

Constructing Southeast Asian Security: The Pitfalls of Imagining a Security Community and the Temptations of Orthodoxy

Nicholas Khoo
Columbia University

Abstract *At the ninth summit of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in October 2003, the organisation's leaders declared their intention of transforming ASEAN into a security community. In making the case that ASEAN has functioned as a realist security institution since its inception in 1967, this article argues that the theoretical literature underpinning the ASEAN security community idea is characterised by significant conceptual and empirical flaws. First, a number of problems surround the variables—either norms or identity—that are used to explain the emergence of a putative security community among the ASEAN states. Second, critical issues in the ASEAN security community literature include the tautological nature of the arguments and a failure to rule out alternative explanations. Third, from an empirical perspective, the nascent ASEAN security community has arguably never existed.*

The concept of security community ... provides the most useful framework ... within which to examine the evolution and nature of ASEAN's political and security role and to identify the constraints it faces in developing a viable regional security community. (Acharya 2001, 6)

The ASEAN security community is envisaged to bring ASEAN's political and security cooperation to a higher plane to ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another and with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment. (Declaration of ASEAN Concord II [Bali Concord II] at the Ninth ASEAN Summit, October 2003)

The achievement of orthodox status is very often fatal to the integrity of a concept. When it becomes popular and respectable ... men are tempted to proclaim their belief in it whether or not they genuinely understand its meaning or fully accept its implications. (Claude 1971, 246).

Security Community or Failed Security Institution?

At the ninth summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in October 2003, the leaders of the organisation formally declared their aim of establishing an ASEAN community based on a tripartite economic, security and

sociocultural framework.¹ The declaration serves as a bold statement of the ASEAN members' attempts to rejuvenate an institution at once plagued by internal paralysis and subject to assault from the forces of Islamic radicalism. Interestingly, the declaration's emphasis on the need to transform ASEAN into a security community in the post-Bali era² also represents the successful culmination of an effort by a number of analysts, stretching back to at least the early 1990s, to advance the concept of 'security community' as a means of understanding the dynamics of Southeast Asian international relations³ (Acharya 1991; Sopiee, 1986). This essay focuses on the theoretical claims and empirical evidence contained in arguments made by these advocates. In an attempt to generate debate between international relations theorists in general and Southeast Asian specialists in particular, the following questions are asked: How should we conceptualise ASEAN? Does the concept of a security community provide the most useful framework to examine the evolution and nature of ASEAN's political and security role, and to analyse its future development? Should ASEAN strive to develop into a security community as an increasing number of scholars⁴ (Acharya 2001; Chong and Sebastian 2003; Khong 1997a; Peou 2002; Ramakrishna 2003; Sukma 2003) and the Indonesian government⁵ argue?

In contrast to the claims being advanced by security community advocates, the thesis proposed here is that ASEAN is best conceptualised as a failing realist security institution whose fortunes have been, and will continue to be, inextricably linked to those of its dominant member, Indonesia. It is further argued that interpretations of a security community developing in Southeast Asia are flawed for at least three reasons. First, a variety of problems surround the variables—be they norms or identity—that analysts use to explain ASEAN's development into a security community. With respect to norms, there is a failure to adequately explain why the norms these analysts privilege emerged as ASEAN's dominant norms. The lack of a convincing explanation for the origins of these norms is damaging because *prima facie* other variants, let us call them perverse or negative norms, appear to give us greater purchase in understanding the

¹ Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II) at the Ninth ASEAN Summit, October 2003. Available on ASEAN's official website: <<http://www.aseansec.org/15160.htm>>.

² The Bali bombings of October 2002 have made terrorism emanating from radical Islam the central issue for Southeast Asia in the early 21st century.

³ The fact that a concept that was developed to analyse Western European security cooperation in the 1950s has found its way into the post-Bali world of Southeast Asian security is a tribute to the enterprise of scholars such as Amitav Acharya who have been vigorously advocating the concept to the official ASEAN community. (See 'Seminar on ASEAN Co-operation', New York, 3 June 2003, located on the website of the Indonesian Mission in New York City: <<http://www.indonesiamission-ny.org/issuebaru/Mission/asean/asean.htm>>.)

⁴ Chong and Sebastian highlight some of the problems confronting the attempt to construct a security community in Southeast Asia. They nevertheless conclude that 'Despite the difficulties anticipated ASEAN members should at least give serious thought to the idea of creating a security community' (Chong and Sebastian 2003).

⁵ The Indonesian government has been the most influential institutional proponent for transforming ASEAN into a security community. In its capacity as Chairman of ASEAN Standing Committee, Jakarta has played an active role in proposing that ASEAN take the necessary steps to transform itself into a security community by 2020.

organisation. When identity is used—either as an independent or intervening variable—to explain the emergence of the putative ASEAN security community, questions arise concerning measurement of this variable. Additionally, the complex issues associated with aggregating the individual identities of the constituent ASEAN states are not adequately addressed. Second, the ASEAN security community literature exhibits important theoretical weaknesses. Problems in this regard include the tautological nature of the arguments and a failure to rule out all plausible competing arguments. Third, the dependent variable, the nascent ASEAN security community, has arguably never existed. Until the problems highlighted above are dealt with in a convincing manner, the security community concept will prove a misleading theoretical tool for academics and its implementation by ASEAN diplomats will further erode the organisation's already faltering credibility.

Thinking Outside the Box: Conceptualising ASEAN as a Failing Realist Security Institution

How should we conceptualise ASEAN? The record of discord within ASEAN since the Asian financial crisis of 1997 patently confounds the expectations of neoliberal institutionalist and constructivist theories that over-emphasise the cooperative aspects of institutions. (Among others see Acharya 2001; Busse 1999; Khong 1997a; Mack and Ravenhill 1995; Peou 2002; Simon 1995). These theories overlook the reality that institutions can just as easily exacerbate tensions and block solutions to regional problems as they can facilitate cooperation. As such, they are of little assistance in helping us to understand ASEAN's post-1997 record and, arguably, even its pre-1997 record. The first step required in any attempt to conceptualise ASEAN is to recognise that ASEAN's descent into paralysis has been caused largely by the absence of effective Indonesian leadership following the fall of President Suharto in 1998. Given this institutional leadership vacuum, ASEAN *qua* institution has locked its members into a vicious pattern of negative interaction that is corroding the ASEAN institution and will spell its continuing irrelevance, if not eventual demise. The ASEAN states are caught in a dilemma. They are reluctant to abandon the organisation, since that would expose member states to increased vulnerability *vis-à-vis* external powers. Perhaps equally important, discarding ASEAN could reopen the question of Indonesia's role in the region. However, the cost of maintaining the *status quo* under ineffective Indonesian leadership is that ASEAN's constituent states are locked in a decaying organisation whose *raison d'être* is continually challenged as it fails to respond effectively to regional events.

The difficulties of ASEAN do not lie only in Indonesia's inability to take an active leadership role. Since 1997, Indonesia has become the *source* of many of the vexing issues facing Southeast Asia. In both the Asian financial crisis and the referendum to determine East Timor's political status *vis-à-vis* Indonesia, Jakarta's mismanagement at once prolonged the effects of these crises and exacerbated regional turmoil, thus requiring non-ASEAN actors to intervene. In the first instance the International Monetary Fund was a lender of last resort, while in the second Australia had to intervene to stabilise the situation in East Timor. With respect to the most urgent issue facing Southeast Asia today, that of countering terrorism emanating from the forces of radical Islam, Jakarta has

procrastinated.⁶ Rather than leading ASEAN in cracking down on the terrorist network in Southeast Asia, Jakarta's reluctance to admit, until the Bali bombings of late 2002, that there was a problem with 'home-grown' terrorists based in Indonesia has meant that ASEAN's war on terrorism was unnecessarily handicapped by the non-participation of the state with the region's most populous Muslim community. Jakarta's hesitation provided the region's principal terrorist group, Jemaah Islamiyah, with a valuable opportunity to regroup after the initial crackdown by Southeast Asian governments in the period immediately following September 11, 2001. (Chandrasekaran 2002a). In a statement that exemplifies the extent of denial that previously existed in Indonesia, a prominent Indonesian academic could boldly declare in an article published in mid-2002, just prior to the Bali bombings, that 'attention to such groups as the *Laskar Jihad* has been overblown. They are rather noisy groups, but small and marginal ... Extremist groups (in Indonesia) protesting US policies on global terrorism are small and temporary in nature' (Wanandi 2002, 142–43). On this issue, a particularly bizarre incident involving Indonesian Vice-President Hamzah Haz reflects the degree of difficulty Indonesia has in coming to terms with terrorism. In May 2002, in an attempt to ascertain the validity of claims made by the US government and several fellow ASEAN members that Indonesia had a terrorist problem, Vice-President Haz invited the leaders of a number of extremist Islamic organisations to his residence. Attendees included Jemaah Islamiyah leader Abu Bakar Bashir,⁷ Laskar Jihad leader Jafar Umar Talib, and Al-Habib Muhammed Rizieq bin Hussein Syihab, the leader of a group that threatened to forcibly expel Americans from Indonesia after the US started bombing Afghanistan in 2001. After a four-hour dinner discussion, Haz declared that the experience had left him 'certain that there are no terrorists in Indonesia' and that these individuals 'only want to see that Indonesia has a religious society. None of them has an extreme character' (Chandrasekaran 2002b).

At this point, a brief foray into international relations theory is necessary. In the inter-paradigm debate that occupied such a prominent place in international relations theorising during the 1980s and early 1990s, influential realists such as Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer 1994–95) and Waltz (1979; 1986) minimised the role of international institutions in world politics. However, as Priess and Schweller have argued, this is both a mistake and a distortion of the classical realist position, which emphasises the important role that institutions (such as ASEAN) have historically played in world politics (Priess and Schweller 1997).

The realist security institution view of ASEAN offered here is consistent with Priess and Schweller's argument and is at odds with a simplistic realist view, which argues that institutions are unimportant in international relations, or that outcomes within ASEAN merely reflect the mechanistic workings of the balance of power. Moreover, in the face of a surge of interest in constructivist theories

⁶ Zachary Abuza has meticulously chronicled the origins of radical Islamic groups in Southeast Asia during the Cold War era and their proliferation in the post-Suharto era. See Abuza (2002; 2003); see also Desker (2003).

⁷ In September 2003, Bashir was sentenced to four years in prison for subversion. He was found guilty of 'knowing about an organisation that is trying to topple the (Indonesian) government' but was acquitted of the most serious charge levelled against him—that of being the leader of Jemaah Islamiyah (Murphy 2003).

as a tool for studying Southeast Asia's international relations, this thesis represents an attempt to bring the realist school of analysis back into the field, and to point to the often overlooked, ossifying or otherwise negative impact that institutions have had in the region. Additionally, this conception of ASEAN clashes with ASEAN's supposed *raison d'être*, that it is a venture in economic, social and cultural cooperation.

Whatever other functions it performs, ASEAN was, and continues to be, a security institution⁸ whose primary purpose is to produce security and should be assessed in those terms (Betts 1992). Formed in 1967, during the heart of the Cold War, ASEAN was a bulwark against Asian communism. As Leifer notes, 'The ostensible purpose of establishing ASEAN was to promote economic, social and cultural co-operation but regional security was the prime occupation of its founders' (Leifer 1989, 1). In the post-Cold-War era, a concern for security issues has remained at the top of ASEAN's agenda. The organisation has attempted, via the creation of the ASEAN Regional Forum, to keep the US anchored in the Asia-Pacific as a hedge against a rising China, the region's traditional hegemon (Leifer 1996). That said, ASEAN has failed during the Post-Cold-War era to provide adequate security for its members.⁹ To take the most recent example, despite extensive funding ASEAN's security services were unaware of the scope of al-Qaeda's operations in Southeast Asia and its close association with Jemaah Islamiyah and other radical Islamic groups in the region (Abuza 2002; 2003; Jones and Smith 2003). The discovery soon after September 11, 2001 that al-Qaeda had established a regional network in Southeast Asia was made even more alarming by revelations that indigenous terrorists planned to establish an Islamic state encompassing Indonesia, Malaysia, parts of the Philippines and eventually Singapore and Brunei (Desker 2003; Nakashima and Sipress 2002; Vatikiotis 2002).

The ASEAN Security Community Concept: Value Added or a Red Herring?

Having offered an explanation of what ASEAN is, it is now appropriate to explain what ASEAN is not. Notwithstanding the claims of security community advocates, ASEAN is not a nascent security community; nor will it become a consolidated security community in the foreseeable future. A little intellectual history on the security community concept might be helpful in understanding why this judgement is appropriate. Contemporary Southeast Asian security community advocates are actually utilising an idea developed by Karl Deutsch in the 1950s. In *Political Community in the North Atlantic Area*, Deutsch and colleagues argued that the Western Europeans had succeeded in creating a pluralistic security community wherein the likelihood of the use of force between members was almost unthinkable (Deutsch *et al.* 1957). The use of the pluralistic security community concept to characterise inter-Western-European relations was not without its problems. In particular, even if it did exist, the

⁸ For a review of the full spectrum of security institutions see Lake (2001).

⁹ Following Wolfers, this article defines security as 'the absence of threats to acquired values' (Wolfers 1952, 485). While it is incumbent on anyone who uses the term to define it, it is beyond the scope of this article to engage in a debate on the concept of 'security'. For further discussion concerning the concept of security see Baldwin (1997).

pluralistic security community Deutsch and his colleagues spoke of was arguably a direct consequence of American hegemony over Western Europe rather than the result of neo-functional variables. The literal presence of US troops on Western European soil obviated conflict in Western Europe and served to bolster Washington's extended deterrence policy. Thus, in declaring Western Europe a pluralistic security community, these analysts mistook effect for cause. If the security community concept has problems on its home turf of Western Europe, its transposition to the region of Southeast Asia turns out to be an even more hazardous venture.

In making the claim that a security community is emerging in Southeast Asia, theoretical proponents typically focus attention on the role of either norms or identity as independent variables (Acharya 2001, 8; Khong 1997a, 321). Norms are understood as 'standards of behaviour defined in terms of rights and obligations' (Acharya 2001, 24). Once established, norms have a life of their own, redefining state interests and creating collective identities. Identity is synonymous with a 'we-feeling' and is deemed critical in the making of security communities. According to these analysts, ASEAN norms and identities have succeeded in creating a nascent security community. Security communities are characterised by the absence of war and the absence of significant organised preparations for war, such as military contingency planning. Competitive military build-ups or arms races between members of the security community should also not be present¹⁰ (Huxley 1991; Tan 2000). What are we to make of these arguments and claims? Let us examine them in closer detail.

Searching for Norms: But Which Norms?

Notwithstanding the burgeoning constructivist literature on Southeast Asia's international relations since the 1990s, insufficient attention has been paid to the question of why the norms that constructivists claim to have emerged did so. The importance of the foregoing point is critical to constructivist analysis. As Jeffrey Legro points out, analysts 'confront not a dearth, but a diffusion of norms in the international arena. Given this availability, one can almost always identify a norm to "explain" or "allow" a particular effect' (Legro 1997, 33). Since different norms can have competing or even contradictory impulses, it is important to offer a persuasive explanation for the origins and consolidation of ASEAN's key norms. A second and related critique is the puzzling fact that constructivists privilege norms that tend to promote cooperation—a point seemingly contradicted by the empirical reality of intra-ASEAN relations. This raises the possibility, which requires serious consideration, that a focus on 'negative' norms can yield greater insight into Southeast Asia's international relations.

Since Acharya has thus far published the most influential book on this topic, a critical examination of his usage of norms as an independent variable in this context is instructive in revealing the flaws extant in the security community literature (Acharya 2001). The author argues that a number of norms have led to

¹⁰ In this respect, Tim Huxley's analysis of the tensions inherent in the Singapore–Malaysia relationship casts doubt on the possibility that an ASEAN security community will emerge anytime soon. As Andrew Tan has argued, a similar claim can be made by looking at some of the other bilateral relationships within ASEAN.

the emergence of a security community in Southeast Asia, including: non-interference, non-use of force, the pursuit of regional autonomy, the avoidance of collective defence, and, in particular, the practice of the ASEAN Way (Acharya 2001, 47–79, 195). He further argues that ASEAN's norms derive from two sources. The first source is a variety of official documents, the most important being the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation signed in Bali at the first ASEAN summit in 1976. The second source comes from 'the local social, cultural and political milieu' (Acharya 2001, 47). He notes, since the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation codifies principles that are present in various United Nations and other international documents, there is nothing particularly unique about them. The second source of ASEAN's norms therefore assumes particular significance in the analysis. The author declares, 'what made ASEAN really distinctive were the norms which came to be known as the ASEAN Way' (Acharya 2001, 63). Users of the 'ASEAN Way' term emphasise two key aspects: a preference for informality and an aversion to the institutionalisation of cooperation (Acharya 1997; Almonte 1997/98; Katsumata 2003). Unfortunately, the centrality of the norms associated with the ASEAN Way is matched only by elusiveness concerning their origins. Acharya either rejects or is ambivalent about common explanations for the origins of the ASEAN Way, such as cultural similarities among ASEAN societies and the role of interpersonal ties among the first generation of ASEAN leaders (Acharya 2001, 64). However, no alternative or competing explanation is offered by the author. Oddly, notwithstanding the importance of the origins of ASEAN's norms, a mere two pages are accorded to the subject (Acharya 2001, 63–64). Without providing a satisfactory explanation, Acharya quickly moves on to an analysis of the ASEAN Way.

The deficiencies present in Acharya's account of the origins of ASEAN's norms raise a second critique that concerns the question of which ones we should focus on while studying ASEAN. Why should we accept that a certain set of norms favoured by constructivists are the operative ones within ASEAN? From an empirical perspective, the norms they point to as determining the putative ASEAN security community have been routinely violated.¹¹ Scepticism concerning a cooperative or positive norms-based explanation for ASEAN's evolution is heightened when one views the empirical record. Even during the supposed heyday of ASEAN during the initial years following the end of the Cold War, norms such as the ASEAN Way,¹² consensus building and avoidance of legalistic procedures appear to have borne only a tenuous connection with reality. Often consensus has been difficult to establish, and issues have been kicked down the road for resolution at a later date with adverse consequences for the organisation. A prominent example was the failed attempt by ASEAN, led by Thailand, in pursuing a 'constructive engagement' policy toward the State Peace and Development (SPDC) regime in Yangon. That policy, which began in 1992, manifestly failed in altering the military regime's behaviour and ended with the admission of Myanmar into ASEAN in 1997. The subsequent Thai-initiated policy of 'flexible engagement' in the years following Myanmar's ad-

¹¹ See Acharya 2001, 63, 72.

¹² Leifer observes that 'the ASEAN Way has been a convenient rationalisation for diplomatic torpor, formal or informal. The ASEAN Way, so-called, has been possible because it has never really been put to the test' (Leifer 2001, 485).

mission has been far from constructive in moderating the human rights abuses perpetrated by the SPDC. Indeed, ASEAN has been on the defensive as Myanmar's human rights record has deteriorated and ASEAN's European and American dialogue partners continue to ostracise the military regime. Most recently, in early June 2003, the SPDC placed Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi under 'protective custody' after the regime realised support for her party had not diminished (*The Economist*, 2003). The detention of Aung has sparked worldwide condemnation (Crispin and Lintner 2003; Lyall 2003; Mydans 2003) and led some of the more pro-engagement SPDC segments of ASEAN to admit that 'ASEAN's constructive engagement with Yangon has produced nothing to end Myanmar's political crisis' (Lim 2003).

The problems cited above raise a serious question as to whether qualitatively different variants, let us call them negative norms, have been undermining those identified by constructivists, which appear to be too benign. For example, how robust is the non-interference norm that is often identified as being important in ASEAN's development? After all, one could argue that the prevalence of a contrary norm, namely, 'interference in other states' affairs', appears to be a regularised pattern of behaviour in Southeast Asia. Members of ASEAN have regularly intervened in the internal affairs of fellow ASEAN states, and placed individual states' national interests above concerns for regional autonomy (another ASEAN norm identified by constructivists). The states in ASEAN routinely claim to adhere to the formal norm of non-interference. However, the arguably more influential informal norm of interference in other states' affairs has occurred with depressing regularity. A prominent example is Indonesia's violation of the sovereignty norm *vis-à-vis* East Timor in 1975. In resolving the 'Myanmar problem' ASEAN appears to have embraced the interference norm. In July 2003, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir stated that if the regime in Myanmar continued to defy international opinion on the issue of Aung San Suu Kyi, thus diminishing ASEAN's credibility, the organisation may have to take the unprecedented step of expulsion¹³ (Agence France Presse 2003a). If the SPDC ever took at face value the supposed ASEAN norm of non-interference, they have been seriously misled. The complexities of the interference norm appear to offer a fruitful avenue for research that Southeast Asian constructivists do not investigate thoroughly enough. Indeed, greater theoretical and empirical attention to the complexities of the non-interference or sovereignty norm is necessary for a more dynamic analysis of the history of intra-ASEAN politics than constructivists have provided us with thus far (Krasner 1999). In this respect, Southeast Asian security studies could benefit from sustained attention to the following questions: Why did ASEAN not condemn Indonesia's violation of the sovereignty norm *vis-à-vis* East Timor in 1975 but did react vehemently to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia beginning in late 1978? Was Jakarta's violation of the sovereignty norm somehow made less egregious because it embraced a shared ASEAN norm of anti-communism? Alternatively, was the

¹³ Mahathir cited ASEAN's credibility as a rationale for threatening to expel Myanmar from ASEAN. 'We are thinking about ourselves as ASEAN, we are not criticizing Myanmar for doing what is not related to us, but what they have done has affected our credibility. Because of that, we have voiced our views' (Agence France Presse, 2003a).

violation of the sovereignty norm acceptable in Indonesia's case because of its leadership position in ASEAN? Indeed, how did Jakarta's violation of the sovereignty norm impact on Indonesia's institutional leadership? Prima facie, it would appear that Jakarta's violation of the sovereignty norm with respect to East Timor actually bolstered its standing in ASEAN.

The Ambiguities of Collective Identity¹⁴

Another norm emphasised by constructivists is that of identity. Both Acharya and Khong associate identity with the 'we-feeling' that ASEAN states are claimed to possess (Khong 1997a, 321; Acharya 2001, 26–30). Collective identity is constructed through interaction and socialisation. As Acharya notes, 'Like norms, collective identifications are made and remade through interactions and socialisation, rather than being exogenous to those processes' (Acharya 2001, 27). Another characteristic that norms share with identity is the difficulties associated with the measurement of identity. Indeed, Acharya notes that 'measuring identity formation is one of the most difficult challenges for academic theorists' (Acharya 2001, 28). Khong side-steps this difficult problem by focusing on making a plausible case that identity matters in ASEAN's evolution¹⁵ (Khong 1997a, 321). Acharya acknowledges this problem and proposes three methods of measurement (Acharya 1997, 29). The first is a commitment to multilateralism. The second is the development of security cooperation. The third measure of identity formation is derived from 'the definition of what constitutes a region and commonly held notions of who is included and excluded' (Acharya 2001, 29).

An important question arises. Specifically, do these measures of identity change perform the task that is demanded of them? Phrased differently, do they measure identity change or something else? The first two measures proposed as indicators of identity change are arguably excellent measures *not* of identity change but of changing threat perceptions. For example, there is no need for any identity change in order for states to engage in multilateral security cooperation against a real or perceived threat. Indeed, that is the very essence of Stephen Walt's realist classic *Origins of Alliances* (Walt 1986). The development of ASEAN security cooperation during and after the Cold War is best explained as a reaction to threats rather than the development of any nascent sense of an ASEAN identity. During the Cold War ASEAN security cooperation was a reaction to the tangible threat posed by the Vietnamese communists. The subsequent incorporation of Vietnam into ASEAN in the post-Cold-War era had, arguably, little to do with identity change on the part of Hanoi and instead reflects the fact that the latter was unsuccessful in maintaining strategic dominance over Indochina. Even the formation of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which is viewed by constructivists as a constructivist enterprise (Khong 1997b), is arguably best explained from a realist perspective. As already mentioned, the

¹⁴ For Khong, identity is the independent variable. For Acharya, despite the construction of a flow chart, it is unclear where identity fits into his causal argument. See diagram in Acharya (2001, 29).

¹⁵ Khong traces the development of this sense of 'we-ness' by breaking down ASEAN's history into four periods: before 1967, 1967–76, 1976–89, 1989 to the present.

origins of the ARF reflect a typically realist concern with influencing the regional balance of power in ASEAN's favor. In the Post-Cold-War era, the initial retrenchment of the US forward presence in the Asia-Pacific during the Bush and Clinton administrations was accompanied by the assertion of expansive claims by the People's Republic of China in the South China Sea (Valencia 1995). In the context of a fluid strategic environment, the ARF was formed in the early 1990s as part of a hedging-balancing strategy by ASEAN *vis-à-vis* a rising China, and as a prudent means of keeping the US engaged in Asia.

A related problem associated with using identity as a variable concerns the issue of aggregation. Even if we accept for the sake of argument that identity matters, there is little indication from security community advocates as to how exactly identity change in individual states comes to transform ASEAN's collective identity. How does a heterogeneous organisation like ASEAN, whose members differ on a multitude of dimensions, come to develop a common identity? What happens if the identity of some states changes while that of others does not? Does identity change in some states matter more than in others? For example, it is plausible that identity change in more powerful states within ASEAN, like Indonesia, matters more than identity change in Laos or Cambodia. Yet, without a reliable method of measuring identity change, analysts of South-east Asia's international relations would be better served by sticking with the realist theories that constructivists critique and claim to offer greater leverage over.¹⁶

Constructing and Testing Theories: The Problem of Tautology and the Need to Rule out Competing Explanations

A second critique of security community arguments relates to the mechanics of theory construction and testing. With respect to theory construction, a significant problem with these arguments relates to their tautological nature. First, there is a failure to conceptualise norm robustness independent of the effects attributed to norms, thus leading to tautology. This is a common weakness in the constructivist literature that could have been acknowledged and dealt with. As Legro, himself a constructivist, observes about the contemporary constructivist literature, 'whether one emphasizes the behavioral or the linguistic/discursive facet of norms, avoiding circular reasoning requires a notion of norm robustness that is independent of the effects to be explained. This is no easy task' (Legro 1997, 33). In this respect, one of the norms that Acharya identifies as 'central' to the formation of the ASEAN security community is the non-use of force (Acharya 2001, 48, 195). However, this is a tautology. The norm against the use of force is used to explain the behaviour of a security community, which is *by definition*

¹⁶ In addition to the numerous problems highlighted above, constructivist security community advocates have yet to convincingly address the fundamental question of why identity as a variable necessarily facilitates cooperation. In this respect, this analyst is not aware of any attempt being made by ASEAN security community advocates to address the arguments of Jonathan Mercer. Mercer argues that, from the psychological perspective of situational identity theory, claims by some constructivists that inter-state competition can be transcended are highly questionable. Mercer's arguments also provide a psychological basis for understanding why the ASEAN security community is headed for failure (Mercer 1995).

'groups of states which have developed a long-term habit of peaceful interaction and ruled out the use of force in settling disputes with other members of the group' (Acharya 2001, 1).

With respect to theory testing, there has been a failure to rule out competing explanations, a basic requirement for theoretical analysis. As Legro notes, 'a problem of many [constructivist] studies is a neglect of alternative explanations, particularly ideational ones, for the effects attributed to norms. The dangers of not doing so are clear. One risks spuriously crediting international norms with consequences (e.g. the shaping or enabling of particular identities, interests, beliefs or actions) that are better explained by other types of factors' (Legro 1997, 34). Khong, besides offering a brief discussion of Barry Buzan's security complex concept and economic interdependence theory, fails to rule out alternative explanations for what he sees as ASEAN's political-security development (Khong 1997a, 319, 329). Acharya, on the other hand, only briefly discusses neo-functionalism, neoliberal institutionalism and neorealism in his first two chapters¹⁷ (Acharya 2001, 1-4, 6-8, 16-24, 30-34).

Promoting the ASEAN Security Community: Visionary Advocacy or Fantasy Theory?

The dependent variable, or what security community advocates are trying to explain, is the development of a nascent ASEAN security community. However, a major problem with their arguments is that ASEAN appears to have declined into a 'sunset organization' even before becoming a nascent security community, let alone a full-fledged one. This point has not been missed by security community theorists.¹⁸ Acharya is careful to make the proviso that ASEAN was 'perhaps' only ever a 'nascent security community', although 'its progress toward the ascendant or mature level looked more promising in the early 1990s than in the later part of the decade' (Acharya 2001, 208). In light of these qualifications, why should we embrace the security community perspective, when *prima facie*, viewing ASEAN as an imitation community, as David Martin Jones and Michael Smith have argued, seems more appropriate (Jones and Smith 2002)? Smith and Jones contend that ASEAN is little more than a rhetorical shell that obfuscates the realist conduct of bilateral relations between member states and that the organisation's ostensible commitment to non-interference negates the expression of a region that the Association purports to uphold.

In this regard, how long do we need before we declare the ASEAN project of identity building, which is necessary for the construction of a security community, a failure? It appears that security community advocates would call for an almost endless exercise in identity building. Acharya argues that 'whether such an identity has developed after more than thirty years of interaction is debatable. But this should not detract from the serious nature of the efforts by ASEAN members to overcome their security dilemma and establish a security community through the development of norms and the construction of an ASEAN identity that would be constitutive of their interests' (Acharya 2001, 28).

¹⁷ Acharya differentiates security communities from other forms of multilateral security cooperation (2001, 16-20).

¹⁸ Acharya 2001, 203-8.

From a methodological point of view, the preceding exhortation leads us to a simple yet critical question: how would one be able to falsify the security community argument? The dependent variable and general argument is hedged with so many qualifications that it is difficult to see when these advocates would declare that the security community building project has failed. Any evidence cited by a critic as evidence of a breakdown of the nascent ASEAN security community could be declared by security community advocates as merely a bump or U-turn in the socialisation process *en route* to the achievement of a mature and consolidated security community.¹⁹

A New Constructivist Research Agenda?

As we reflect on the various points of critique raised above, an important question presents itself: will the ASEAN diplomatic and research institute establishment reconsider their embrace of the security community idea? The answer is uncertain. Notwithstanding the flaws that characterise security community arguments, more policy-oriented scholars and bureaucrats have found the concept to be a handy tool in their bid to regenerate an ailing ASEAN organisation now in the throes of a legitimacy crisis. According to Rizal Sukma, an analyst at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta who has been identified as ‘a key contributor to the proposal’ (Rekhi 2003), ASEAN needs to turn itself into a security community in order for it to ‘prove itself as an organisation not only worthy of its existence but also relevance’ (Sukma 2003). Sukma’s argument thus implicitly embraces the idea that the purpose of the security community concept is for ASEAN to justify its *raison d’être*. The problem with this argument is that it sounds like a bureaucratic-based argument to resuscitate a non-performing organisation and has little to do with ASEAN’s main purpose, which, as noted in the earlier part of this article, is to generate security for the ASEAN states.

What about constructivist academics who study Southeast Asia’s international relations? Will they accept the analysis offered here? Again, it is difficult to answer that question. Constructivists have not responded to previous critiques of the security community concept (Ganesan 1995). Nonetheless, it seems opportune to make some comments on the future of constructivism in Southeast Asian security studies. Constructivist security community advocates who study Southeast Asia argue that norms and identity matter in international relations. But how much one wonders? As Robert Jervis notes, ‘It is one thing to argue that material factors and the external environment do not determine a state’s behaviour, and to point to the importance of regulative and constitutive norms, shared understandings, and common practices. It is quite another to say how norms are formed, how identities are shaped, and how interests become defined as they do’ (Jervis 1998, 974). At a minimum, if norms and identity really matter, we should see them working when it really counts—when states have disputes.

However, as observed in this article it is increasingly difficult to find positive norms operating, and cooperative identities developing, in intra-ASEAN rela-

¹⁹ In this respect, see Acharya’s account of the socialisation process (2001, 34–37). In particular, see pp. 36–37 on the decline of security communities.

tions.²⁰ In fact, since 2001 there have been a number of cases of ASEAN members resorting to international institutions rather than ASEAN's norms in settling disputes. The Malaysian and Indonesian dispute over the Sipadan-Ligitan islands off Sabah was settled at the International Court of Justice in December 2002. In early August 2003, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir indicated that Malaysia will seek international arbitration in its increasingly acrimonious dispute with Singapore over the supply of water to the island republic (Ahmad 2003). In early October 2003, Malaysia brought its dispute with Singapore over the latter's land reclamation activities to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (Associated Press 2003). In mid-October, Singapore gave Malaysia notice that it too would seek international arbitration over railway land located in Singapore that remains under the ownership of Malaysia's national railway company (Agence France Presse 2003b). These examples highlight the fact that if the security community concept takes hold within Southeast Asian security studies, a widening gap will develop between the empirical reality of the region's international relations and the conceptual tools that are used to study the region. That condition will benefit no one, and least of all constructivists, who will have been thoroughly discredited. As things stand, the normative bias toward 'positive' or 'cooperative norms' present in the current constructivist literature on Southeast Asia appears to reflect a wider trend in many constructivist works and has not been without cost. As one analyst has argued, 'Constructivists pay little attention to norms and ideas that are both revolutionary and evil. This oversight has the cost of ignoring perhaps the strongest argument against materialist claims: one cannot understand Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, the two most destructive states of the twentieth century, without understanding the norms, identities, and ideas held by dominant elites ... Perhaps constructivists slight these cases because they indicate that realism can be a force for moderation, that new ideas can make the world worse, and that those who seek radical change can be monsters' (Jervis 1998, 974).

What should constructivists do? Having spent the better part of this article critiquing a constructivist attempt at understanding ASEAN and Southeast Asia *via* the security community concept, a qualification is in order. The foregoing is not intended to deny the possible contributions that constructivism can make to Southeast Asian studies. However, this analysis suggests that constructivists should recalibrate their research lenses.²¹ It would appear that a focus on 'negative' or 'perverse' norms could make a significant contribution to explaining the dynamics of Southeast Asia's international relations (and perhaps even the nature of its domestic politics). One is struck by the potential for constructivism to make inroads concerning our understanding of the Khmer Rouge, for example. The slaughter of a significant proportion of the Cambodian population, and an even greater proportion of its intelligensia, would appear to be amenable to a norms or identity-based explanation (Jackson 1989; Kiernan 1996). Constructivists could render the field of Southeast Asian studies a great service if

²⁰ Indeed, Acharya notes that, rather than informally settling disputes in a spirit of give and take, ASEAN members have increasingly submitted conflicts between them to international institutions for resolution (Acharya 2001, 205). One might further add that in these cases there has been maximum attention to relative gains.

²¹ For an overview of the security community concept and its application to international politics see Adler and Barnett (1998).

they were able to convincingly explain the Khmer Rouge phenomenon. What are the causal linkages, for example, between the group's identity and ideology and its practice of international relations?²²

More generally, the low currency of human rights in the region, the celebration of authoritarianism and general disparagement of liberal democracy in the pre-1997 period might be explained very well with a constructivist approach, and throw important light on the dynamics at play within ASEAN. Students of comparative politics focus a great deal on transitions to democracy and the consolidation of democratic institutions (Huntington 1991; Przeworski 1991; Mainwaring *et al.* 1992). Yet, in analysing postcolonial Southeast Asia and the role of ASEAN, the more interesting issue concerns the *decline* of democratic institutions after some initial democratic experiments such as in Indonesia in the 1950s and the Philippines in the pre-Marcos era. The Southeast Asian experience could assist us in answering questions such as these: How do authoritarian views get institutionalised in the political discourse of particular regions and states? Which level of analysis should we focus on in explaining such illiberal phenomena? Is it individuals, states or the structural level that is most important? Or, is it some combination of these levels? Does economic crisis serve as a catalyst to democratic transition or does it prompt a recidivist turn toward less pluralistic forms of politics? Notwithstanding the current crisis that authoritarianism appears to face in Southeast Asia following the financial crisis of 1997, as the experience of Latin America suggests, the development of democracy does not necessarily follow a linear trajectory. Reversals to authoritarian rule, or even the appearance of new phenomena such as totalitarian Taliban-like rule, are not unimaginable in Southeast Asia. In any case, the questions raised above are varied, suggesting avenues for further research.

Constructing Southeast Asian Security: How Not to Build Orthodoxies on Sand

A number of conclusions flow from this analysis. First, if, as is argued in this article, ASEAN is best conceptualised as a realist security institution, the practical implications are that ASEAN's trajectory will closely mirror Indonesia's. Accordingly, should Jakarta continue in its inability to exercise leadership within ASEAN, the institution will remain mired in its current legitimacy crisis. The ASEAN shell will still exist but solutions to regional problems will be exceedingly difficult to achieve. Unfortunately for ASEAN, the prospects for the vigorous exercise of Indonesian leadership are complicated by the fact that Jakarta is currently undertaking systemic economic and political reform even while fighting a war against Islamic radicalism.

Second, this analysis finds that the security community concept *does not* provide the most useful framework to examine the evolution and nature of ASEAN's political and security role, or to analyse its future development. It is also unclear how seeking to transform ASEAN into a security community will

²² What is the contribution of Khmer Rouge ideology to its own dissolution? How did norms favoring genocide win out over other norms that may have been operative in intra-Khmer-Rogue politics? How did Khmer Rouge nationalism differ from other varieties of Cambodian nationalism? Were there varieties of Khmer Rouge nationalism?

increase the ASEAN states' individual and collective security. Indeed, it would appear that with the spillover of terrorism into Southeast Asia even before the Bali bombings in October 2002, the ASEAN member states would be better served by focusing their energies on the threat emanating from the forces of radical Islam. As the Marriott bombing in Jakarta in August 2003 demonstrates, to be distracted from that task by attempting to engage in the construction of a security community would be a significant error that present and future generations of Southeast Asians and their policy makers could well rue. As such, the Indonesian government should *not* use its current term as head of the ASEAN Standing Committee to attempt the construction of an ASEAN security community. Finally, it would appear that if constructivists want to remain relevant to the study of Southeast Asian security, they should focus greater attention on negative norms. However, such a focus would have to be justified by first cogently ruling out alternative explanations such as the realist security institution perspective proposed in this article. Only then can the new constructivist orthodoxy prevalent among many Southeast Asian analysts be built on a solid foundation.

References

- Abuza, Z. (2002) 'Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 24(3), pp. 427–65.
- Abuza, Z. (2003) 'Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 25(2), pp. 169–99.
- Acharya, A. (1991) 'The Association of Southeast Asian Nations: "Security Community" or "Defence Community"', *Pacific Affairs*, 64(2), pp. 159–78.
- Acharya, A. (1997) 'Ideas, Identity and Institution Building: From the "ASEAN Way" to "Asia Pacific Way"?', *Pacific Review*, 10(3), pp. 319–46.
- Acharya, A. (2001) *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London, Routledge).
- Adler, E. and Barnett, M. (Eds) (1998) *Security Communities* (New York, Cambridge University Press).
- Agence France Presse (2003a) 'Myanmar Might Have to Be Expelled from ASEAN', 20 July.
- Agence France Presse (2003b) 'Singapore Wants Railway Dispute with Malaysia to Go to International Court', 16 October.
- Ahmad, R. (2003) 'Water Supply Deal Will Remain: Mahathir', *Straits Times*, 2 August.
- Almonte, J. (1997/98) 'Ensuring Security the "ASEAN Way"', *Survival*, 39(4), pp. 80–92.
- Associated Press (2003) 'International Tribunal Rules for Singapore in Land Reclamation Dispute with Malaysia', 8 October.
- Baldwin, D. (1997) 'The Concept of Security', *Review of International Studies*, 23, pp. 5–26.
- Betts, R. (1992) 'Systems of Peace or Causes of War? Collective Security, Arms Control, and the New Europe', *International Security*, 17(1), pp. 5–43.
- Busse, N. (1999) 'Constructivism and Southeast Asian Security', *Pacific Review*, 12(1), pp. 39–60.
- Chandrasekaran, R. (2002a). "Indonesia a "Big Disappointment" in Terror War; Neighbours, US Say Jakarta Has Failed to Arrest Key Suspects", *Washington Post*, 24 March, p. A16.
- Chandrasekaran, R. (2002b) 'Concerned by Indonesia's Voice of Caution, US, Asian Diplomats Say Vice-President Preventing More Forceful War on Terror', *Washington Post*, 14 May, p. A17.
- Chong, I. and Sebastian, L. (2003) 'Towards an ASEAN Security Community at Bali', Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Commentaries, October 2003. <http://www.idss.edu.sg/Perspective/research_050336.htm> .
- Claude, I. (1971) *Swords into Plowshares*, 4th edn (New York, Random House).
- Crispin, S. and Lintner, B. (2003) 'Silenced Again', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 June, p. 20.

- Desker, B. (2003) 'Islam in Southeast Asia: The Challenge of Radical Interpretations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 16(3), pp. 415–29.
- Deutsch, K., Burrell, S. and Kahn, R. (1957) *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, Princeton University Press).
- Economist, The* (2003) 'ASEAN and Myanmar: A Slap on the Wrist', 19 June, p. 62.
- Ganesan, N. (1995) 'Rethinking ASEAN as a Security Community', *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 21(4), pp. 210–26.
- Huntington, S. (1991) *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press).
- Huxley, T. (1991) 'Singapore and Malaysia: A Precarious Balance', *Pacific Review*, 4(3), pp. 204–13.
- Jackson, K. (Ed.) (1989) *Cambodia, 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death* (Princeton, Princeton University Press).
- Jervis, R. (1998) 'Realism in the Study of World Politics', *International Organization*, 52(4), pp. 971–91.
- Jones, D.M. and Smith, M.L.R. (2002) 'ASEAN's Imitation Community', *ORBIS*, 46(1), pp. 93–109.
- Jones, D.M. and Smith, M.L.R. (2003) 'The Perils of Hyper-vigilance: The War on Terrorism and the Surveillance State in Southeast Asia', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17(4), pp. 31–54.
- Katsumata, H. (2003) 'Reconstruction of Diplomatic Norms in Southeast Asia: The Case for Strict Adherence to the "ASEAN Way"', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 25(1), pp. 104–21.
- Khong, Y.F. (1997a) 'ASEAN and the Southeast Asian Security Complex', in: D. Lake and P. Morgan (Eds), *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press).
- Khong, Y.F. (1997b) 'Review Article: Making Bricks without Straw in the Asia Pacific?', *Pacific Review*, 10(2), pp. 289–301.
- Kiernan, B. (1996) *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (New Haven, Yale University Press).
- Krasner, S. (1999) *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press).
- Lake, D. (2001) 'Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions', *International Security*, 26(1), pp. 129–60.
- Legro, J. (1997) 'Which Norms Matter? Revisiting the "Failure" of Internationalism', *International Organization*, 51(1), pp. 31–63.
- Leifer, M. (1989) *ASEAN and the Security of Southeast Asia* (London, Routledge).
- Leifer, M. (1996) *The ASEAN Regional Forum* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Leifer, M. (2001) Reviews, *Pacific Review*, 14(3), pp. 484–86.
- Lim, K.C. (2003) 'Pressure on Myanmar to Free Suu Kyi', *Straits Times*, 3 June.
- Lyall, S. (2003) 'Britain Says Democracy Advocate Is Held in Burmese Jail', *New York Times*, 20 June, p. A3.
- Mack, A. and Ravenhill, J. (Eds) (1995) *Pacific Cooperation: Building Economic and Security Regimes in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Boulder, Westview Press).
- Mainwaring, S., O'Donnell, G. and Valenzuela, J.S. (1992) *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (South Bend, University of Notre Dame Press).
- Mearsheimer, J. (1994–95) 'The False Promise of International Institutions', *International Security*, 19(3), pp. 5–49.
- Mercer, J. (1995) 'Anarchy and Identity', *International Organization*, 49(2), pp. 229–52.
- Murphy, D. (2003) 'Militant Cleric Sentenced in Indonesia; The Alleged Spiritual Leader of Jemaah Islamiyah Rerror Group Was Convicted Tuesday of Sedition', *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 September, p. 7.
- Mydans, S. (2003) 'Japan Halts Aid to Burmese over Democracy Leader's Detention', *New York Times*, 26 June, p. A5.
- Nakashima, E. and Sipress, A. (2002) 'Militant Alliance in Asia Is Said to Seek Regional Islamic State', *Washington Post*, 20 September, p. A16.
- Peou, S. (2002) 'Realism and Constructivism in Southeast Asian Security Studies Today: A Review Essay', *Pacific Review*, 15(1), pp. 119–38.

- Priess, D. and Schweller, R. (1997) 'A Tale of Two Realisms: Expanding the Institutions Debate', *Mershon International Studies Review*, 41(1), pp. 1–32.
- Przeworski, A. (1991) *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Ramakrishna, K. Interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 12 October 2003. <<http://abcasiapacific.com/focus/stories/s964462.htm>>.
- Rekhi, S. (2003) 'ASEAN to Moot Security Community', *Straits Times*, 23 July.
- Simon, S. (1995) 'Realism and Neoliberalism: International Relations Theory and South-east Asian Security', *Pacific Review*, 8(1), pp. 5–24.
- Sopiee, N. (1986) 'ASEAN and Regional Security Community', in: M. Ayoob (Ed.), *Regional Security in the Third World: Case Studies from Southeast Asia and the Middle East* (London, Croon Helm).
- Sukma, R. (2003) 'The Future of ASEAN: Towards a Security Community', paper presented at a one day Seminar on 'ASEAN Cooperation: Challenges and Prospects in the Current International Situation' in New York, 3 June.
- Tan, A. (2000) *Intra-ASEAN Tensions* (London, Royal Institute of International Affairs).
- Valencia, M. (1995) *China and the South China Sea Disputes* (London, International Institute of Strategic Studies).
- Vatikiotis, M. (2002) 'What Went Wrong? Interview with Lee Kuan Yew', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 December, pp. 26–27.
- Walt, S. (1986) *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press).
- Waltz, K. (1979) *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley).
- Waltz, K. (1986) 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: A Response to My Critics', in: R. Keohane (Ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York, Columbia University Press).
- Wanandi, J. (2002) 'Indonesia: A Failed State?', *Washington Quarterly*, 25(3), pp. 135–46.
- Wolfers, A. (1952) '"National Security" as an Ambiguous Symbol', *Political Science Quarterly*, 67(4), pp. 481–502.

