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**The EU, China and Southeast Asia:  
Divergent Views of Dealing with  
Human Security in Burma/Myanmar**

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# **The EU, China and Southeast Asia: Divergent Views of Dealing with Human Security in Burma/Myanmar**

Katja Weber<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

This chapter takes a closer look at the European Union (EU), China, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s respective approaches to dealing with non-traditional security (NTS) challenges by investigating their policies toward Burma/Myanmar—a source country of numerous such challenges. It argues that, although all, as members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), see the need for multilateral solutions to fight organized crime, provide disaster relief, combat terrorism, prevent drug trafficking, etc., they differ with respect to the steps to be taken to protect human security in Asia-Pacific. China, initially hesitant to join the ARF for fear that other members might try to contain it, has come to value the principal forum for NTS challenges in the Asia-Pacific region since, like many ASEAN countries, it is a big proponent of non-interventionism, non-use of force, consensus decision-making, that is, the confidence-building mechanisms commonly referred to as the 'ASEAN way'.<sup>2</sup> The EU, as a strong proponent of human rights and the rule of law, repeatedly, has criticized ARF members for allowing sovereignty-related norms to get in the way of the protection of human rights, but it has refrained from assuming the role of norm exporter. As will be seen in the case of Burma/Myanmar, the EU does make its opinions heard and, when necessary, will take unilateral steps not supported by the ASEAN members of the ARF but, cognizant of the history of the region, for the most part, settles for supporting economic development and aiding in capacity-building, understanding that it would be counter-productive to exert pressure on reluctant ARF members to modify the non-interference norm. The chapter then speculates about the 'ASEAN way's' longevity, arguing that, increasingly, there are internal and external dynamics that seem to indicate that the 'ASEAN way,' at least in its current form, may not be here to stay. The conclusion looks at what might be in store for Burma/Myanmar in the years to come.

## **The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)<sup>3</sup>**

Since a sizable literature concerning ASEAN and, by extension, the ARF already exists (Frost 1990; Leifer 1996; Narine 2002; Acharya 2003; Weber 2009; Weber 2011, Weber 2013), I will keep my discussion of the ARF's history brief and summarize the organization's main objectives, goals, principles, and performance to date. At the end of the Cold War, ASEAN, like many other international organizations, was not immune to changes in its external environment. New transnational challenges

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<sup>2</sup> For an insightful discussion of the difficulties involved in dating the origins of the 'ASEAN way' see Haacke (2003) chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>3</sup> This section draws heavily on Weber (2013) 'The ASEAN Regional Forum and the EU's Role in Promoting Security in Asia-Pacific': 345-349.

(terrorism, maritime security, human and drug trafficking, environmental disasters, refugee flows, etc.), greater uncertainty regarding the behavior of the Great Powers in the region, and the fear of US isolationism necessitated a reassessment of existing security provisions. ASEAN concluded that it should expand its focus by creating a new multilateral arrangement—the ARF—to deal with external as well as internal threats.

It was clear from the outset that ASEAN members sought to complement their bilateral alliances with the US by using ASEAN's own model of cooperative security as a framework for promoting peace. Having to operate in a significantly changed international environment where unilateral action clearly would be insufficient and bilateralism risky, '[ASEAN's] underlying goal,' as Leifer (1996: 19) put it, 'was to create the conditions for a stable ... distribution of power among the three major Asia-Pacific states – China, Japan and the United States – that would benefit regional order.' After careful deliberations in July 1993, the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and Post Ministerial Conference agreed to create the ARF.

The inaugural meeting of the ARF was held in Bangkok on 25 July 1994. Its founders conceptualized the organization as the principal forum for security cooperation in the region, which, via the dissemination of specific rules and norms, they hoped would promote trust, peace and prosperity and allow them to confront trans-national challenges. Comprised of 27 countries,<sup>4</sup> the ARF is based on ASEAN-style diplomacy, that is, it relies on non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force, pacific settlement of disputes, consensus decision-making, and 'good neighbourliness' as main principles of action. The ARF has a strong preference for non-binding and non-legalistic approaches and displays minimal institutionalization, thus setting it apart from European security structures.

As Katsumata (2006: 194) explains, the 'ARF is not designed to "resolve" ... disputes'. It therefore could not prevent conflicts between its members such as the diplomatic row between South Korea and Japan over Dokdo/Takeshima, China's military intimidation in the Taiwan Strait, territorial disputes regarding the Spratlys in the South China Sea, or disagreements concerning water utilization in the Mekong River Basin, to name but a few.

Rather than settling disputes, the ARF seeks to promote lasting peace by utilizing confidence-building mechanisms (CBMs) to create trust among its members. In other words, the ARF is about 'identity-building' and its members hope that 'dialogue should lead to socialization which, in turn, will lead to the dissipation of conflicts of interests' (Garofano 1999: 78). Comprehensive engagement and political dialogue, from the ARF's perspective, are the correct way to foster peace, not the dispatch of troops (Leifer 1996: 46). Thus, during its first ten years, the ARF largely held workshops with the main purpose of disseminating the 'ASEAN way' (non-use of force, non-interference in domestic affairs, etc.), thereby earning the label of a 'norm brewery' (Katsumata 2006: 195).

In their efforts to promote peace, the ASEAN members of the ARF seek to retain control over the organization. They do this by making sure that ASEAN states provide the venue for the ARF's annual meetings. Moreover, they insist that inter-sessional study groups, which are composed of two states, always include an ASEAN member. Also, they mandate that the ASEAN consensus principle always prevails (Simon 2007: 22). The bottom line for the ARF, as for ASEAN, is to protect the sovereignty of its members and to uphold the fundamental principles outlined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. It

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<sup>4</sup> Members of the ARF are the ten ASEAN member states, ten ASEAN Dialogue Partners (Australia, Canada, China, the EU, India, Japan, New Zealand, ROK, Russia and the US), and one ASEAN observer (Papua New Guinea), as well as the DPRK (North Korea), Mongolia, Pakistan, East Timor, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Australian Government, 2010).

is important to understand, however, that the ARF is split between activist (Australia, Canada, US, Japan, EU) and reluctant (China and most of ASEAN) members. ASEAN countries reject a more formal ARF because they want to avoid taking any steps that would undermine the ‘ASEAN way’. China, similarly, rejects greater formality because it opposes interference in its domestic affairs (particularly regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea). Hence a ‘pace comfortable to all participants’ needs to be found, which, as will be seen in the case of Myanmar, often undermines the effectiveness of the ARF.

Since any type of institutionalization, by definition, entails some curtailment of freedom of action and most ARF members remain hesitant to restrict their autonomy, the organization has purposely been kept ‘under-institutionalised’. For the most part, the ARF has concentrated on exchanging views among its members and, from 1994 to 2009, has held 27 Inter-Sessional Support Group meetings on CBMs, as well as more than 150 inter-sessional, regional and expert meetings on topics such as peacekeeping; search, rescue and disaster relief; defense; counter-terrorism; and maritime security – all to promote trust (ARF 2012). Additionally, for the period 1994–2004, Track I activities were complemented by 68 Track II activities dealing with such issues as regional security, trans-national crime, non-proliferation regimes and the Korean peninsula (ARF 2009).

With respect to performance, in their 1995 Concept Paper the ARF members envisioned a ‘three-stage, evolutionary approach (...) moving from confidence building to preventive diplomacy and, in the long term, towards a conflict resolution capability’ (ARF 1995: 1). Thus far, the ARF has largely made progress in confidence building. Since it took the organization until 2005 to declare that it was time to move into the preventive diplomacy (PD) stage, efforts to develop PD mechanisms are underdeveloped, and conflict management is non-existent.

When it comes to confidence-building, the ARF seeks to disseminate the norms and rules associated with the ‘ASEAN way’. Given that the region has experienced tremendous bloodshed in the 20th century and that there are still cultural, ethnic, religious and historical differences to overcome, the goal is to promote trust via CBMs and bring about peace and prosperity. On the one hand, the ARF seeks to build confidence by endorsing the principles of ‘good neighbourliness’. On the other hand, the organization seeks to implement specific CBMs such as Defense White Papers, arms registers, high level visits, and disclosure of arms exports for which it has designed a specific timetable (see ARF 2006: 6–9).

Even though the ARF has held numerous meetings to promote stability and has recently become more outspoken when members engage in undesirable behavior, it still lacks teeth. A case in point is its interactions with Burma/Myanmar. As will be discussed below, even though a number of ARF members expressed their deep concern about the situation in Burma/Myanmar, called for the release of all political prisoners, urged the country to make ‘meaningful and expeditious progress towards democratic reform and national reconciliation’ (ARF 2008a), the ARF goes no further than that and stays clear of policing missions, providing post-conflict reconstruction or peace-building.

As expressly stated in the Co-Chair’s Summary Report of the ARF Workshop on ‘Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy in Asia and Europe’, 12–14 March 2008 in Berlin, the ARF is ‘currently in the transition phase from confidence building to preventive diplomacy’ (ARF 2008d). The document explains that ‘[a]s mutual trust amongst ASEAN countries ... and ARF participants had increased, the ARF was in a good position to advance into preventive diplomacy’ (ibid.: 1). Steps to enhance CBMs and PD might include the improvement of communication between ARF participants, information exchange mechanisms, and the creation of a crisis room or some other form of early warning mechanism (ibid.).

Since its inception, the ARF, for instance, has held numerous Disaster Relief Desk-top Exercises which entail simulations of a series of fictitious natural disasters (cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.) to

develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and to discuss the improvement of military-to-military and civilian–military coordination among ARF members (ARF 2007a). In the area of protection, only modest progress has been made, due to the norm of non-interference and the ARF members’ hesitancy to curtail their autonomy. The ARF recognizes the need to protect society from threats caused by organized crime, terrorism, the spread of infectious diseases, and so on, but, so far, has not moved much beyond the discussion stage. It has, for example, conducted Roundtables on Maritime Security, mainly concluding that it is time to move from discussion to the implementation of concrete measures (ARF 2007b). The ARF also has moved towards greater defense cooperation, but ‘the need for capacity building through joint training and information sharing’ still exists (ARF 2008c: 1–2).

In recent years, the ARF has made some progress regarding counter-terrorism. It has called upon its members to become parties to international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism (ARF 2012a), stressed the need for cooperation among regional organizations like ASEAN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the ARF in the area of counter-terrorism, and addressed measures like bilateral agreements, intelligence exchanges, information sharing, law enforcement cooperation, and mutual legal assistance to fight trans-national crime more effectively (*ibid.*; also see Yuzawa 2006: 800; Simon 2007: ix). However, the bottom line for ARF members is that proposals need further reflection, since they would lead to the creation of permanent mechanisms that could undermine the ‘ASEAN way’.

Since the ‘prime model for the ARF is ASEAN’s own distinctive, political approach to regional security problems,’ as Leifer (1996: 3) aptly put it, ‘conspicuously absent from the ARF is any robust provision for addressing the use of force in conflict and conflict resolution’. Military intervention, peacemaking, peace-enforcement or any other military instruments are clearly outside the purview of the ARF, which consciously elects to rely exclusively on political and economic means. This lack of ‘teeth’, according to Leifer (1996: 53), renders the ARF an ‘imperfect diplomatic instrument for achieving regional security goals’. Nonetheless, in 2008 there were signs that the ARF might soon be ready to set itself more ambitious goals and consider undertaking preventive actions in addition to preventive diplomacy. During its second Peacekeeping Experts’ Meeting in Singapore, 4–6 March 2008, the organization discussed the possibility of future participation in peacekeeping operations and called for ‘enhanced quality in training, the right equipment and the necessary political will’ (ARF 2008b: 4). The Japanese government, moreover, offered cooperation with peacekeeping training centers in the Asian region.<sup>5</sup> Those countries not ready to contribute forces, it was noted, could aid in other ways by providing health and medical services, military advisers and combat service support forces (*ibid.*).

### **Divergent views of sovereignty and the importance of norms**

Although the EU, China and ASEAN countries all see a need for tackling human security issues multilaterally, the EU is more willing to curtail its autonomy than the latter two who fiercely protect their freedom of action. How can this divergence in views be explained?

In general, two main reasons have been given as to why others embrace certain ‘standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations’, that is, norms (Krasner 1983: 2). On the one hand, as rational choice proponents make clear, there are material reasons. Scholars in this camp suggest that ‘domestic actors follow norms because they want to maximize their individual utility and decrease the

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<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of Japan’s understanding of human security and different perceptions of the Responsibility to Protect within the country, see Honna 2012.

cost of non-compliance, that is, these scholars employ a logic of ‘conditionality’ (Kelly 2004). On the other hand, there are constructivists who use a ‘logic of appropriateness’ to account for the diffusion of norms—they argue that ‘actors follow norms for intrinsic reasons such as personal dispositions informed by social belief’ (Kelly 2004 quoted in Dominguez 2010: 5; also see Susanto 2011). And, of course, there may be a combination of material and normative reasons.

Norms then are tools with which to shape policy. They emerge as a result of a persuasion effort carried by ‘norm entrepreneurs’ (De Carolis 2010: 73). The EU, labeled a ‘normative power’ on account of its strong support for human rights and the rule of law (Treaty on European Union, Article 6 [see European Union 1992]; European Security Strategy [see European Council 2003]; Manners 2002; Diez and Manners 2007), may be tempted to export human rights-related norms. Yet, as will become clear when taking a closer look at its policies vis-à-vis Burma/Myanmar, the EU exercises self-restraint and, although it issued sanctions (negative incentives), largely continues to support economic development as well as capacity-building projects (positive incentives) to address NTS challenges in the region.<sup>6</sup>

What needs to be kept in mind is that there are two sides to the norms story. It is not only the dissemination of norms that matters, but their reception and reinterpretation (Capie 2007). As Rueland and Bechle (2011: 3) explain, ‘[t]he belief that external norm entrepreneurs may induce norm recipients to fully change deeply entrenched beliefs and world views is an overly optimistic assumption ... . It is driven by the Western-centrism ... of mainstream modernization theory and attaches agency primarily to the external norm entrepreneurs.’ Recent empirical evidence by scholars like Capie (2007) and Acharya (2009) suggests that such a view ignores agency on the part of the norm recipients. ‘Much more than being passive norm-takers, they may completely reject new ideas, adopt them rhetorically or amalgamate them with existing ideas’. Typically, Acharya (2009: 21) goes on to say, there is an ‘existing set of ideas, beliefs, systems, and norms which determine[s] and condition[s] an individual or social group’s receptivity to new norms’—a ‘cognitive prior’.

For ASEAN countries, ‘non-intervention resonated strongly with the prior norms of anti-colonialism and anti-power politics held by Asian leaders’ (Acharya 2009: 61). Hence, ‘while localizing non-intervention, [these countries] not only enhanced their prior anti-colonial norms and identity as independent actors, they also gave an extended and expanded meaning to the non-intervention norm in the regional context’ (Acharya 2009: 68). As Katanyuu (2006: 826-7) emphasizes, ASEAN countries ‘continue to be plagued by interstate disputes, internal subversion, and moves to secede. Neighbors suspect each other of bolstering domestic ethnic or separatist groups to foment secession.’<sup>7</sup> Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand today still face elements of domestic insurgency or extremism. In principle, ... interference would provide an avenue for a country’s neighbors to aid such insurgents. This would undermine a member’s territorial integrity and national security.’ Rather than to blindly adopt outside beliefs, norms and values, local actors ‘through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection’ purposely modify foreign ideas such that they become ‘congruen[t] with local beliefs and practices’, a process which Acharya (2009: 15) labels ‘constitutive localization’. Case in point the reframing of the transnational small arms norm to make it congruent with ASEAN’s constitutive norms—the non-intervention in the domestic affairs of others and the protection of sovereignty (see Capie 2007: 5). It therefore does not suffice to look merely at how foreign ideas impact the norm-takers, but how the

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<sup>6</sup> On negative versus positive incentives vis-à-vis Honduras, see Dominguez 2010: 6.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout the 1960s, for instance, guerillas associated with the Malayan Communist Party staged raids against government forces in northern Malaysia and then would hide at sanctuaries along the Thai border. Thailand, eventually, agreed to joint border patrols with Malaysia and the latter reciprocated by withholding support for Thai Muslim secessionists in southern Thailand (Khong 1997: 328).

latters' 'cognitive priors ... influenc[e] the reshaping and reception of these external ideas' (Acharya 2009: 136).

Since, as Rueland and Bechle (2011: 4-5) remind us, 'localization tends to occur when the external norm entrepreneurs find vocal allies within the recipient society or organization and when [the local government] increase[s] its international respectability [and] strengthen[s] its domestic legitimacy', the 'transformative power' of the EU is limited (Dominguez 2010: 3). Aside from the fact that 'Europe is not the principal determiner of what is "normal" in global affairs' (Wood 2011: 246), when non-European countries reject its normative agenda, the EU, 'conscious of business, public and strategic interests' (ibid.: 243), tends to exercise self-restraint, rather than to insist on being a norm exporter. This does not prevent the EU from emphasizing the importance of protecting human rights and the rule of law. It has done so for years and, as can be seen during a recent summit meeting with China (see European Council 2012: Article 6), continues this practice. And yet, as long as countries like Russia or China behave peacefully toward it, Europe seems to be content without insisting on these countries adopting 'Europe's liberal democratic values' (Schieder 2009 quoted in Wood 2011: 249), thereby seriously undermining its human rights dialogue.

China, a big proponent of the 'ASEAN way' (Xinbo 2009), much like many ASEAN members of the ARF, appears to be largely unimpressed by 'normative power Europe'. In fact, it seldom misses an opportunity to remind Europe that sovereignty-related norms must be upheld in Europe's dealings with China, even when they get in the way of the protection of human rights. Similarly, China goes out of its way to stress that non-intervention is non-negotiable. Unlike EU members who view sovereignty as a qualitative measure, that is, a country either is 'constitutionally independent' or it is not (James 1986: 30-48), like the ASEAN members of the ARF, China appears to view sovereignty in quantitative terms. In fact, it seems to equate it with 'formal power', 'political independence' or 'freedom of action'—measures a state can have more or less of (Weber 2012).<sup>8</sup> Thus, not surprisingly, like many ASEAN countries, China rejects Western universalism and takes every opportunity it gets to stress the need to respect sovereignty and diversity.

### **Burma/Myanmar: Main political developments since independence**

Burma/Myanmar is a multi-ethnic state with one of the longest-running civil wars in history where, to this day, different ethnic groups fight for autonomy. Colonized by Britain in three Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-1885), the country gained independence from the British Empire following negotiations in 1947 by Aung San, founder of the modern Burmese army. Upon his assassination by political rivals in July of the same year, on 4 January 1948, Sao Shwe Thaik became the first president of the independent Union of Burma. Multi-party elections were held on three separate occasions (1951-1952, 1956 and 1960) and, on 2 March 1962 'the military took power in a political coup ... under the Ne Win regime (Petersson 2006: 568). Military rule lasted until general elections in 2010 brought a civilian government to power.

Characterized as a 'modern-day hermit kingdom' (...) from the 1960s to the late 1980s Burma was one of the most closed societies in the world' (Bunyanunda 2002: 118-120). For decades it has also been known for one of the most horrendous human rights records in the world, where people were 'forced

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<sup>8</sup> For the argument that a shift in power toward the East may allow Asia to challenge Western preferences for universal adoption of democracy, free market economics, and human rights, and the possibility of the "Westphalian" system being supplanted by an "Eastphalian" one see, Fidler, Kim and Ganguly (2009).



into labor by the military' (Petersson 2006: 568), where peasants had to walk ahead of army troops 'when booby traps or ambushes were expected' (Bunyanunda 2002: 121), and where the regime used brute force to suppress protests against military rule.

By the end of the 1980s the country confronted economic ruin and, Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, gave rise to a new political movement to improve living conditions and promote democracy and civil rights (Petersson 2006: 568). 'From March through September of 1988, Burmese pro-democracy protesters took to the streets in several cities around the country' (Bunyanunda 2002: 118), and more than 3000 protesters were killed in what became known as the 8-8-88 Uprising. The Burmese military not only crushed the protests, but 'usher[ed] in a new era of repression under the State Law and Order Restoration Council or SLORC—a junta' (ibid.) which changed the country's name to the Union of Myanmar.

In free elections SLORC promised for May 1990, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) badly defeated the military junta at the polls, resulting in her being placed under house arrest and thousands of her supporters being jailed. The pro-democracy leader would spend 15 of the following 21 years under arrest. SLORC continued to exist until 1997, and then was replaced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) which lasted until March 2011.

Since the crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in 1988, the UN General Assembly has passed numerous resolutions deploring the situation in the country and calling for change. Beginning in 1995, special envoys and human rights rapporteurs have made regular visits to Burma/Myanmar and, upon continuous urging by the US since 2004, the UN Security Council, on 15 September 2006, formally placed Burma/Myanmar on its agenda (International Crisis Group 2008: 6). Due to serious objections from China and Russia, however, a US/UK draft resolution calling on the Burmese government to 'cease military attacks against civilians in ethnic minority regions (...), permit international humanitarian organizations to operate without restrictions (...), to begin without delay a substantive political dialogue' (see European Council 2012a: 2), on 12 January 2007, became subject to a Sino-Russian veto.

Given that the country is one of the most impoverished in the world, and that most resources have been used to support the military, it does not come as a surprise that an unannounced hike in fuel prices on 15 August 2007 led to protest marches. Whereas, initially, mainly NLD members, social activists and student leaders took to the streets, when monks from a small town southwest of Mandalay joined in the protests and were brutally 'beaten by pro-government vigilantes', in the weeks that followed, daily marches took place in Yangon and from there spread to a couple dozen other towns (International Crisis Group 2008: 2). On the evening of 25 September the government imposed a curfew and, during the next night, 'troops raided several monasteries, beat up monks and dragged several hundred off to special detention centres' (ibid.: 3). On account of this brutal crackdown, the army's standing suffered irreparable harm and, as will be seen below, ultimately, a combination of domestic and international pressure played a critical role in bringing about a relaxation of tensions between the government and its political opposition. What will also become clear is that there were stark differences between the response of the Western countries, China and the ASEAN members of the ARF and, at times, even differences within regions. Fast forwarding to October 2010, although an announcement was made that Aung San Suu Kyi may be released prior to what were to be the first Burmese general elections in nearly 20 years, the government decided that she would not be allowed to run, but promised that she would be released on 13 November 2010. Days after the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won the election, Aung San Suu Kyi finally regained her freedom. In January 2012, she became a contestant in special parliamentary elections and, on 1 April 2012, won a seat in Parliament.

What the above synopsis of Burma/Myanmar makes readily apparent is that we are dealing with one of the poorest countries in the world which has experienced civil war for several decades and which is

plagued by a host of NTS challenges. Due to continued fighting in the border regions, Burma/Myanmar's neighbors are subject to significant refugee flows and, short of any major improvement in the country's human rights record as well as economic/social conditions, this situation is unlikely to change. Moreover, neighboring countries have to content with drug-trafficking (Burma/Myanmar is the world's second-largest producer of illicit opium [see US Department of State 2007: 5]), the spread of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, and fear that ethnic conflict may spill across borders and that secessionist movements may infect their own populations.

### **The EU's relations with Southeast Asia and Burma/Myanmar**

Relations between Europe and Southeast Asia, as Petersson (2006: 563) makes clear, have been 'long and complex'. In the past century alone, Southeast Asians experienced colonialism, then saw decolonization and, toward the latter part of the century, significant economic aid from the European Community as well as enhanced commercial ties with Europe (ibid.).

Starting in July 1994, the EU codified its Asia policy in a series of Commission documents (see Weber 2013) which it periodically modified until it came up with a master plan for 2007-2012. In a nutshell, these documents recommend for the EU to play a pro-active role in regional cooperation via the ARF and inter-regional dialogues via the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (Commission 2001: 3). A Plan of Action, moreover, proposes to 'deepen security cooperation', especially when it comes to 'crisis management, conflict prevention, and capacity building' (Commission 2007: 1-2). These documents suggest that the EU understands that it is more likely to make meaningful contributions to Asian security by continuing to support economic development, sharing its experiences with regional cooperative efforts, providing tools, independent monitors, and aiding in capacity-building. Or, put differently, the EU realizes that insisting on improved human rights and democracy promotion in Southeast Asia—being a norm exporter—would lead to opposition and thus make it more difficult to achieve the EU's goal of enhancing security in the region. Given differences in values, norms and culture between Europe and Asia, and the fact that 'the issue of fundamental human rights, the promotion of democracy and good governance constitute core objectives in [the EU's] external relations ... with third countries' (Petersson 2006: 564), however, it does not always manage to steer clear of incorporating human rights clauses in cooperation agreements with ASEAN countries.

According to De Flers (2010: 3), human rights played 'a marginal role at best in official EC-ASEAN relations until the late 1980s'. Also, by the early 1990s, ASEAN-EU trade was growing more rapidly than ASEAN's trade with its largest partner—Japan (Petersson 2006: 573). Then, political relations between Europe and Southeast Asia began to become strained.

As a result of the phenomenal changes in Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s—the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disintegration of the Soviet empire, and the move toward democratic governments and free market economies by many Central and East European countries—the EU not only began to include human rights and democracy clauses in its relations with its new neighbors to the East and South (Weber, Smith and Baun 2007), but, also insisted on including such clauses in its cooperation agreements with ASEAN (De Flers 2010: 2). Trade and economic aid became linked to human rights and democratization issues, that is, the EU began to pursue a policy of 'conditionality' (ibid.: 3).

Not surprisingly, the Southeast Asian countries regarded these demands by the EC/EU as interference in their domestic affairs, and thus, as unacceptable. This prompted a group of ASEAN states to begin what became known as the 'Asian values' debate, in which they outlined their own position towards human rights. More specifically these countries argue that 'human rights are enmeshed in

cultures, social structures and traditions’, and thus outright reject ‘Western universalism with regard to human rights standards’ (De Flers 2010: 4; Clifford 2011). Interestingly, in addition to respect for the individual, many Asians include ‘the obligation by that individual to the society and the state’ as a fundamental component of human rights (Petersson 2006: 577). To lend greater emphasis to their position, many Asian countries, additionally, make use of every opportunity to remind ‘Western democracies [that they] themselves showed little concern for human rights before they became political[ly] stable (ibid.: 577-9), thus accusing them of double-standards.

In 1997 two ‘cataclysmic’ events took place that worsened the relationship between the EU and Asian countries further, namely, Burma/Myanmar’s entry into ASEAN and the Asian financial crisis. As a direct response to Burma’s membership in ASEAN, ‘the EU temporarily suspended its formal dialogue with the Association’ (Bunyanunda 2002: 131). The EU was so upset with this new development that it ‘expanded its existing visa ban on Burmese government officials in October 1998, ... suspended the Generalized Scheme of Preferences ... for Burma, [and] initiated an arms embargo’ (ibid.).

Without a doubt, the Burmese military junta’s human rights abuses and, as will be seen below, the defense of such abuses by the other ASEAN countries under invocation of the ‘ASEAN way’ have ‘soured the relations between the two regions’ (Petersson 2006: 564) and contributed to the failure of an EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement that was being negotiated at the time (see EU Center Singapore 2012). Rather than trying to engage Burmese military leaders, as several ASEAN members of the ARF have done—maintaining that Burma’s human rights record and political instability were internal matters not subject to regional interference (De Flers 2010: 5)—the EU decided to ignore ASEAN members’ wishes and impose sanctions.<sup>9</sup> This was not without risk since the latter could have had positive as well as negative consequences. Clearly, the EU hoped that sanctions would bring the Burmese government to its knees, but they could have also caused Burmese citizens to ‘rally around the flag’ (see Bunyanunda 2002: 134). And, there was the possibility that other countries, like China, might fill the void. It took the EU and ASEAN to come up with ‘an implicit bargain’, as De Flers (2010: 6) explains, which involved a promise by Burma/Myanmar to ‘lift restrictions on the National League for Democracy (NLD) and accept a visit by the EU Troika’ (Jones 2008: 277), to resolve the impasse in EU-ASEAN relations and, in 2000, resume ministerial meetings. What one finds, however, is that each time there were particularly serious human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar, the EU renewed its sanctions and thought of additional restrictive measures to punish the junta.

To sum up, even though the EU is cognizant of the history of the region, fundamental ‘differences in values, norms and culture between Europe and Asia’ remain and are apparent with respect to the issue of how to deal with Burma/Myanmar (De Flers 2010: 1). Although the EU makes its opinions heard and has imposed a number of sanctions on members of the Burmese junta and their associates, ultimately, it prefers an approach that consists of a mix of carrots and sticks (International Crisis Group 2008: 16). By also concentrating on economic development, capacity building and cooperation with respect to non-traditional security threats—that is, providing positive incentives—the EU seeks to prevent its normative priorities and sticks in the form of sanctions from undermining its security goals. It understands that by strengthening Southeast Asia it will help to balance against an increasingly powerful and assertive China, thereby leaving both partners better off.

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<sup>9</sup> Among the measures taken the EU instituted a visa ban for high-ranking officials (mostly members of the military junta and their associates), froze their assets, suspended non-humanitarian aid, and banned the export of equipment and technology for the timber and gems industries (see Buente and Portela 2012: 4-5).

## China's relations with Southeast Asia and Burma/Myanmar

Contrary to what we have observed in the case of Europe, the relationship between China and most Southeast Asian countries, historically, has seen little conflict and, throughout much of the Cold War, these countries, for the most part, '[did] not feel any direct concrete threat to their existence by China' (Tang 2010: 64). Moreover, close to 28 million Chinese live in South East Asia today and, as Tang (65) explains, this 'diaspora ... control[s] a large portion of these countries' wealth' (ibid.). And China is one of the top trading partners of these countries.

Yet, due to increased military spending by China in the mid-1990s, provocative military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in 1996, attempts to project its power beyond its borders and assert ownership of contested territory in the South China Sea and the Mekong River Basin, this largely positive perception of China became more nuanced. On the one hand, the rise of China is viewed as a great opportunity, a 'new engine of growth for the entire region' (Banlaoi 2003: 99). On the other hand, it brings great uncertainty and feelings of insecurity.

As already mentioned, when China joined the ARF in 1994, it was concerned that the US, Japan and the Southeast Asian countries, viewing China at least as a potential threat due to its growing power, might use the ARF to contain China (Xinbo 2009: 56). Another concern was that the ARF might seek to address territorial disputes in the South China Sea, an issue Beijing was hoping to deal with on a bilateral basis with various Southeast Asian countries. After all, if the ARF were to place the South China Sea issue on its agenda, China feared, 'disputants such as Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam might form a united front against China' which other Southeast Asian countries 'and possibly the United States and Japan might join' (Xinbo 2009: 56).

Since neither happened,<sup>10</sup> China has become more comfortable with regional security cooperation and, concerned about security and stability on its periphery (terrorism, separatism, extremism), has sought to strengthen its ties with its neighbors. Thus, whereas regional multilateralism in the 1980s was viewed as potentially hazardous, China, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, began to perceive it as a useful tool to beef up its security and to increase its influence in the region (ibid.: 58). Although China prefers ASEAN Plus Three (APT)—an arrangement composed of the 10 ASEAN countries plus China, Japan and South Korea—to the ARF,<sup>11</sup> since the former keeps India, Australia, New Zealand and the US out of the negotiations, it does acknowledge the ARF's role in building trust and fostering habits of cooperation, a non-trivial accomplishment.

When it comes to policy vis-à-vis Burma/Myanmar, 'there is a clash of interest between the West and China ... [Whereas] the West regards intervention towards Myanmar as a humanitarian issue, ... China considers ... [it] an issue about their image, position and commitments to neighboring countries' (Li and Zheng 2009: 630-1). Rejecting any outside interference in its domestic affairs—such as criticism of its own human rights record—China, not surprisingly, has seen eye-to-eye with Burma/Myanmar when it

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<sup>10</sup> Although, recently, there have been rising tensions over competing territorial claims in the South China Sea and these tensions were high on the priority list of the ARF's Foreign Ministers meeting in Cambodia on 11-12 July 2012, there were sharp divisions among the ASEAN countries so that, for the first time in the ARF's 45-year history, there was no agreement on a final communiqué. At the same time, a planned Code of Conduct (CoC) for the South China Sea between ASEAN and China ran into problems, when the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei—all claimants in the dispute—failed to reach agreement among themselves. For a more detailed discussion of these tensions see, Storey (2012).

<sup>11</sup> As will become clear below, the ASEAN countries prefer the ARF because it puts them in the driver's seat and makes it possible for the US to balance against China.

comes to sovereignty-related issues and, for many years, has been a strong supporter of the SLORC.

In addition to ideological commonalities, China has significant security and commercial interests in Burma/Myanmar. Viewing the latter as ‘part of its strategic landscape’ (McCarthy 2008: 928), ‘China is reported to have supplied more than \$1.5 billion worth of military aid in the form of radar equipment, patrol boats, heavy artillery, tanks, anti-aircraft missiles, fighter aircraft, guns and munitions’ (Bunyanunda 2002: 128-9). In creating a symbiotic relationship with Burma/Myanmar, China hopes to not only gain from trade—to date it has heavily invested in ‘telecommunications, mining, automotive, aviation, and oil industries’ and thereby become Burma/Myanmar’s largest trade partner (Bunyanunda 2002: 129)—but also to obtain access to the Indian Ocean and to ‘develop its poverty-stricken inland western provinces’ (International Crisis Group 2008: 8-9).

Largely concerned with tackling drug smuggling, AIDS, cross-border gambling, illegal immigration, i.e., NTS challenges, as well as ‘keeping a free transport corridor in the Indochina Peninsula and a buffer at China’s frontier’, according to Li and Zheng (2009: 633-6), China has adopted a policy of ‘soft interventions’ vis-à-vis Burma/Myanmar. These, we learn, can take two forms: ‘cross-border intervention and diplomatic intervention’ (ibid.: 633). Whereas the former includes activities such as ‘joint anti-drug operations’ or ‘China’s legal actions against ... casino[s] in Myanmar’, the latter entails ‘Chinese efforts to encourage Myanmar to break international isolation, to pressure the Myanmar military government during the period of mass demonstration and to facilitate the UN special envoy’s visit in Myanmar’ (ibid.). This policy, therefore, clearly sets China apart from the West. When the US and the EU imposed sanctions against the military junta in Burma/Myanmar, and the UN Security Council repeatedly called for national reconciliation, China, like Russia, protected Burma/Myanmar by casting a veto against UNSC Draft Resolution S/2007/14-12/01/2007), ‘argu[ing] that the situation did not constitute a threat to regional or international peace’ (Wouters and Burnay 2011: 12; Haacke 2010: 159).

In sum, what China shares with the West is its increasing concern about non-traditional security challenges that threaten human security. It also acknowledges that unilateral action will not be able to get the job done and that regional cooperation is needed to make progress in this area. Moreover, China seems to recognize that the EU, on account of its long history of regional cooperation and experience in addressing NTS challenges, may be able to provide useful lessons for the ARF. Where China and the EU differ is in their treatment of Burma/Myanmar. Although China benefits from the status quo, it recognizes that further instability in Burma/Myanmar could lead to the exodus of ‘more than one million Chinese nationals who...have settled in Myanmar, thus closing an important safety valve for socio-political pressure in China itself’ (International Crisis Group 2008: 9). As a strong proponent of non-interference in domestic affairs, and a country that has been used to playing the ‘sovereignty card’ for as many years as it has made use of the ‘history card’ (Weber and Huang 2010), China exercises much greater leniency toward Burma/Myanmar than the West. Its soft interventionism—consisting largely of ‘nudg[ing] the military leadership towards better governance and policy reform’ (International Crisis Group 2008: 9) and opposition to sanctions—not surprisingly, has been criticized time and again by the US and the EU (as well as Australia and Japan), but has fared much better with many ASEAN members of the ARF.

### **ASEAN countries’ policies vis-à-vis Burma/Myanmar**

ASEAN, and since its inception also the ARF, time and again, have been accused of being willing to look the other way in the face of severe human rights violations. To name but a few examples, ASEAN did not take any action against ‘Indonesia’s 1975 invasion and 1999 human rights violations in East Timor, ... severe human rights violations against Muslims in Southern Thailand during the Thaksin era,

[and] repeated crackdowns on pro-democracy activists and ethnic minorities in Burma' (Rahim 2008: 71).

Yet, one needs to be careful not to lump all ASEAN countries in the same category. At least in part due to their political heterogeneity—Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam and Laos are authoritarian states; Malaysia and Singapore are semi-authoritarian; Brunei is an absolute monarchy; Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines are unconsolidated democracies (Rahim 2008)—some members are more willing to curtail their political autonomy than others. Typically, the more democratic members of ASEAN and the ARF are more willing to promote democracy and human rights in other member states than the 'illiberal' members (Haacke 2010: 168-9). Moreover, geopolitical considerations seem to matter in the treatment of fellow Southeast Asian countries. In the case of Burma/Myanmar, although the country does not appear to harbor 'any clear aggressive intentions towards its neighbors', as Petersson (2006: 570) points out, 'the nation is nevertheless a source country for a number of non-traditional security threats'. 'In the 1980s', Petersson (*ibid.*) goes on to explain, 'Myanmar had become the largest producer of illicit opium in the world'.

While Thailand, Laos and China fear that drugs will spill across their borders from Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, additionally, has 'social concerns', worrying that the struggle between the Burmese military and minority groups will spill across borders and worsen its refugee problems (Katanyuu 2006: 828-9). To complicate matters further, many ASEAN countries' 'political legitimacy ... [repeatedly has come and continues to be] under threat from within their own borders' (Narine 2002: 193). Although, as will be seen, for a number of years the preferred solution had been to uphold the principle of non-interference in its entirety, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines, gradually, began to see a need to relax the principle and support national reconciliation in Burma/Myanmar.

To draw Burma/Myanmar out of 'the shadows of isolationism and into the light of globalism, which [he hoped] would then have a liberalizing effect on the appalling human rights situation in the country' (Bunyanunda 2002: 120), Thai Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun in 1991 introduced the concept of 'constructive engagement'. Upholding the 'ASEAN way', it stressed consensus decision-making and non-interference. In line with what has been observed in China's treatment of Burma/Myanmar, ASEAN countries, thus, decided to take a 'soft line' against the military junta, justifying their actions by suggesting that further isolation or pressure would lead to 'even more brutal repression' (*ibid.*: 120-123). At the same time, they hoped to appease Europe and the US, who were calling for the imposition of sanctions on the Burmese military (*ibid.*: 119-120). As Bunyanunda (2002: 123) emphasizes, by far the most important goal, however, was 'to counteract the influence of the People's Republic of China (PRC)'.

In shielding Burma/Myanmar from outside interference, 'constructive engagement' largely failed to accomplish its goals. Human rights violations continued to go unpunished by ASEAN countries, the military junta remained in isolation, and China's influence, if anything, continued to grow. In fact, several countries accused ASEAN of keeping the military in power in exchange for economic benefits. The US, for instance, much like the EU, imposed unilateral sanctions and, instead of engaging the junta, tried to isolate it further. To this point, in 1997, it banned all new investment in Burma/Myanmar and proposed an international arms embargo (*ibid.*: 131).

Seeing no relief with respect to refugee flows, drug smuggling and border conflicts with Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, in 1998, proposed to modify 'constructive engagement' and replace it with 'flexible engagement'. Rather than for non-interference to be absolute, from now on there should be 'open discussion of internal developments that affected other member states' (Katanyuu 2006: 830). As Haacke (1999: 581) explains, 'flexible engagement' was to broaden 'the range of issues and contexts

traditionally defined as internal affairs in which other ASEAN governments [would] now legitimately [be able to] become involved'. Since only the Philippines were willing to go along with Thailand's proposal, however, it never gained sufficient support. As Singapore's former Foreign Minister stresses, it is the great heterogeneity of the region that makes a move away from the 'ASEAN way' problematic: 'Most of us have diverse populations, with significant differences in race, religion and language, all of which are highly emotive issues. The surest and quickest way to ruin is for ASEAN countries to begin commenting on how each of us deals with these sensitive issues' (Haacke 1999: 594).

Given that 'flexible engagement' could not be salvaged, Thailand then proposed a strategy of 'enhanced interaction' (Petersson 2006: 571). 'Essentially a national variant of "flexible engagement"' (Haacke 1999: 598), 'enhanced interaction' could include 'peer pressure or friendly advice ... if a domestic situation could reasonably be expected to involve deleterious ramifications for the wider region' (Haacke 2010: 159; and De Flers 2010: 7). Thailand, as a direct neighbor of Burma/Myanmar, for instance, called for reconciliation and democratization and, time and again, implored the military junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi and strike up a dialogue with minority groups. The Philippines, sharing no borders with Burma/Myanmar and preoccupied with domestic problems themselves at the time, were not particularly vocal initially but, feeling sympathy for Aung San Suu Kyi, President Arroyo encouraged the Burmese military leaders to enter into dialogue with the political opposition (Katanyuu 2006: 836). Indonesia, mainly concerned with defending its position as ASEAN's leader, also began to put pressure on the junta. And, to give but one further example, Singapore, in an effort to raise its international standing and protect its lucrative trade with Burma/Myanmar, similarly began to speak up in favor of political reconciliation (ibid.: 838).

At the end of 2005, a group of Southeast Asian parliamentarians, known as the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Burma/Myanmar, called for the country to be expelled from ASEAN, unless the regime was to improve its human rights record (McCarthy 2008: 924). The group began to openly comment on the horrendous human rights violations, urging the junta to release political prisoners and to make progress toward democratic reform (Rueland and Bechle 2011: 7-8). To investigate the situation in the country further, the group also agreed to send a delegation to Burma/Myanmar (Katanyuu 2006: 839), and to write 'an open letter to the heads of government of A[SEAN], China, and India ... to pressure the Burmese authorities to deliver genuine reforms' (Rahim 2008: 67-8).

All these events transpired while Burma/Myanmar was scheduled to assume the ASEAN chairmanship for 2006/2007 (De Flers 2010: 7-8), a development which, the other ASEAN members recognized, had to be prevented at all cost. Not only was there international pressure<sup>12</sup> in that the US and the EU would have boycotted meetings of the ARF, but, as Haacke (2010: 168-9) makes clear, a combination of economic (Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia are important trade partners of Burma/Myanmar), geopolitical and reputational concerns convinced ASEAN members to toughen their stance. Finally, a growing desire to bring about an ASEAN Community and, further down the road, an ASEAN Charter, also helps to explain ASEAN's shift in policy (ibid.: 164). Consequently, '[t]he normative shield from which Burma/Myanmar had benefitted in earlier years'—namely strict adherence to the principle of non-interference—'was no longer available' (De Flers 2010: 7).

Although ASEAN, ultimately, succeeded in getting Burma/Myanmar to give up the 2006/2007 Chair's position, from then on, its relationship with the country was seriously strained until just a couple

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<sup>12</sup> The US Senate had already passed a resolution 'calling on A[SEAN] to suspend or expel the SPDC from the organization until it improved its human rights record', and, as mentioned earlier, the EU had 'extended its...travel ban on SPDC officials', while both Western powers tightened their economic sanctions (Rahim 2008: 68).

of years ago. Increasingly frustrated with a barely noticeable pace of reform, in July 2006, ASEAN ministers called for ‘tangible progress that would lead to peaceful transition to democracy in the near future’ (ibid.: 8). In September of the following year, as a result of the military junta’s brutal crackdown on unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators, ASEAN expressed ‘revulsion’ (Rahim 2008). Yet, since one of ASEAN’s main goals is to keep Burma/Myanmar within its sphere of influence, rather than to see the military junta form closer ties with China, it needs to choose its policies carefully (McCarthy 2008: 935).

On November 20, 2007, ASEAN unveiled its Charter which entered into force on 15 December 2008. Article 1 Section 7 states that the purpose of ASEAN is ‘[t]o strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the Member States’ (ASEAN 2008). The Charter was then followed by the launch of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in Cha-am Hua Hin, Thailand, on 23 October 2009 (ASEAN 2009).

These developments, according to Acharya (see Clifford 2011: 6), suggest that ASEAN, recently, has moved away from its strict interpretation of non-interference. Aside from adopting a Charter, ‘it has developed mechanisms for dealing with transnational challenges and regional conflict. It has come out on the side of political reform in Burma, when traditionally it was very hands off, and has begun a limited regional mechanism for human rights’ (ibid.). Or, put differently, whereas non-interference had been necessary during the early years of ASEAN and, by extension, the ARF, it ‘had become unworkable as an ongoing policy for dealing with human rights and cross-border threats’ (Katanyuu 2006: 825-6).

To sum up, three sources of pressure came together to urge the Burmese government to improve its appalling human rights situation: ‘one originating from individual members, the second coming from ASEAN as a group, and finally the will of the international community’ (ibid.). Clearly, Western states took the hardest stance vis-à-vis Burma/Myanmar, whereas regional actors pursued more of a ‘soft line’ in comparison (Bunyanunda 2002: 133). However, it deserves to be emphasized once more that ASEAN countries cannot simply be lumped into a single category—they vary in their willingness to curtail their freedom of action as well as their willingness to depart from a strict interpretation of the ‘ASEAN way’. Whereas Thailand and the Philippines, increasingly, grew eager to promote greater interventionism towards the Burmese military junta, more illiberal ASEAN members like Vietnam and Laos decided to stick to their guns.

As the Summary Report of the Ninth ASEAN Regional Forum Security Policy Conference in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2012 underscores, the persistent pressure placed on the Burmese government by ARF members to improve its human rights record appears to have paid off. Article 8 emphasizes that, ‘[t]he successful by-election in Myanmar has sent a strong message that Myanmar is committed to democratic transition. The Conference [also praised] the Government of Myanmar for allowing international observers in the by-election ... and encouraged the lifting of all remaining sanctions and bans to support the ongoing progress in Myanmar’ (ARF 2012b: 2).

To leave no doubt as to who will continue to have the say when it comes to regional security in the future, less than two months later, the foreign ministers of the ARF countries ‘reiterated the importance of the ARF as the main forum to promote peace, security and stability in [Asia-Pacific]...[and] underlined the role of ASEAN to continue to serve as the primary driving force within the ARF’ (ARF 2012c: 1). At the same time, ‘[t]he Ministers welcomed Brunei Darussalam as the next Chair and Myanmar as the next Vice-Chair of the 20th ARF, beginning on 1 January 2013’ (ibid.: 8).

### **Challenges to the ‘ASEAN way’**



Although adherence to the ‘ASEAN way’ would give China and those ASEAN members of the ARF who continue to be fiercely protective of their political autonomy common ground, as has been seen in the case of Burma/Myanmar, there have been external as well as internal dynamics that make one question the longevity of the ‘ASEAN way’ in its present form. International pressure, clearly, played a significant role in incentivizing the ASEAN members of the ARF to gradually move away from the normative shield that they had put in place and that they firmly adhered to for a number of years. During the early years of the ARF their defense of the non-interference principle and the consensus rule was so strong that more progressive ARF members like the EU and the US had to resort to unilateral action vis-à-vis Burma/Myanmar to place pressure on the military junta. To the EU’s credit, it never sought to impose its normative views on the ASEAN countries. Recognizing that doing so would be counter-productive and would, potentially, make it lose any influence in the region, as Commission documents (2001: 3) corroborate, despite imposing sanctions on Burma/Myanmar and issuing travel bans to junta members, the EU, for the most part, exercised patience and sought to strengthen its ‘political and economic presence across the region’.

More recently, as some of the more democratic ASEAN members of the ARF have been willing to move away from a very strict interpretation of the non-intervention norm toward a less stringent one (the move from ‘constructive engagement’ to a discussion of ‘flexible engagement’ and then ‘enhanced interaction’), and have been willing to make modifications to the consensus rule, there is increasing hope that the ARF may soon be much more than the ‘talk shop’ it has been accused of being for a large number of years. This, obviously, will make it much easier for the EU and other progressive ARF members like the US, Japan, Australia, etc., to cooperate with their partners in Southeast Asia in an effort to enhance human security. This was duly noted by the EU Commission in a *Plan of Action to Implement the Nuremberg Declaration* (Commission 2007: 1-2) which suggests using bilateral and multilateral fora to strengthen cooperation in ‘crisis management, conflict prevention, and capacity building’. As Bunyanunda (2002: 133) argues, ‘the most efficacious measures’ to promote human security in Asia-Pacific are likely to incorporate both carrots and sticks.

## **Conclusion**

There appears to be consensus between the EU and some of the more progressive ASEAN members of the ARF that they need to continue monitoring the situation in Burma/Myanmar carefully. What they have to avoid, if at all possible, they know, is for the country to form closer ties with China. Such a move could seriously offset the regional balance of power and thereby undermine everyone’s security. Fortunately, China’s rise in military power and growing economic presence in Burma/Myanmar appears to have alerted the latter’s leaders as well.

So what might be in store for Burma/Myanmar in the years to come? Due to the combination of internal and external factors described above, the country recently has ‘witnessed a liberalization of the press, the release of political prisoners and the initiation of a political dialogue between the regime on the one hand and the opposition and ethnic groups on the other’ (Buente and Portela 2012: 1). Moreover, an independent National Human Rights Commission has been formed, new legislation has granted the right to strike, and the president has ‘signed peace agreements with most of the ethnic groups that have been fighting the central government for decades’ (ibid.: 2). However, decades of corruption, mismanagement and horrendous human rights abuses have left their toll, confronting the country with a huge uphill battle. Constitutional reforms are badly needed, along with civilian control of the military, as well as numerous ‘social, political and economic institutions’ (International Crisis Group 2008: 25).

Given that Burma/Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in the world where the government still battles with various ethnic groups, progress can be expected to be slow. According to the International Crisis Group (2008: 26), '[t]he most promising path forward...is through incremental changes, carefully managed by a reformist, power-sharing coalition of civilian and military leaders, including ethnic representatives, and supported by an engaged international community'. To acknowledge the recent progress made and encourage further reform, several western donor countries like the US, the EU and Australia have begun to 'unfreeze aid', 'reestablish diplomatic ties,' and the EU decided to 'suspend all sanctions' (with the exception of the arms embargo and the Generalized System of Preferences) (Buente and Portela 2012: 4). The fact that it suspended sanctions until 30 April 2013 (see European Council 2012b), rather than to lift them, however, is telling. It seems to indicate that, in the eyes of the EU, the recent developments in Burma/Myanmar, although promising, are not irreversible and that a tough road remains ahead.

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