

Title:

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Dynamics of Resistance to Sovereignty Violation: The Case of the Third Indochina War (1978-91)

Abstract:

This paper investigates the history of ASEAN's relationship to external intervention in regional affairs. It addresses a specific question: What was the basic cause of the success of ASEAN resistance to the Vietnamese challenge to ASEAN's sovereignty from 1978-1991? ASEAN's history is understood in terms of a realist theoretical logic, in terms of the relationship between an ASEAN state with the most compelling interests at stake in a given issue, which I call a 'vanguard state,' and selected external powers. Using the Third Indochina War (1978-1991) as a case study, this paper contends that ASEAN's ability to resist violations to the sovereignty of Thailand from a Soviet-backed Vietnam is a consequence of high interest convergence between Thailand, and a designated external power, China.

Keywords:

Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Interests, Sovereignty, Intervention, Cambodia

“Without ASEAN there would have been no Cambodia issue. Because if we had not taken up the cause of Cambodia in early 1979, and steadfastly championed it, it would have disappeared.”

Tommy Koh, former Singapore Ambassador to the United Nations (Cited in Acharya, 2009a, pp. 95-96).

Introduction

The Third Indochina War began on 25 December 1978, when between 150,000 and 220,000 Vietnamese troops invaded and occupied neighbouring Cambodia (Turley & Race, 1980, p. 92).¹ Rooted in Sino-Soviet rivalry, the conflict was a spillover of the Cold War into Southeast Asia (Khoo, 2011). Following the invasion, Vietnamese troops were involved in recurring cross-border operations in Thailand, which stopped short of an outright Vietnamese invasion. In a bid to contain the Vietnamese threat, Thailand, in its role as a frontline or vanguard Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) state, formed an informal alliance with China, the Khmer Rouge, and to a lesser extent the United States (US). These actors provided active diplomatic and/or military support to Thailand, culminating in a major diplomatic and military success when Hanoi withdrew its forces from Cambodia in 1989.

This Cold War era episode has direct relevance to the current debate on ASEAN's record as a vehicle for defending regional sovereignty from external intervention. As

will be reviewed below, existing research has either over-emphasised or under-emphasised ASEAN's ability to defend regional sovereignty. This article advances an alternative position, contending that ASEAN's record is highly dependent on the stance of external actors whose interests align with the organisations'. The specific question to which this article is concerned with is this: What was the basic cause of the success of ASEAN resistance to the Vietnamese challenge to ASEAN's sovereignty from 1978-1991? This article contends that ASEAN's success in this instance can best be explained by levels of interest convergence between the ASEAN vanguard state (Thailand) and a designated external actor, China (See Figure One).

As the vanguard state, Thailand was able to set ASEAN's agenda, garner great power security commitments, and forge a united ASEAN front for Thailand's Vietnam policy. While Thailand (in its capacity as the ASEAN vanguard state) clearly had an important role to play in this process, an *equally important* factor explaining ASEAN resistance to sovereignty violation during this time-period resides in the role played by external actors. As will be explained more fully below, this view represents a serious challenge to much of the existing scholarship, which either over-emphasises or under-emphasises ASEAN's ability to defend regional autonomy from external intervention.

Contending Explanations for ASEAN and Sovereignty Violation

The existing regional literature regarding ASEAN's record on sovereignty violation is polarised. An influential group of constructivist theorists advocate a perspective emphasising ASEAN's autonomy and ability to uphold regional order despite challenges (Acharya 2009a; Acharya 2009b; Acharya 2012; Ba 2009; Haacke 2003). A second approach views regional intervention in terms of its relationship to social forces within ASEAN states (Jones, 2012). Leifer (1979, 1989) and Jones and

Smith (2002, 2006, 2007a, 2007b), represent a third perspective, emphasising ASEAN's lack of autonomy and reliance on external actors' sufferance. This article adopts a middle ground in respect to this literature. In the process, it will advance a distinctive realist perspective of ASEAN's record.

Constructivist Theory

The consensus among constructivists studying ASEAN is that the organisation's governing norms emphasise dialogue, consensus-building and non-confrontation. According to Amitav Acharya (2009a, p. 4), norms have a transformative impact. Norms regulate state behaviour, redefine state interests, and constitute state identities (Acharya, 2009a, p. 4). For Jürgen Haacke (2003, p. 2), norms also help mediate ASEAN leaders' insecurity. For Alice Ba, ideas are the primary focus. Regionalism in Southeast Asia is viewed as part of an interactive process, where ideas play a key role in shaping expectations and behaviour (Ba, 2009, p. 4).

In this literature, there is significant emphasis on ASEAN autonomy, and 'regional solutions for regional problems, with minimal intervention by outside powers' (Acharya, 2009a, p. 101). Indeed, the norm of non-interference is enshrined in Article 2c of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). It is stated there that 'in their relations with one another, the High Contracting Parties shall be guided by...non-interference in the internal affairs of one another' (Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, 1976). Seeking to transcend the role of the nation state by emphasising the role of 'regionalism' (Acharya, 2012, p. 3), it is believed that regional cooperation can play a central role in shaping modern Southeast Asian identity (Acharya, 2012, p. 1).

What happens when the organisation's norms, ideas and regional identity are challenged? Constructivist theorists interpret the Third Indochina War as a challenge to ASEAN norms, cohesion and unity (Acharya, 2009a, p. 116; Ba, 2009, p. 85; Haacke, 2003, p. 111). As Ba states, 'Vietnam's action clearly challenged the idea of a unified and resilient Southeast Asia' (Ba, 2009, p. 86), while Thailand's subsequent alliance relationship with China 'represented a real test of the regional autonomy goals' (Ba, 2009, p. 86). However, she maintains that 'shared ideas of region and the importance of regional unity might...have been the *only* [italics in text] significant thing that kept them working together toward a common solution' (Ba, 2009, p. 87). In this view, ideas about Southeast Asia's 'division and foreign intervention' find expression in 'ideas of resilience and "One Southeast Asia"' (Ba, 2009, p. 29). At face value, this clearly over-estimates the role of ideas, and neglects a host of other factors, including regional security concerns, and the role of external powers emphasised in standard accounts of this period of Southeast Asia's history (Weatherbee, 2005, pp. 75-87).

Other constructivists also maintain that the Third Indochina War was a stellar success for ASEAN, which emerged from the conflict strengthened in its mission and core norms. According to Acharya, ASEAN 'presented the Vietnamese invasion as a gross violation of the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states as well as the principle of non-use of force' (Acharya, 2009a, p. 116). As events developed, the conflict gave 'a more substantive meaning to ASEAN political and security cooperation' (Acharya, 2012, p. 195), whilst also having 'positive effects for ASEAN's pursuit of a regional identity' (Acharya, 2009a, p. 116). Our point here is not to deny that there was a record of ASEAN co-operation, but to emphasise that it has been misinterpreted. To be specific, the role of ASEAN has been elevated, while that of

external powers' has been systematically downplayed, with important theoretical consequences. Indeed, Jürgen Haacke, a constructivist who has studied ASEAN's diplomacy in the Third Indochina War, reaches a very different conclusion to Acharya, noting that 'ultimately, however, all of ASEAN had to bow to the pressure of major powers and accept the political compromise' that was presented as a *fait accompli* (Haacke, 2003, p.111).

Critical Theory

Critical theorist Lee Jones advances a second perspective of ASEAN sovereignty that centres on the domestic politics of the various ASEAN states. Jones (2012, p. 15) seeks to identify the forces that benefit from particular sovereignty regimes. In this view, sovereignty is conceptualised as a 'technology of power' (Jones, 2012, p. 14). Patterns of sovereignty are explained with reference 'to the strategies used by state managers to advance particular societal interests and ideologies over others' (Jones, 2012, p. 29). Because sovereignty regimes are 'closely implicated in the state-making process', they are likely to be challenged, both externally and by internal social forces (Jones, 2012, p. 29). What therefore emerges is 'the contingent outcome of a struggle between all these forces, which must be considered as dynamic, evolving and often interrelated' (Jones, 2012, p. 29).

For Jones, ASEAN responded to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia 'not to defend its non-interference principle, but rather to contain revolution in Indochina' (2012, p. 76). To this end, the ASEAN states 'engaged in counter-intervention, fomenting civil war inside Cambodia to keep Vietnamese forces pinned down and unable to support revolutionary movements outside Indochina' (Jones, 2012, p. 76). The Vietnamese threat is 'not understood in conventional, military, balance-of-power terms' but in terms

of 'the likely consequences of the invasion for the balance of forces within their own societies' (Jones, 2012, p. 78). Jones focuses a disproportionate amount of his narrative on ASEAN's opposition to the spread of revolution for domestic political reasons. As such, his approach fails to consider a variety of other critical factors including: ASEAN's position in the Cold War regional environment, ASEAN state external security concerns, and the external reasons for collaboration between ASEAN states and the great powers (Weatherbee, 2005, pp. 75-87). Jones makes no mention of the role of the Soviet Union, and fails to consider the shared mutual security interests between Thailand and China. Jones also deemphasises legitimate and real fears of Vietnamese expansion on the part of ASEAN states. Taken together, these limitations undermine Jones' argument.

Realist Theory

A third strand in the literature is represented by the standard realist perspective. If the constructivist literature has over-emphasised ASEAN's ability to resist sovereignty violations, then this strand in the literature sees little agency for ASEAN in regional affairs. Michael Leifer, David Martin Jones and Michael LR Smith contend that ASEAN's preference for consensus and conflict avoidance has lent itself to extra-regional actors manipulating ASEAN norms to serve their own best interests (Jones & Smith, 2007a, p. 150). According to Leifer, for Thailand, an alliance with China and the Khmer Rouge represented a 'much more effective means by which to challenge Vietnam's hegemonic position than the diplomatic support of ASEAN' (Leifer, 1989, p. 97). In this view, the position 'adopted by the Association favoured China's interests, above all' (Leifer, 1989, p. 98).

While Leifer does pay some consideration to the 'differential impact on the actual security interests' of the ASEAN member states, these are relatively ineffective (Leifer,

1989, p. 90). Thus, alternative approaches to resolving the problem of Vietnam's invasion are interpreted as arising 'from a natural divergence of strategic perspectives, which has been an important factor in denying the Association a conventional security role' (Leifer, 1989, p. 90). The critical point to note is that Leifer does not seek to develop a connection between external power and regional state interests. As such, ASEAN state interests remain hostage to those of China, and regional autonomy remains wholly reliant on external actors.

Jones and Smith also minimise ASEAN's role in the resolution of the Third Indochina War, maintaining that the eventual settlement 'represented an archetypal manifestation of great power politics' (Jones & Smith, 2006, p. 55). According to this view, 'ASEAN's actual contribution to the Cambodian settlement reveals its role to be both ambiguous and ultimately limited' (Jones & Smith, 2006, p. 54). The Association only appeared effective 'because its actions coincided with superpower interests', with ASEAN acting as 'a convenient front for external actors and interests' (Jones & Smith, 2006, p. 55). For Jones and Smith, the fact that China and the Soviet Union effectively resolved the conflict through bilateral diplomacy, illustrated 'the region's continuing dependence upon external actors and the illusory character of ASEAN's attempt to erect a *cordon sanitaire* around Southeast Asia' (Jones and Smith, 2006, p. 55).

To be clear, Jones and Smith offer a strong counter-argument to constructivist theorising. Their assessments of the role of great powers in Indochina during the Cold War, add significant weight to their realist-based claims. However, as with Leifer, they take an overly restrictive view of ASEAN autonomy and the role of ASEAN states. As I will attempt to show, they are unable to adequately explain examples of state

cooperation and consensus, as evident during periods of the Third Indochina War. This is an important limitation in their analysis, which I seek to rectify.

Defining Realist State Interests and Sovereignty

In advancing an alternative account in the literature, the critical independent variable in our analysis is the degree of convergence in state interests between an ASEAN vanguard state and a specific external actor or actors. Consistent with a realist theoretical approach, we draw on a realist understanding of how interests are defined. Following the work of Stephen Krasner (1978, p. 12), analysis begins with, and ultimately attempts to defend, the basic premise underlying what has become known as the state-centric realist paradigm. In this view, states can be treated as unified actors pursuing aims understood in terms of the national interest (Krasner, 1978, p. 12).

Interests enjoy a strong tradition within the realist literature, where there exists a consistent view of the basic state interest, which is state survival. For example, neorealist Kenneth Waltz believes that 'by comparing nations and corporations, the elusive notion of national interest is made clear. By assumption, economic actors seek to maximise expected returns, and states strive to secure their survival' (1979, p. 134). John Mearsheimer reaffirms this view, stating that 'survival is the primary goal of great powers' (2001, p. 31). When a state must act to ensure its survival, this constrains a state's consideration of broader interests (Zakaria, 1998, p. 186). However, during periods of relative peace, 'powers have the "luxury" of choosing their interests and goals' (Zakaria, 1998, p. 186). During such times, a range of other values will be sought, including 'rank, respect, material possessions and material privileges' (Wolfers, 1952, p. 489). Interest based inter-state cooperation may be based on a response to threats (Walt, 1987), or for the pursuit of gains (Grieco, 1988).

Our dependent variable focuses on resistance to sovereignty violations. Sovereignty is understood in terms of the Westphalian model, defined as an 'institutional arrangement for organising political life that is based on two principles: territoriality and the exclusion of external actors from domestic authority structures' (Krasner, 1999, p. 20). Westphalian sovereignty can be violated through intervention, where more powerful states coerce 'public authorities in weaker states to accept externally dictated authority structures' (Krasner, 1999, p. 8). For many, the principle of non-intervention, which is always violated through coercion or imposition, is the key element of sovereign statehood (Krasner, 1999, p. 20). Interventions occur when there is an asymmetry of power (Krasner, 1995, p. 229). Because powerful states intervene in the internal affairs of less powerful states (Krasner, 1995, p. 229), weaker states have always been the 'strongest supporters' of the rule of non-intervention (Krasner, 1999, p. 21). Weaker states will always seek to resist violations to their sovereignty. It is our contention that they are able to do so when their interests converge with that of an external actor.

An understanding of the foregoing literature leads us to conceptualise our variables in a particular way. For the purposes of analysis, this study begins with the basic assumption that state interests are premised on seeking survival. Building on the works of Timothy Crawford (2003, pp. 30-31) and Daryl Press (2005, pp. 25-28), a continuous variable has been constructed representing the state interests at stake, with vital interests at one end and secondary interests at the other. Crawford (2003, p. 31) defines vital interests as involving 'self-preservation, political independence, and, by extension, defence of strategically vital areas'. Similarly, Press (2005, p. 26) defines vital interests as preservation of 'sovereignty'. Secondary threats can vary greatly, and

may range 'from very important interests, such as maintaining trade routes, the safety of your allies, and even national "prestige", to much more ephemeral ones' (Crawford, 2003, p. 31). Whilst ranking the hierarchy of state interests is inherently difficult, ultimately, interests pertaining to national self-preservation logically must take precedence (Crawford, 2003, p. 31).

Interest convergence is measured by identifying symmetric or asymmetric interests (Ross, 2002, pp. 48-85), whether vital or secondary (as defined by Crawford), and arrangements for cooperation between states. Interest convergence is a dynamic process, where small states actively seek 'maximum great-power commitment to their security interests while trying to minimise the price of obtaining that support' (Ciorciari, 2010, p. 2). They do so because they 'generally lack formidable independent power capabilities' and, as such, 'cannot affect the international security landscape on their own' (Ciorciari, 2010, p. 1). However, because some small states 'occupy strategic positions', they can 'affect the overall global distribution of power by adding to the resources of some great powers and constraining others' (Ciorciari, 2010, p. 1).

Engaging with this literature, our analysis begins with the underlying premise that the study of interest convergence can yield utility to the field of Southeast Asian international relations. As a small collection of regional states, ASEAN has little impact on the international security landscape. This view of ASEAN autonomy is consistent with existing realist literature of Leifer (1989) and Jones and Smith (2006). However, this article contributes to the literature by demonstrating that when a clear interest convergence occurs between an ASEAN state and an external power, a substantial compact is constructed. In short, an ASEAN vanguard state plays the important and necessary function of actively seeking and supporting a great power intervention in

regional affairs, which are consistent with the interests of both the ASEAN state and the external actor. By doing so, an ASEAN vanguard state has an active and substantial role in resisting sovereignty violations from other external powers. Great powers will use regional institutions to pursue their own interests (Schweller and Priess, 1997, p. 12). However, when vital interests are at stake, regional states will seek to do the same.

Theoretical Assessment of the Third Indochina War (1978-1991)

To test the hypothesis that following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978, an increase in interest convergence between an ASEAN vanguard state and designated external actor caused an increase in ASEAN vanguard state success of resistance to sovereignty violation, we must consider the regional environment of Southeast Asia during that period.

The Regional Environment 1975-1978

In 1975, communist power was consolidated in three Southeast Asian countries: Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Following victory over the United States, North Vietnam lost little time attempting to secure a number of objectives. First, and most importantly, it sought to enhance its regional security. Vietnamese strategists argued that if a power hostile to Vietnam established a close relationship with either Cambodia or Laos, that association would seriously threaten Vietnam's security (Chanda, 1986, p. 94). Of secondary importance was the realisation of a long held desire to establish its own sphere of influence in Indochina. Since the 1930s, the Vietnamese believed a Federation of Indochina, including Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, was the proper configuration for the Indochina region (Pike, 1979, p. 30). In 1977, Vietnam secured a twenty-five year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Laos. This was an unambiguous declaration

that Laos clearly fell under Vietnam's sphere of influence (Khoo, 2011, p. 115). Vietnam had more difficulty establishing a sphere of influence over Cambodia. The increasingly anti-Vietnamese and pro-Chinese Khmer Rouge had seized power in neighbouring Cambodia in April 1975 (Chanda, 1986, p. 5). This presented Vietnam with the reality of a hostile regime right at its border.

Tensions grew between Cambodia and Vietnam throughout the period 1975-1978. Within Cambodia, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge embarked on a brutal crackdown, which included forced labour, starvation and mass genocide. Even the Khmer cadres were subject to large-scale killings and routine purges (Chanda, 1986, pp. 83-84). The Khmer Rouge had long been wary of Vietnamese regional ambitions. Their aim was 'to blunt Vietnamese expansionism, pre-empt Hanoi's effort to exert influence over Phnom Penh, and reclaim soil that, in the Cambodian view of history, properly belonged in the hands of the Khmer' (O'Dowd, 2007, p. 33). With these aims in mind, the Khmer Rouge sought to eliminate all Vietnamese influence within Cambodia, and to implement anti-Vietnamese policies (Pike, 1979, p. 31). Cambodia declared a cessation in diplomatic relations with Vietnam on 31 December 1977 (Leifer, 1979, p. 249). This was interpreted by the Vietnamese as 'the creation of a "bridgehead of aggression" on behalf of the Chinese', who had 'used the reactionary and genocidal Pol Pot-Ieng Sary fascist gang to make war, nibbling at the south-western border of our homeland hoping to squeeze us in a vice' (Leifer, 1979, p. 249). A hostile Cambodia posed a serious threat to Vietnamese security.

Chinese State Interests

China, which perceived a unified Vietnam, backed by the Soviet Union, to be a major regional threat, increasingly believed that the two were engaged in a strategy of

Chinese encirclement (Ross, 1991, p. 1171). Enhanced Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation increasingly led to a further deterioration in both the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnamese relationships (Khoo, 2011, p. 55). Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua informed US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in 1978 that Vietnam's 'objective is regional hegemony, and it has hired itself out to the Soviet Union, while the Soviet Union had exploited the ambitions of Vietnam to realise its aggression' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 138). Aiming to counter the Soviet-Vietnamese encirclement strategy, China provided military and economic aid to Cambodia to support its fight against Vietnamese expansion. A November 1978 US Interagency Intelligence Memorandum found that China 'considers an independent Kampuchea allied with Peking an essential buffer against the expansion of Vietnamese, and by extension Soviet, influence in the area' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 152).

At the same time, China sought to act as a moderating influence on the Khmer Rouge. Concerned that the abuse of human rights by the Pol Pot regime would alienate international support, China attempted to point the regime 'in the direction of a more traditional realpolitik foreign policy' (Morris, 1999, pp. 85-86). China also mediated a 1975 agreement to establish relations between Thailand and Cambodia, with the purpose of 'creating a 'united front' against Hanoi expansionism' (Chambers, 2005, pp. 609-610). It was of vital Chinese interest that the Soviet Union, and by extension Vietnam, be prevented from extending their influence into Southeast Asia. China's regional primacy and territorial security were at stake.

Regional State Interests

ASEAN, Vietnam and the Soviet Union

ASEAN state reactions to Vietnamese communist consolidation of power in Southeast Asia were polarised, reflecting a variety of state interests. Of the ASEAN states, most alarm was felt in Thailand, 'the country closest to the epicentre of political and military turmoil' (Ang, 2013, p. 7). Vietnamese communist victory 'brought the least response from the country furthest away, Indonesia' (Ang, 2013, p. 7). Seeking enhanced security and potential economic aid, Vietnam made diplomatic overtures to the ASEAN states after its reunification in 1975. However, it refused to deal with ASEAN as an Association. This was largely due to the Vietnamese perception of ASEAN during the Second Indochina War, when ASEAN 'was venomously flayed as a de facto military alliance' (Buszynski, 1981, p. 540). Vietnam's attempts to normalise relations with the ASEAN states were ultimately 'subject to the suspicions and animosities that had been fuelled by the Vietnam War' (Buszynski, 1986, p. 116). Vietnam made another bid to woo the ASEAN states in August and September of 1978, at a time of increased Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Vietnamese overtures were much to China's displeasure, who warned 'ASEAN against Soviet attempts at infiltration and expansion' (Chanda, 1986, p. 36). The ASEAN states decided against rushing into a formal agreement with Vietnam at that time (Chanda, 1986, p. 319).

The Soviet Union had been attempting to extend its influence in Southeast Asia since 1969, when it had advanced the idea of an Asian collective security system. The ostensible aim of this proposal was to 'demonstrate Soviet solicitude for the security of Asian states' (Buszynski, 1986, p. 67). However, the collective security system struggled to get off the ground. This was largely due to the regional belief that the concept was an anti-China move, which might ultimately provoke Beijing (Buszynski, 1981, pp. 536-537). The Soviet Union revived the notion following Vietnamese communist success in

the Vietnam War. Soviet leaders 'anticipated that the announcement of American withdrawal from Indochina in the context of expanded Chinese influence within the region would work in their favour' (Buszynski, 1986, p. 69). Whilst some ASEAN states did move to enhance diplomatic relations with the Soviets, this did not result in any formal alliances. The ASEAN states, warned by China that Moscow's collective security proposal aimed to promote its 'hegemonic aspirations' (Ross, 1988, p. 111), remained wary of drawing Soviet influence into the region.

Thailand and Singapore

Responding to the threat posed by a unified Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore sought external power security guarantees. In a 1975 conversation between Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Lee stated his belief that 'Hanoi may see this as a moment of destiny. They may want a master-servant situation with Cambodia and Laos and put pressure on the Thais' (U.S. Department of State, 2011, doc. 297). In April 1975, Prime Minister Lee met with a Thai delegation in Bangkok, which included the Thai Prime Minister Khukrit Pramot and Foreign Minister Chatchai Chunawan. During this meeting, Lee informed Chatchai that he viewed Thailand to potentially be 'the next domino' in Southeast Asia (Wikileaks, 1975, BANGKO074125_b). As a result, he argued, it was vital that they maintain a US presence in order to resist communist incursions (Wikileaks, 1975, BANGKO074125_b).

In a 1975 meeting between Chatchai and Kissinger, Kissinger stated the US preference that Cambodia remain:

Independent as a counterweight to North Vietnam...we would prefer to have Laos and Cambodia aligned with China rather than with North Vietnam. We

would try to encourage this if that is what you want...you should also tell the Cambodians that we will be friends with them. They are murderous thugs, but we won't let that stand in our way' (National Security Archive, 1975, doc. 17).

Chatchai informed Kissinger that 'yes, we would like you to do that...the Chinese are 100 percent in support of Cambodia's being friends with Thailand' (National Security Archive, 1975, doc. 17). In an October 1975 meeting with Japanese officials in Tokyo, Chatchai made it clear that the situation in Indochina was 'very dangerous' for Thailand, and that Hanoi was the major threat (Wikileaks Cable, 1975, 1975TOKYO14290_b). Japanese officials believed Chatchai implied a 'linked PRC [People's Republic of China], Cambodia and Thailand in [a] quasi-alliance' (Wikileaks Cable, 1975, 1975TOKYO14290_b). For both Thailand and Singapore, Vietnam represented a clear threat to regional security.

Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines

Indonesia, and to a lesser extent Malaysia, took a different approach to the unification of Vietnam. In line with their own state interests, these states largely sought a regional approach to any threat posed, preferring to limit the role of external powers in the region. Although Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines took steps to establish diplomatic relations with China in 1975, Indonesia was not happy with Beijing's attempt to 'woo' ASEAN countries, or the 'current "panicky rush" of ASEAN countries to Beijing' (Sukma, 1999, p. 94). In April 1975, Indonesian Minister of Defence General Panggabean met with US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Brown to discuss Vietnam. Panggabean confirmed the Indonesian view that 'naturally [the] prospect of communist takeover in Indochina creates a very real concern in Indonesia. Indonesians hoped, however, and were inclined to believe, that communists in Indochina were as

much nationalists as communists. If this was [the] case, relations with them over longer term would be possible' (Wikileaks, 1975, 1975JAKART04135_b).

Similarly, acting Malaysian Prime Minister Ghafar Baba stated the Malaysian hope that 'both the new governments in Cambodia and South Vietnam would cooperate with ASEAN countries in maintaining political and economic stability in this region. Whether (they) follow the democratic system of governments as Malaysians know it is their affair' (Wikileaks, 1975, 1975KUALA02386_b). The Philippines' President Marcos, aware that his country was geographically removed from any threat and home to a number of US bases, remained 'firm in his expressions that the US-Philippine security relationship is essential to his country' (U.S. Department of State, 2011, doc. 16). These differing state interests prevented any unified ASEAN response to the consolidation of communist power in Indochina. Instead, 'much of the initiative towards accommodation with the emerging realities of the power structure in the region was effectively in the hands of individual member states rather than in ASEAN as a regional grouping' (Nair, 1984, pp. 57-59).

The Vietnamese Invasion of Cambodia (1978)

By 1978, Vietnam's domestic situation was in disarray. Unable to receive aid from countries such as the US and China, Vietnam was driven further into the arms of the Soviet Union. Vietnam joined COMECON, a Moscow based economic arrangement, in August 1978 (Pike, 1979, p. 33). Two months later, on 2 November 1978, it agreed to sign a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow. This resulted in a massive shipment of Soviet military hardware to Vietnam (Pike, 1979, p. 33). A closer relationship with the Soviet Union provided economic and military aid, as well as security assurances against an increasingly aggressive China. However, the increase in

Soviet-Vietnamese relations led to a further deterioration in Sino-Vietnamese relations (Khoo, 2011). China viewed the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance as a direct threat. It responded with increased support to Cambodia, a diplomatic effort to strengthen regional relations, and an interest in early normalisation of diplomatic relations with the United States (Ross, 1988, p. 219).

Of particular importance to China were close ties with Thailand. In Beijing's view, Thailand, in conjunction with Cambodia, could help China in a Vietnamese containment strategy (Khoo, 2011, p. 127). Two days after Vietnam signed the friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, Chinese Vice premier Deng Xiaoping travelled to Bangkok to seek more formal security cooperation. Deng assured Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanan that Beijing would end its support for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and would punish Hanoi for its hegemonic behaviour. Deng stated that Thailand's security mattered to Beijing, as did the stability of Southeast Asia, and that China would help enhance Thai security against the Vietnamese threat (Chambers, 2005, p. 613). Kriangsak did not immediately agree to a formal alliance, although the meeting was a step closer to enhanced relations between the two.

Having signed a formal treaty with the Soviet Union, Vietnam was now in a stronger position to take action against Cambodia. Apart from Cambodia's close physical proximity to Vietnam, Cambodia's relationship with China allowed an external power increased presence in Indochina. Seeking to put a halt to this process, the Vietnamese decided to attack the Khmer Rouge. On 25 December 1978, the first phase of the assault commenced, when between 150,000 and 220,000 Vietnamese troops invaded neighbouring Cambodia (Turley & Race, 1980, p. 92). On the 7 January, Pol Pot was driven from Phnom Penh by Vietnamese troops, supported by some 20,000

dissident Cambodians (Funston, 1979, p. 268). On the 8 January, a Vietnamese puppet government was installed headed by Heng Samrin, a former Khmer Rouge commander who had defected to Vietnam. Approximately 20-40,000 Khmer Rouge troops survived the invasion. These troops withdrew into the jungle, where they could commence guerrilla operations against the Vietnamese forces (Funston, 1979, p. 268).

Initial Responses to the Invasion

ASEAN and China: Official Responses

On 7 January, the Chinese government transmitted a statement to the United Nations (UN), stating that 'Viet Nam had invaded Democratic Kampuchea, was occupying a large part of the country and, with USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] support, intended to annex Kampuchea by force and set up an "Indochinese Federation" under its control' (The United Nations, 1979, p. 272). On 9 January, the Indonesian Foreign Minister issued a statement as chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee on the escalation of the armed conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia. In the statement, the ASEAN member countries stated that they 'deeply deplore the current escalation and enlargement of the conflict between the two states in Indochina...they call upon all countries in the region to strictly, respect each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political system' (ASEAN Standing Committee, 1979). This was followed on the 12 January with a joint statement issued by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers stating that the ministers 'strongly deplored the armed intervention against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kampuchea...[and] called for the immediate and total withdrawal of the foreign forces from Kampuchean territory' (ASEAN Foreign Ministers, 1979).

ASEAN State Concerns

Clearly, ASEAN was greatly concerned by Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. The Soviet-Vietnamese alliance 'seriously shook ASEAN confidence about Vietnam's claim to be an independent and nonaligned nation' (Chanda, 1986, p. 325). Vietnamese overtures towards ASEAN in 1978 were viewed as a 'duplicitous stratagem', and a 'manoeuvre to soften them as part of Vietnam's preparations to invade Cambodia' (Turley & Race, 1980, p. 102, p. 98). The invasion also coloured regional views of the Soviet Union. The ASEAN states had attempted to limit Soviet influence in the region, as can be seen in the Soviet's failed collective security proposal. Following Vietnam's invasion, the ASEAN states believed 'Moscow had attempted to gain illegitimate entry into the region in disregard of the ASEAN desire to remove the basis for great power intervention of this kind' (Buszynski, 1981, p. 541).

Deng Xiaoping succinctly expressed Chinese and Southeast Asian state fears regarding Vietnam and the Soviet Union in a meeting with US President Jimmy Carter in a meeting on 29 January 1979. During this meeting, Deng informed Carter that China found 'that Vietnam has become totally Soviet controlled...at least a majority of ASEAN countries assess this as an extremely grave matter...ASEAN countries are now in the front line' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 205). Carter informed Deng that the US 'are encouraging the ASEAN countries to stand united against Vietnam, and we are increasing military aid to Thailand. We have also warned the Soviet Union in strong terms about the damage to their relations with us if they pursue their aggression against Cambodia' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 205). Deng agreed with this approach, stating that:

At least a majority of ASEAN countries assesses this an (sic) extremely grave matter. Not long ago I visited Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. At that time, they believed Hanoi's promises. But when Vietnam attacked Cambodia, they realised they had been taken in. At the same time, they expressed the hope that China will be able to do something. Some friends even criticised China for being too soft. Thus ASEAN countries are now in the front line' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 205).

Sino-Vietnamese Border War (1979)

Deng informed Carter of the Chinese plan to launch a punitive strike against Vietnam. Deng stated that the 'Vietnamese now are extremely arrogant...we consider it necessary to put a restraint on the wild ambitions of the Vietnamese and to give them an appropriate limited lesson...the lesson will be limited to a short period of time...If our action in the South is quickly completed, they won't have time to react...we need your [the US] moral support in the international field' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 205). China labelled the strike a 'self-defensive counterattack', in order to reduce any domestic or international negative reactions (Zhang, 2005, p. 860).

Before the invasion, Deng set out to woo the ASEAN countries, embarking on a nine-day tour through Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, tasked with assuring 'these countries of China's benevolent role as guardian of regional security and to enlist their support in the confrontation with Vietnam' (Chanda, 1986, p. 324). The ensuing border war with Vietnam was fought in three stages, beginning on 17 February, and ending with a complete withdrawal on 16 March (Zhang, 2005, p. 863). China claimed the attack to be a victory. Catching Hanoi off-guard, it forced the Vietnamese to expend resources preparing for a second attack, whilst having to maintain a large portion of its

army at the Sino-Vietnamese border, thus preventing those troops from being deployed in Cambodia (Morris, 1999, p. 221).

External Power Interest Convergence

The Sino-Thai Alliance

On 14 January, members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) flew to meet with Thai premier Kriangsak to discuss Sino-Thai cooperation following the invasion of Cambodia. It was at this meeting of military leaders that 'a foundation of de facto Sino-Thai alliance was laid' (Chanda, 1986, pp. 348-9). Kriangsak is reported to have given Thai consent to allow Chinese use of Thai territory to support the Khmer guerrillas, a crucial element in China's 'bleed Vietnam white' strategy (Chambers, 2005, p. 614). In return for the use of this territory, Beijing agreed to terminate its support for the CPT (Turley & Race, 1980, p. 107). Thailand's security was greatly enhanced by the alliance. Upon reporting Vietnamese artillery shelling or attacks on the Thai border, the Thais could 'expect that within six hours, the Chinese troops on the Sino-Vietnamese border would repay the Vietnamese in kind' (Chambers, 2005, p. 616).

This informal security alliance had a core purpose that satisfied both Chinese and Thai interests: 'to balance against the Vietnamese threat to the region' (Chambers, 2005, p. 602). A US telegram from the Embassy in China to the US Department of State confirmed this relationship, stating that 'Beijing's strategy is heavily reliant on Thai cooperation...if the Vietnamese spill over into Thailand, the risk of a major PRC military strike against Vietnam will be commensurately greater' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 275). China viewed Thailand as a front-line state in the fight against Vietnamese expansion. In a July 1979 meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua and US

National Security Council Staff members Nicholas Platt and Richard Holbrooke, Hua 'stressed the threat to Thailand, where seven Vietnamese divisions are poised on the border. If Thailand goes, "the rest of ASEAN will fall like dominoes" (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 252).

The United States

In an August 1979 meeting between US Vice President Walter Mondale and Chinese Vice Premier Deng, the situation in Indochina was discussed in detail. Mondale informed Deng that 'in Indochina, we share the same objectives: to protect Thailand and other ASEAN states, and to show Vietnam that its increasing dependence upon Moscow will hurt badly over time and should be abandoned...the US stands ready to work closely with China and with ASEAN in making progress to this end' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 265). Mondale informed Deng that the US had:

Placed major emphasis on the closest consultation with ASEAN countries including improved security assistance to Thailand, more modern planes, more economic assistance and military assistance. I personally travelled to Bangkok to reaffirm the Manila Pact. I went to the Philippines to get the long-stalled negotiations on Subic Bay extended on a permanent basis...this relationship with ASEAN has been a crucial part in the process of increasing stability in the ASEAN and Pacific region' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 265).

Deng agreed with Mondale's support for the ASEAN states, claiming that the 'ASEAN countries particularly Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines have expressed their apprehension that the Vietnamese may attack them, and I told them in the event of an

attack against the ASEAN countries, we will stand on their side. And I told them that we mean what we say' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 265).

In the 1980s, China provided Thailand with heavy artillery guns, anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns as well as battle tanks, with the purpose of enhancing Thai military capabilities (Chambers, 2005, p. 616). In a July 1980 meeting between President Carter and Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 313), Carter informed his Chinese counterpart that the US 'had expedited shipment by air to Thailand of some weapons they had ordered'. Huang stated that 'it was important to support Thailand, and that the PRC appreciated what the US had done'. China was making 'every effort to assist the Thais, including shipments of "natural resources"'.

China was also 'taking pressure off Thailand by tying down 29 SRV [Socialist Republic of Vietnam] infantry divisions along the Sino-Vietnamese border'. As an added element of security, Hua had informed 'the Thais that the PRC would "side with them" if Vietnam made another large-scale attack into Thailand' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 313). China's ultimate conditions for a political settlement, as articulated by Deng Xiaoping, were the genuine independence of Kampuchea and the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from the country. Any political settlement departing from these two preconditions 'is in fact aiding the Vietnamese and aiding the Russians...if we waiver on these two preconditions whatsoever, then the political settlement will not rid us of a Vietnam trying to form an Indochina Federation' (U.S. Department of State, 2013, doc. 265).

Thailand's Diplomatic Role

Thailand also played an important diplomatic role for China. In particular, it was able to act as a key link between the PRC and ASEAN (Chambers, 2005, p. 617). In an

October 1980 visit to Beijing, Thai Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda secured Chinese 'willingness to consider ASEAN's proposal to create a coalition resistance government that would include non-communist forces as well as the Khmer Rouge' (Chambers, 2005, p. 618). This was in part a response to negative international attention regarding Pol Pot's brutal regime. A tripartite resistance coalition was formed in June 1982. It consisted of the Khmer Rouge, Prince Sihanouk; the former King of Cambodia who was ousted from power during a US backed coup in 1970, and Son Sann, a former Cambodian Prime Minister.

The resistance coalition, named the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), proved diplomatically successful, helping increase international support at the United Nations against the illegitimacy of the Vietnamese puppet regime in Cambodia (Simon, 1984, p. 525). Thailand also sought to alleviate tensions between the PRC and ASEAN at a UN international conference in July 1981. Thailand persuaded ASEAN countries to move closer to the Chinese position on the need for the Khmer Rouge (Chambers, 2005, p. 618). It also strove to patch up misunderstandings between the two, and to alleviate lingering concerns regarding China's true intentions (Chambers, 2005, pp. 618-619).

Thailand as a Vanguard State

As emphasized in the work of Crawford (2003, pp. 30-31) and Press (2005, pp. 25-28), following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, security cooperation for the purpose of self-preservation was a vital interest for both Thailand and China. Interest convergence between the two can be identified by the informal arrangement for cooperation that developed from 1979. In order to contain the Vietnamese threat, China was able to use Thai territory to aid the Khmer Rouge. In return, Thailand

received security guarantees that greatly enhanced Thai territorial integrity. Whilst it is unclear whether Vietnam would have invaded Thailand, there existed a strong regional belief that Thailand could be the next domino to fall. By obtaining great power security commitments, Thailand was able to resist any potential sovereignty violation from an aggressive Vietnam. Thailand actively sought and supported great power intervention in regional affairs, which was consistent with the interests of both the ASEAN state and the external actor. This satisfies all criteria of Thailand acting as a vanguard state.

ASEAN Institutional Cohesion (1978 – 1991)

ASEAN Disunity

Despite the release of joint ASEAN statements following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, the conflict did not automatically see an alignment of ASEAN state interests. Divisions within ASEAN 'arose from a natural divergence of strategic perspectives' (Leifer, 1989, p. 90), which were 'located along a continuum whose extremes were marked by the positions of Thailand and Indonesia' (Leifer, 1989, p. 92). Indonesia and the Philippines indicated that 'they did not consider that Vietnam posed any threat to ASEAN' (Funston, 1979, p. 280). Indonesia, and to a lesser extent Malaysia, foresaw 'the possibility of growing Chinese strength leading at best to increased great power rivalry in the region and at worst to the reassertion of Beijing's hegemony' (Simon, 1984, p. 527).

Indonesia, in particular, historically viewed China as 'an aggressive and expansionist power' (Sukma, 1999, p. 54). However, Thailand and Singapore believed China could help maintain regional stability. In the period following the Sino-Vietnamese border war, China launched a major propaganda war directed at

neighbouring ASEAN countries. Beijing committed to reduce aid to communist parties within Thailand and Malaysia to the lowest level in over twenty years (Simon, 1984, p. 522). Taking a strong stance in its fight against the Vietnamese, Singapore proposed military cooperation with external powers and called upon ASEAN to aid Khmer Rouge guerrillas in their fight at the borders (Buszynski, 1981, pp. 542-543).

Enhanced ASEAN 'Solidarity'

Thailand was dissatisfied with the level of support offered by the ASEAN states. It showed this dissatisfaction through local news reports, stating its concern 'that other countries had not shown they were prepared to fully support Thailand in the event of an attack on it by Vietnam' (Funston, 1979, p. 282). Faced with a division in state interest, Thailand sought to push its own agenda within ASEAN. Chinese support 'was of signal relevance to the insistence by the Thai government that its regional partners stand up and be counted in a collective demonstration of ASEAN solidarity' (Leifer, 1989, p. 96). As such, ASEAN was made 'hostage to solidarity' with Thailand (Leifer, 1989, p. 97). Thai efforts were aided by two events: a surge of refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam in April and May 1979, which threatened the internal stability of the ASEAN states, and a series of shallow Vietnamese raids and armed incursions against Khmer Rouge camps at the Thai border in 1979. Under pressure from Thailand, the Association 'closed ranks once more in support of the Association's front-line state...from that point, ASEAN became more explicit in its challenge to Vietnam' (Leifer, 1989, p. 108).

As a response to these events, Malaysia cancelled aid and technological cooperation agreements with Vietnam, tripled the size of its air force and doubled the size of its army (Turley & Race, 1980, p. 109). By May, the Malaysian Prime Minister had made a successful visit to China, indicating a shift away from Vietnam (Funston,

1979, p. 281). The Philippines announced a \$200 million increase in its military budget and Indonesia ordered that 60 army battalions be brought to full strength (Turley & Race, 1980, p. 109). Both Malaysia and Indonesia also promised to assist Thailand in case of a Vietnamese attack (Turley & Race, 1980, p. 108). What form this aid would have taken is unclear. In mid-March 1979, ASEAN as an entity secured the Non-Aligned Movement's sponsorship for a draft resolution before the UN Security Council. The Association lobbied the UN to prevent international recognition of the Vietnamese puppet regime in Cambodia, thus denying a Vietnamese *fait accompli*. UN General Assembly resolutions on Cambodia sponsored by ASEAN were effectively handled by Singapore, which 'came into its own' in the period after the invasion (Leifer, 2000, p. 84). Singapore took the position that 'if Democratic Kampuchea were to lose its seat in the United Nations, it would be tantamount to saying that it is permissible for a powerful military state to invade its weaker neighbour, to overthrow its government and to impose a puppet regime on it' (Leifer, 2000, p. 86).

Indonesia's Diplomatic Initiatives

Whilst Indonesia and Malaysia supported ASEAN's position against Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, they still believed that attempts should be made to reach a diplomatic compromise with Vietnam (Sukma, 1999, p. 95). This was articulated in the March 1980 Kuantan principle. Advocated by both states, it sought to reduce great power influence in the region and seek a regional solution to the conflict in Cambodia. At the heart of the proposal was the hope that 'Vietnam would agree to cut its Soviet ties...if Thailand delinked from China and the Khmer Rouge' (Simon, 1984, p. 528). However, the principle was never implemented, proving unpopular with Thailand, China and Vietnam (Buszynski, 1986, p. 224). With tensions remaining between the

Indonesian and Thai approaches to Vietnam, Indonesia was given the role of 'official ASEAN interlocutor' with Vietnam (Ross, 1991, p. 1178). Jakarta maintained this position throughout the crisis, making various attempts to engage Vietnam diplomatically. For example, in 1988, Indonesia invited representatives from Hanoi, Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge and Prince Sihanouk to meet for discussions at a cocktail party in Jakarta, later titled the Jakarta Informal Meeting (Ross, 1991, p. 1178). Crucially, Indonesia's diplomatic attempts never sought to obstruct ASEAN consensus over Cambodia (Ang, 2013).

Amelioration of the Sino-Soviet Conflict

Despite ASEAN's diplomatic role in the crisis, which certainly helped to frustrate Vietnamese and Soviet regional ambitions, ASEAN had very little impact on the eventual resolution of the conflict. This is a fact acknowledged in 2011 by Wong Kan Seng, former Singaporean Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security. According to Wong, 'the Cambodian issue was essentially a Sino-Soviet proxy conflict. This was clearly beyond the powers of Singapore or even ASEAN as a whole to resolve' (Wong, 2011). Indeed, the conflict only came to an end when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, seeking normalisation with China, realised that 'ameliorating the Sino-Soviet conflict and disengaging China from the Western security system was a far more important objective than having good relations with Vietnam and significant influence in Indochina' (Ross, 1991, p. 1174). With a gradual reduction in Soviet economic and military aid, Vietnam found itself abandoned, and unable to support its wartime economic and military policy in Cambodia. With little power to face Chinese aggression on its own, Vietnam withdrew all its troops from the territory, bringing an official end to the conflict on 23 October 1991.

Conclusion

This article was prompted by dissatisfaction with the inadequate treatment of the Third Indochina War in the existing ASEAN literature. Within the constructivist literature, there is significant emphasis on ASEAN norm adherence and the development of a regional identity. However, our analysis of the Third Indochina War illustrates that such analysis downplays the role of an external actor, China, in explaining the ASEAN states' resistance to sovereignty violation. A second approach advocated by Lee Jones focused solely on domestic factors, overlooking the critical role played by external factors including extra-regional actors, as well as ASEAN's international security concerns. Finally, a third perspective associated with Michael Leifer, Michael LR Smith and David Jones takes an overly restrictive view of ASEAN autonomy in its analysis. While their perspective is compelling at points, they underestimate ASEAN states' ability to secure their interests and to engage in cooperation to defend them. Despite deep divisions within ASEAN, the Association formed and maintained (admittedly, more robustly at some times than others) a united front in support of Thailand's Vietnam policy.

The primary purpose of this article is to construct an explanation, rooted in a theoretical perspective that can more convincingly explain the dynamics of ASEAN state resistance to sovereignty violation. As has been described above, a realist external actor-ASEAN state interest convergence model is effective in explaining ASEAN's resistance to sovereignty violation during the Third Indochina War. Interest convergence between Thailand and China regarding the Vietnamese threat meant that Thailand (and by extension ASEAN) was able to resist sovereignty violation from an expansionist Vietnam. Conversely, China was able to use Thailand, and by extension

ASEAN, to support its Vietnam policy in Southeast Asia. Had it not been for the informal alliance with China, and to a lesser extent the US, it is highly likely that Thailand would have resigned itself to Vietnamese domination in Indochina. ASEAN alone did not have the capabilities to reverse Vietnam's Cambodia policy, or to stand against Vietnam if it had sought to expand into Thailand. So, Singaporean diplomat Tommy Koh is half-right. ASEAN was an important component in the story. But we would be only seeing half the story if we did not focus on China's role, and the issue of external actor convergence emphasised in this article.

Notes

1 For the purposes of this article, the Third Indochina War has also been referred to as the Cambodia conflict, the Second Indochina War has also been referred to as the Vietnam War, and Cambodia has also been referred to as Kampuchea.

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