Acharya, Amitav. Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order, 3rd edition, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014.

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This work is an updated edition of Amitav Acharya's most well-known work, integrating the already rich content with a deeper focus on the issue of regional order in the South China Sea and the relationship between the regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with both China and United States. Acharya's work is placed within the constructivist theory of the "security community," which emerges when a group of states collectively renounce violence as a means of resolving their differences.[1] The framework adopted by the author originates in the work of Karl Deutsch, who was the first to theorize the concept of security community as a distinctive form of multilateral security cooperation. Acharya goes beyond Deutsch's security community, adopting a sociological approach to the study of the complexity of regionalism and "focusing on the role of norms, socialization, and identity as central explanatory tools in the making and unmaking of security communities" (p. 4). The forum of ASEAN provides the ideal environment for developing the study of security communities because of its weak socio-political cohesion and the new relevance of the Southeast Asian region in global politics.

ASEAN was founded in Bangkok in August 1967 by five countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand – with the purpose of shaping their own regional policy, avoiding the pressure of the bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, and standing as a united front against communist expansion in Southeast Asia. The founding states were dissimilar in terms of socio-cultural heritage and identity, political agenda, and colonial and post-colonial legacy; they also lacked significant experience with multilateral cooperation. Consequently, the evolution of ASEAN's norms and principles has been a delicate and precarious one, during which the member nations have developed a specific set of core agreements to guide the conduct of intraregional relations: (1) non-use of force – *i.e.*, the use of peaceful resolution of disputes, (2) the acknowledgment of regional autonomy, (3) avoidance of military pacts, and (4) the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. The last of the four, says Acharya, is the "single most important principle underpinning ASEAN regionalism . . . [and] is the key factor as to why no military conflict [has] broken out between any two member states since 1967" (p. 56). The evolution and adherence to these principles led to the creation of a specific body of norms, known as the ASEAN "Way." The Way is a mode of interaction based on "discreteness, informality, consensus building, and non-confrontational bargaining style, which is often contrasted with the adversarial posturing, majority vote, and other legalistic decision-making procedures in Western multilateral negotiations" (p. 63). This informal, inclusive, and non-binding framework has been the ideal tool for building trust and confidence within the association and reflects the regional attitude towards multilateral cooperation. The ASEAN Way has nonetheless been severely challenged by some regional developments, particularly those occurring during the years immediately following ASEAN's inception. Regional autonomy was tested, and somehow lost, during the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnamese forces in December 1978. ASEAN tried to be an effective player in the resolution of this conflict despite the association's limited political leverage., but ultimately, ASEAN had to share the credit for the resolution of the conflict with Soviet Union and People's Republic of China, two outside powers.

The ASEAN Way faced another great challenge when its members decided to expand

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[1] Members of a security community, bound by common interests, have agreed to prioritize the resoution of social problems without resorting to force. Members of security communities share reciprocal interests, with more mature security communities being characterized by some form of collective security measures and/or suprantational or transnational elements.

the membership in the late 1990s in order to achieve the vision of "One Southeast Asia." Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, despite their more volatile political systems and pressing domestic issues, joined the association. Acharya alleges that the expansion both enhanced and eroded ASEAN's progress towards a security community because its key norms faced new tests, such as the erosion of the non-interference principle after the admission of Burma and Cambodia, the great diversity of political outlooks of its members and the different attitudes among them towards military build-up, respect for human rights, and democratic values. In addition, the admission of the Vietnamese brought to the fore the Spratly Island dispute,[2] which remains the most serious challenge to ASEAN's regional conflict management role and could threaten the future development of its relationship with Beijing. Intra-regional conflicts, in Acharya's eyes, challenge not only the internal stability of ASEAN states but also regional stability as a whole.

Despite the growing pains associated with the admission of additional nations, ASEAN has managed to maintain its equilibrium and has gone to specific efforts to work out the kinks associated with expansion in order to maintain a functional security community. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), a formal, ongoing multilateral dialogue among 27 Asian Pacific regional members is the region's broadest attempt to develop a multilateral security forum that conforms to the association's norms of regional autonomy and the ASEAN Way. The ARF is the first and only regional security framework in the world in which all major players are represented. The element of inclusivity was a new aspect of the ASEAN institution, which set as its objective the development of friendship rather than the identification of enemies (p. 171). Acharya is quite pessimistic regarding the development of such a diverse security community, however, which will need to deal with some of the core national interests of its member nations (including, for example, territorial claims and sovereignty issues in the South China Sea). Acharya asserts that while navigating these issues, the likelihood of ASEAN adhering to the ASEAN Way (characterized by informality, incrementalism, and emphasis on non-binding agreements) is slim. Accordingly, skeptics of the ARF argue that in dealing with Chinese power, "ASEAN will have to decide whether to place their trust primarily in the ARF, or whether to place it in a US-lead balance of power" (p. 179). The ARF's structural problem is that its validity and influence seem to depend on the prior existence of a stable regional balance, but the organization is not really in a position to create it. This is why China is so confident in its ability to keep its regional *status quo* within the ARF's framework; it is also why the United States was able to increase its military presence in the region, resurfacing as an external security guarantee. The ARF's future is unclear, but it has nonetheless shown itself to be a diplomatic instrument – albeit a highly imperfect one – for coping with the new and uncertain security context.

After the economic crisis of 1997, ASEAN faced new and dangerous challenges. Transnational terrorism, the SARS pandemic, and the Indian Ocean tsunami were the three most delicate situations that the member nations had to deal with. ASEAN's effectiveness in dealing with transnational challenges has been a mixed one and has truly depended on the nature of the challenge and the responsibility and accountability of the particular member state involved in the first place. Acharya judges the development of the association and the response to such challenges in a mixed way, acknowledging that some deep and structural changes to the organization are necessary. The author's overview is clear when he says that "to a large extent, the problems facing ASEAN in the late 1990s could be explained in terms of the burden imposed by membership expansion and the emergence of new sources of intra-

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[2] The Spratly Island dispute is a territorial dispute between Brunei, China, Malaysia, The Phillippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam concerning the ownership of a group of islands and their associated martime "features" (reefs, banks, and cays) located in the South China Sea. Low level military occupation by all disputing parties (except Brunei) and diplomatic stalemate characterize the dispute at this time.

regional and transnational conflict . . . . ASEAN might have overestimated its capacity to assume the role of *driver* in the development of the ARF, ASEAN Plus Three, and East Asia Summit. These burdens now challenge the sanctity of ASEAN's norms and the credibility of the ASEAN Way, including the doctrines of non-use of force and non-intervention" (p. 262).

ASEAN has so far survived multiple challenges, but it must now question its very own normative soul. The ASEAN Way is seen as stale, less-than-functional in light of the globalized challenges that the association faces. In conclusion, Acharya says that over the course of the next few decades, we might come to see ASEAN either as the wise counselor of Asia or as a marginalized relic of the past, unable to adapt and shape its nature to the globalized political agenda. To avoid the latter fate, Acharya suggests that "ASEAN leaders . . . stay united, strengthen mechanisms for cooperation, steadfastly maintain a neutral image among the great powers, and be attentive to their people's voices. By doing so, they will have a good chance of retaining ASEAN's driver's seat in Asian regional cooperation and turning Southeast Asia into a genuine pluralistic security community" (p. 267).

Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia is a groundbreaking work and an important landmark for the study of regional and international security. The text under review is written in a clear and wise way, with a deep analysis of the regional dynamics of Southeast Asia and its future developments. It is addressed to students and scholars of the area's academic community, but it would also be a vivid read for those who are recently approaching the issue, such as journalists and media.

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