In July, shortly before the AMM, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar agreed that ASEAN leaders had communicated to Burma's leaders the 'ramifications' of it taking up the chair, and "with all those matters placed before them, it's up to them to make a decision" (Japan Economic Newswire 2005).

Nevertheless, it can be argued that making statements regarding the damage to ASEAN's image amounts to public criticism. While not directly critical, such comments were a clear judgement of Burma's political situation. It certainly imposed pressure on Burma's internal decision-making process. Even if the decision was ostensibly up to them, a concerted effort to pressure Burma into declining detracts from the claim that the decision was entirely unilateral. Several ministers of founding member states were clearly more willing

to be forthright with their positions in the media, irrespective of whether consensus had been achieved among ASEAN members.

Ultimately, such efforts were successful. At the Thirty-Eighth AMM, U Nyan Win announced that Burma would not take up the chairmanship. The Joint Communiqué states that the decision was made because Burma wants "to focus its attention on the ongoing national reconciliation and democratisation process" (ASEAN 2006: Point 70). Nyan Win told the news conference that 2006 will be a 'critical year,' in which Burma will be draft a new constitution and prepare for free and fair elections (The Nation 2005). ASEAN foreign ministers reacted to the announcement with gratitude. In the Joint Communiqué, they express "sincere appreciation to the Government of Myanmar for not allowing its national preoccupation to affect ASEAN's solidarity and cohesiveness…(it) has show its commitment to the well-being of ASEAN and its goal of advancing the interest of all Member Countries" (ASEAN 2006: Point 70). This is an interesting and notable reversal of the 'direction' of ASEAN norms; where ASEAN's normative principles were originally devised to support founding states' objectives of nation-building, the livelihood of the Association itself is now regarded as of primary concern.

Individual reactions from Foreign Ministers were similar to the official position expressed in the Joint Communiqué. Yeo said the decision "removes a thorny issue" from relations between ASEAN and extra-regional actors. However, he claimed that the decision was entirely Burma's, and noted that no additional discussions on the matter had taken place at the AMM.[36] Similarly, Kantathi stated that the development was "a rare breakthrough in a positive way" (Kazmin 2005). In the Philippines, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said that his country was ready to assume the chairmanship, and wished "to express its appreciation" to Burma for sensibly stepping aside (quoted in Deutsche Presse-Agentur 2005). The founding states were greatly relieved that the tension had dissipated. Moreover, the result motivated Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's claim that "this demonstrates ASEAN's fully developed capability to solve its own problems" (quoted in "RI Regrets Rice's Decision to Skip Security Forum" 2005). The outcome vindicated member states' behaviour in pressuring Burma, and appeared to indicate a changing conception of ASEAN principles and practices.

The Role of Extra-Regional Actors
The concern regarding ASEAN's image was somewhat influenced by the reactions of extra-regional actors to the issue of Burma's potential chairmanship. The EU and US both threatened to boycott meetings with

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[36] This is to be expected, given the usual relegation of such issues to informal discussion (Kazmin 2005).

ASEAN if Burma took the chair.[37] This is not particularly surprising, given these actors' sanctions on Burma and continued calls for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. In early May 2005, US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick stated that "if Burma is the chair next year, it will obviously tie our hands" (Cossa 2005: 5). However, he emphasized that the issue was ASEAN's decision, and that Washington intended to be supportive. Nevertheless, as Ralph Cossa notes, Washington has been sending "mixed signals" to ASEAN (Ibid.: 1). In July 2005, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that she would not attend the ARF meeting and PMCs that followed the Thirty-Eighth AMM in Vientiane. Although she cited 'other vital travel' in explanation, some ASEAN diplomats speculated that her absence reflected US concerns about Burma taking the chair.[38] In any case, it gave the impression that ASEAN (and perhaps, Southeast Asia in general) was slipping on the US scale of priorities.

Despite such developments, realist explanations for ASEAN's pressure on Burma to relinquish the chair are inadequate. The behaviour of member states cannot be entirely understood solely with reference to self-interested motives and strategic concerns. Threats to boycott ASEAN meetings, whether or not they would have been carried out, do not necessarily imply punitive action by the EU or US with respect to bilateral economic and strategic relationships. As Chong and Ooi point out, such an outcome would be "a breach of capitalist logic… Cheaper labour, raw materials and government incentives will continue to be of primary concern for such companies, not politics" (Chong and Ooi 2005). Moreover, Western countries do not generally impair their commercial relationships with a particular state because of human rights concerns regarding one of its neighbours (Narine 2002: 119).

Similarly, it is unlikely that the US would have withdrawn its regional military presence. The significance of strategic imperatives would have prevented such an outcome. In particular, the current US focus on the 'war on terrorism' since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and its desire to ensure the support of Southeast Asian governments in this endeavour, has recently increased its regional military presence (Hartfiel and Job 2005: 10). Such activities are clearly of greater priority to Washington than taking punitive action against ASEAN states due to Burma.

While Rice's absence from the ARF did cause consternation among ASEAN member states, it is unlikely that they feared it portended immediate or irreparable damage to bilateral relations. Syed Hamid Albar admitted that Rice's absence did not "send a good signal," but affirmed that "Myanmar's position in ASEAN must be determined by ASEAN members and not by other nations" (quoted in "Malaysian Minister Wants

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[37] Terence Chong and Ooi Kee Beng (2005) argue that "Brussels and Washington can in no way be convinced to participate in any meeting with ASEAN to be held in Yangon."

[38] Zoellick attended in Rice's place. This marked the first time in two decades that a US Secretary of State had not attended an ARF meeting (Brinkley 2005; "Burma to Skip Being Chairman of ASEAN" 2005).

Rice to Attend ASEAN Regional Forum" 2005). Member states remain concerned with securing US trade relationships and military presence in the long term. However, persuading Burma to decline the chair was not regarded as hindering such priorities in the short term.

Moreover, pressure from extra-regional actors has at times motivated ASEAN member states to reassert regional autonomy, rather than fret about bilateral relationships. Indeed, US and EU opposition to Burma's admission to ASEAN in 1997 was somewhat counterproductive.[39] While it communicated that Burmese membership would cause diplomatic tensions, it also provoked a backlash from member states against perceived Western 'meddling.' Narine argues that ASEAN voted to admit Burma in 1997 as scheduled, "largely as a reaction against the perception that the West was trying to bully it and intrude on its internal affairs" (Ibid.: 116). This may be overstated, since the US tempered its rhetoric and agreed that it was ASEAN's responsibility to encourage reform.[40] However, it certainly appears that international pressure only added to ASEAN's determination to extend to membership to Burma.[41]

When the issue of Burma's potential chairmanship arose, member states again reacted to international pressure by reaffirming ASEAN's independence. Marty Natalegawa (spokesman for Indonesia's Foreign Ministry) stated shortly before the Thirty-Eighth AMM that "the Myanmarese chairmanship is something that we can decide on our own. We don't need any warning or signal from other countries to help us in our decision" (quoted in Susanti 2005).

China's influence is obviously a different matter, but similarly does not give sufficient weight to a realist analysis. The Sino-Burmese relationship continues to be significant; the ICG has expressed concern that a "special affinity" between the governments "motivates Chinese moves to prop up the military junta and might produce even more direct support in case of a direct challenge to SPDC's authority" (International Crisis Group 2001: 20). The pressure on Burma to decline the chairmanship thus risked driving Burma closer to China. Indeed, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, visited Burma immediately after the Thirty-Eighth AMM, apparently seizing an opportunity to discuss "matters of mutual interest" (quoted in "China Woos

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[39] In April 1997, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns declared that the US was "trying to use our influence to make the point that (Burma) should be given a stiff message that it is not welcome (in ASEAN)" (quoted in Shaun Narine 2002: 116).

[40] These sentiments were made at the ARF meeting in July 2005 (Collins 2003: 144).

[41] Notably, this 'backlash' occurred before the regional economic crisis had taken hold; ASEAN states were not yet in a position to require international assistance, and could afford to act in a self-confident manner. However, by the time of Burma's potential chairmanship, member states had largely recovered in terms of finances and self-confidence, and again responded defiantly to extra-regional pressure.

Myanmar as ASEAN Seeks Way to Deal with its Leaders" 2005: 5). The behaviour of member states thus cannot be explained solely by strategic concerns; ideational factors must be taken into account.

Post-July 2005 Developments: The Evolution of Collective Identity?
The events leading up to the 2005 AMM seemed to indicate a departure from the non-interference principle. ASEAN foreign ministers spoke more frankly, albeit outside official ASEAN dialogue, about their desire for Burma to relinquish the chair. While official statements were carefully worded, they implied that Burma's internal affairs were indeed the business of other member states, by virtue of impacting ASEAN as a whole. Further, their cumulative efforts led to Burma's decline of the chairmanship, irrespective of claims that there was no pressure imposed.

Developments since 2005 have not significantly advanced this attitude. This is in part a reflection of the difficulty of managing the issue of Burma. A stalemate persists; the military junta has apparently not changed its stance, and is now less concerned with achieving legitimacy than with regime survival. Its traditional fear of foreign intervention has underscored a tendency towards isolationism. Moreover, ASEAN appears to be unable to take further action at present. There have been calls from parliamentarians for Burma's expulsion from ASEAN or at least the 'freezing' of its membership (Pertubuhan Berita Nasional Malaysia 2005; "ASEAN Parliamentarians Call for Freezing Myanmar's Membership" 2006). However, expulsion of Burma is extremely unlikely; it would not make strategic sense, but also would work against ASEAN's desire to represent 'One Southeast Asia.' Moreover, there is no precedent or mechanism for expulsion.[42] ASEAN also seems to lack the leverage to exert further pressure on Burma; it remains wary of pushing Burma into the arms of China or India.[43] The Association thus continues the delicate balancing act of ensuring Burma does not cause undue damage to ASEAN's image on one hand, and attempting to avoid isolating Burma or driving it away on the other. This is difficult given that the junta has continued to exhibit isolationist tendencies which indicate its reluctance to behave in accordance with ASEAN's current norms regarding governance.[44]

At the same time, there are signs that some member states feel that, given this impasse, too much time has been devoted to the 'Burma issue' in ASEAN dialogue without tangible results, and ASEAN should

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[42] In March 2006, ASEAN's Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong stated that "expulsion is not an option. You can only join ASEAN, you cannot be asked to leave ASEAN. There is no provision for that" (quoted in Kyodo News Service 2006).

[43] Interestingly, Ong Keng Yong stated in June 2006 that he would ask China and India to 'persuade' Burma to reform – a request that was unlikely to be fulfilled, and which indicates the stalemate position in which ASEAN has found itself at present (Kyodo News Service 2006).

[44] For example, in November 2005 it abruptly moved the administrative capital to a remote northern city, Pyinmana, without notifying the other ASEAN governments. This was widely interpreted as a deliberate symbolic act of isolation from its neighbours and the international community at large (Cumming-Bruce 2005).

concentrate on other matters (Bernama: The Malaysian National News Agency 2006). According to Syed Hamid in April 2006, Burma has "become a hanging issue. That's why the other countries are talking about being held hostage to [it]" (quoted in "Myanmar Holding ASEAN Hostage with Snail-pace Reform Malaysia Says" 2006). There is a sense of having made a significant gesture towards resolving the Burma issue, in part to fend off international criticism – 'circling the wagons' as it were – and now needing to ensure that other matters are not neglected. Certainly other crucial security issues such as terrorism, disaster relief and transnational crime require attention. There is also the possibility that the Burma issue will cause divisiveness within ASEAN if further action is attempted. At a meeting of foreign ministers in Bali in April 2006, Syed Hamid stated further that "I think we recognized that the Myanmar issue has crept in to disunite ASEAN because there are different views held, but we cannot project that to the world." He could sense the "frustration and disillusionment" among the foreign ministers, as they realized they could not find common ground on how to deal with Burma (quoted in "Malaysian FM says ASEAN "Frustrated, Disillusioned" with Myanmar" 2006).

Burma is an extreme example of a contemporary security challenge for ASEAN. As such, it is unsurprising that there are constraints on the evolution of the non-interference norm, with respect to official ASEAN dialogue. Haacke argues that ASEAN's approach to Burma, including the circumstances surrounding the chair issue, "has only denoted a limited refinement rather than a transformation of ASEAN's normative terrain and institutional practice." He regards it as a "further embrace of "enhanced interaction"' rather than a new direction for ASEAN" (Haacke 2005: 212-3). However, Haacke's assessment seems somewhat conservative. While the chairmanship issue seemed to indicate a greater departure from non-interference than subsequent developments have delivered, the norm has been challenged and somewhat modified. Individual ministers can now be more candid, albeit outside official ASEAN dialogue.

Moreover, there is now more open debate by ministers about the meaning and relevance of the non-interference principle, which was less acceptable in the past. As foreign minister of the 2005-06 chair, Syed Hamid has been particularly outspoken. Immediately before the 2005 AMM, he stated that it was a pertinent time for ASEAN to reconsider the non-interference principle, given the constraints it places on the Association's response to a range of security issues. He argued that "countries in the region should be concerned about their neighbours if there's a spillover effect, such as in southern Thailand…We are all connected. It's important for us to understand the situation" (quoted in "Malaysian FM: ASEAN's Non-interference Policy has its Limits" 2005).[45] At the foreign ministers' meeting in April 2006, Syed Hamid

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[45] While Thailand resisted the notion that the insurgency in the south be treated as a regional issue, there is undoubtedly increasing pressure to relinquish such defiance. Syed Hamid pointed out that Indonesia set an example by explaining the situation in Aceh to its regional neighbours.

again indicated that the non-interference policy should be reviewed ("ASEAN Ministers Fail to Reach Consensus on Changes in Burma" 2006).

Haacke's assessment is based partly on his observation that the non-interference principle is still affirmed in ASEAN statements. In regard to the Bali Concord II, he takes this as evidence that "the establishment of the envisaged ASC is not predicated upon the abandonment but the continued validity of core elements of ASEAN's diplomatic and security culture" (Haacke 2005: 202). He pays insufficient attention to the evidence of individual ASEAN diplomats behaving in a manner which directly challenges the norm.

The question remains as to whether criticism by individual ministers will gradually translate to more frank references in official ASEAN statements. The circumstances surrounding the Burma issue indicate a tension between the desire to present a collective stance, in part as a reaction to extra-regional pressure, and some degree of divergence in views among member states. However, to the extent that the greater outspokenness of individual members continues, it surely bodes well for an incremental change within ASEAN dialogue, given the futility of a significant disparity between 'quiet diplomacy' inside the Association and forthright criticism outside it. Moreover, as further security challenges emerge, the desire to respond effectively to demonstrate ASEAN's efficacy will likely motivate more open dialogue between members. Some degree of divisiveness with respect to the most appropriate response to such challenges may in fact serve this purpose.

ASEAN continues to pursue greater influence in the wider Asia-Pacific region, and presenting a united front remains central to this objective. Whether public unity is underscored by an 'actual' sense of community is uncertain, but since 'community' is anyhow a constructed notion, the desire to appear cohesive must have implications for the outlook of member states and precipitate a dynamic process of re-evaluating national security in a regional context. It seems there is a move towards approaching issues from the perspective of a regional identity. ASEAN norms are being gradually oriented towards the concerns of the Association itself, rather than those of individual states. This goes some way to indicating the emergence of a collective identity, but clearly constraints on this process remain.

Conclusion

The original norms and principles upon which a regional organization is founded should not be regarded as static, or as providing rigid criteria against which to assess the success or progress of the organization. Security challenges change as an organization's membership expands and the external environment alters. In response, states may reinterpret the normative terrain. This is not to suggest that ASEAN norms are evolving in a complementary manner, or that such evolution will be necessarily beneficial to the Association in the future. There are multiple, sometimes competing norms underpinning ASEAN.

One such tension exists between the 'traditional' norm of non-interference and an emerging norm of appropriate governance. Given the trend of democratization, at least among the founding member states, references to 'democracy' have begun to appear in ASEAN statements.[46] The Bali Concord II envisages that the ASC will "bring ASEAN's political and security cooperation to a higher plane to ensure that countries in the region will live at peace with one another and the world in a just, *democratic* and harmonious environment" (ASEAN 2003: Point A1). Although this was the sole reference to democracy in this document, Donald Emmerson notes that subsequently "democracy became a standard reference in ASEAN rhetoric" (Emmerson 2005: 180). However, "still conspicuously absent…is the "L word" – liberal, as in liberal democracy" (Ibid.). This is not particularly surprising; there was much debate surrounding the inclusion of democracy as an ASEAN objective in the Bali Concord II. Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam objected to the move (Ibid.). Nevertheless, in itself, the inclusion of the word 'democracy' is "something of a potential milestone" (Haacke 2005: 201). Again, it is indicative of the evolution of normative principles underpinning ASEAN dialogue. It suggests that it is now more difficult for member states to avoid scrutiny of their domestic political situations, or to argue that their security problems are of no concern to their neighbours. However, it is also a potential source of divisiveness among ASEAN states.

Political change in member states has also enabled greater participation from members of their parliaments. Various parliamentarians also expressed concern about the ramifications of a Burmese chair. They were in a position to be more forthright in their views, and seek to influence their own foreign ministers on the matter. In November 2004, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) was established.[47] Sixteen members of the parliaments of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Cambodia met in Jakarta, led by Datuk Zaid Ibrahim of Malaysia's ruling UMNO party. Zaid reported that "I told my foreign minister that we would look ridiculous…Having ASEAN chaired by this kind of leadership…would not be acceptable" (quoted in "RI Regrets Rice's Decision to Skip Security Forum" 2005). Lim Kit Siang, the Malaysian parliamentary opposition leader, stated that the caucus aims to "ensure genuine democratisation" in Burma, given that its membership in ASEAN "has caused grave embarrassment to ASEAN, imperiling international goodwill and investment opportunities for the region" (quoted in Vatikiotis 2005).[48] It is

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[46] Democratic transitions have taken place in the Philippines (1986), Thailand (1991-92), Cambodia (1993) and Indonesia (1998). Singapore and Malaysia have long retained "democratic institutions based on the British model," and have avoided military takeovers, although they have evolved into "dominant-party systems" (Acharya 2003: 378-9).

[47] The caucus began as a bipartisan parliamentary group in Malaysia in 2004, and in November 2004 Zaid Ibrahim invited legislators from other ASEAN states to join, making it the region's first interstate parliamentary caucus (Vatikiotis 2005).

[48] The AIPMC also supports placing Burma on the United Nations Security Council's agenda, and increased international pressure more generally (a move which ASEAN would clearly be unwilling to support) (Haacke 2005: 56).

difficult to gauge the impact of the AIPMC on ASEAN dialogue, but it suggests that regional discourse is no longer the sole domain of a small network of elites. The AIPMC is the first interstate parliamentary caucus in Southeast Asia, suggesting a growing tolerance for a broader range of opinions in foreign policy matters generally. In June 2005, Ong Keng Yong described the role of parliamentarians as "a reflection of the maturity of the political culture' in the region" (quoted in <u>Agence France Presse</u> 2005).

The evolution of ASEAN's normative terrain will depend partly upon how the 'Burma issue' plays out, as well as on future political developments in the other newer member states. Given the political instability and tenuous hold on democracy in Cambodia, and the persistence of communist rule in Vietnam and Laos, the progress of these states in political and economic terms will have implications for ASEAN. Notably, the public criticism of Burma emanated from representatives of the founding ASEAN states, rather than Cambodia, Laos, or Vietnam.[49] These states did not overtly oppose Burma's chairmanship, being presumably concerned about the implications of the outcome for their own circumstances.

The attention to Burma's membership may mean the other 'CLMV' states will attract less scrutiny than they otherwise would. Of course, the ongoing stalemate with Burma may have the reverse effect. The temporary mitigation of the contention surrounding Burma may diminish its relative priority on ASEAN's agenda, and there is some speculation (which Syed Hamid has denied) that ASEAN struck a deal with Burma, agreeing to reduce pressure on Burma to reform in return for its declining of the chairmanship.[50] On the other hand, to the extent that some member states feel that ASEAN should move on to other (perhaps 'non-traditional security') matters, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam may escape increased attention. These are all matters for future research.

In a sense, it is too early to gauge whether the evolution of ASEAN norms will result in a more, or less, cohesive Association. While the founding states continue to maintain the most influence in ASEAN, and shape its emerging collective identity, future progress in the community-building project will be affected by their ability to close the 'development gap' and mitigate the risk of a so-called 'two-tier' ASEAN. As events in Southeast Asia unfold, the evolution of ASEAN norms will both reflect and shape states' grappling with cooperation in an environment of contention.

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[49] The latter three states maintained that Burma should be allowed to take up the chair, presumably fearing a precedent for interference in their own affairs (Baguioro 2005).

[50] Syed Hamid Albar refuted these allegations in late July 2005, complaining that "now that Myanmar has decided to withdraw and we welcome the decision as good for ASEAN, they say we are giving carte blanche to Myanmar to do anything" (quoted in "Malaysia Denies ASEAN Giving 'Carte Blanche' to Burma" 2005). Notably, Burma did not appear on the agenda for the December 2005 ASEAN Summit.

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