Introduction: ASEAN and the Vanguard State

> Small countries have little power to alter the region, let alone the world. A small country must seek a maximum number of friends, while maintaining the freedom to be itself as a sovereign and independent nation. Both parts of the equation – a maximum number of friends and freedom to be ourselves – are equally important and interrelated.
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> Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore[1]

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional institution founded in 1967 by the states of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Growing to include Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in July 1995, Laos and Myanmar in July 1997, and Cambodia in April 1999, the institution has repeatedly defied expectations. Born out of the remnants of the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) (1961–1967), a precursor regional institution frustrated by member state inability to overcome national and bloc interests,[2] there was initially little hope that ASEAN would succeed where the ASA had failed. Yet ASEAN has transformed itself into arguably the most successful regional institution outside of Europe. This is particularly noteworthy in light of Southeast Asia's history of colonization and intervention, and the cultural, social, economic and political diversity that characterizes ASEAN's constitution.

ASEAN's Cold War origins

What are the reasons for ASEAN's conception in 1967? And how has this dictated ASEAN's policy and direction in the decades since its establishment? To understand the origins of ASEAN, an understanding

of the history of the Southeast Asian region is crucial. The states that comprise the region understood as Southeast Asia are incredibly politically, socially, and culturally diverse, home to a variety of different ethnic and religious communities. This diversity created barriers between the different states in the region, with communication and cooperation historically difficult to initiate and sustain.[3] So much so, that it was not until the Pacific War that the term 'Southeast Asia' entered common usage, when Western allies established a Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) to fight Japanese imperialism in 1943.[4] This conflict coincided with the struggle of a number of regional states for independence from colonial rule. European powers first colonized the region in the 16th century, with only Thailand spared to act as a buffer state between British and French colonies.[5] As a result of colonization, divisions between the countries were exacerbated, and each state's internal sociocultural dynamics inexorably altered. Nationalism was expressed in the form of armed struggles in Indonesia against the Dutch, and in Vietnam against the French. Between 1946 and the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, the majority of the region's states had gained their independence.

ASEAN is a product of this history and the colonial origins and legacies of its member states. As noted by Narine, 'the experience of colonialism deeply affected how the states of Southeast Asia perceived the regional environment'.[6] External states, particularly great powers, were viewed as interventionist and exploitative, and their motives regarded with suspicion. The advent of superpower rivalry between the United States (US), the Soviet Union and China solidified these views. By 1967, the international system was gripped by Cold War. Once again, the Southeast Asian region was divided, this time along ideological and political lines. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Vietnam, where a proxy conflict was waged between communist and anti-communist forces. Early attempts at establishing a regional organization in Southeast Asia proved unsuccessful. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), formed in 1954, acted as a vehicle for external interests and lacked regional inclusivity. More inclusive organizations, such as the ASA, fell victim to regional state disputes. From 1962 to 1966, disagreements and conflicts between the region's states had hamstrung any efforts at cooperation. These disputes largely centred upon the proposed amalgamation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah into the Federation of Malaysia. Both the Philippines and Indonesia refused to recognize the new Federation. The Philippines disputed the territorial claim of Sabah. Indonesia denounced the influence of Britain, which it viewed as 'an imperial power imposing its will on Southeast Asia'.[7]

As a result, Indonesia embarked on a violent four-year campaign of *Konfrontasi*, or confrontation, with the newly federated state of Malaysia, growing to include Singapore following its forced separation from the federation in 1965. The campaign was only ended in 1966, when a power struggle between Indonesia's General Sukarno and General Suharto culminated in the latter successfully overthrowing the former's regime. With the new Indonesian General keen to enhance regional stability and reassure neighbours of the country's good intentions, the time seemed ripe for another attempt at regional cooperation. For the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, a major factor in their support for a new regional organization was suspicion concerning Indonesia's potential regional ambitions. Through a new association, these states hoped to constrain Indonesia while offering protection for some of the smaller and more vulnerable regional states.

It is these events that paved the way for the establishment of ASEAN on 8 August 1967. Whilst the new Association was ostensibly 'a by-product of institutionalized regional reconciliation,' there is little doubt that 'security was uppermost in their minds … [if] not conspicuously addressed'.[8] These security concerns were informed by the history of intervention in the region, weak domestic political structures vulnerable to insurgencies, separatism, and manipulation from external actors, and fear that US regional retrenchment might tip the balance of power in favour of the communist-controlled Soviet Union and North Vietnam. ASEAN's founding fathers defined the Association's aims in the 1967 Bangkok Declaration. These were to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, to promote regional peace and stability through an abiding respect for the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter, to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of mutual interest, and to maintain close cooperation with similar existing regional organizations.[9] The Declaration's preamble refers to the Southeast Asian state's determination 'to ensure their stability from external interference in any form or manifestation'.[10]

Through ASEAN, the Southeast Asian states hoped to reduce intervention and military influence by external actors, foster regional state cooperation, and strengthen resilience against communist insurgencies.[11] The Association's unique organizational structure, referred to as the 'ASEAN Way', has been credited with helping to bring together the diverse states of Southeast Asia by providing a conducive and non-threatening environment in which to discuss regional challenges. This consists of a preference for informal, consensus-based decision-making within a loosely structured and non-

legalistic institution. For Leifer, it is only through the establishment of ASEAN that a 'conventional, if limited, coherence' developed in Southeast Asia.[12] Analysis of ASEAN's Cold War regional role lends weight to this assessment. Between 1967 and 1991, the ASEAN states maintained a successful campaign to counter Vietnamese expansionism. These efforts took precedence over the pursuit of regional quarrels and bilateral state differences.

ASEAN's post-Cold War relevance

If ASEAN was established to manage Indonesia's regional ambitions and to strengthen the region against communist threat, why has it persisted beyond the Cold War environment in which it was established? Commitment to a post-Cold War regional order and deepening state cooperation has motivated the Southeast Asian states to expand ASEAN membership, and to promote its institutional model beyond the confines of the region. This has undoubtedly been driven by regional uncertainty over the future intentions of China. In view of China's geographic proximity and history of intervention in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN states hoped a consolidated Southeast Asian regionalism would 'strengthen the collective shield against China'.[13] Inclusion of the former Soviet-proxy Vietnam into ASEAN in 1995, followed by Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia, represented an additional step towards this regional consolidation. For many observers of the region, ASEAN has since evolved into a credible regional and international actor. ASEAN's supporters credit the Association with a major role in ending the Cold War in Southeast Asia; successfully integrating Indonesia into the Southeast Asian region; managing interstate regional conflicts; robust growth, driven in part by the liberalization and structural reforms of its smaller, developing states; and successfully exporting its model of regionalism beyond the region's borders to enhance dialogue and cooperation with external states, as seen through initiatives such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). As summarized by Severino, 'ASEAN has achieved a certain degree of political solidarity, become a force for stability in the region, and managed to engage external powers constructively in Southeast Asian affairs'.[14]

ASEAN's critics dispute these claims and question the Association's coherence and relevance outside of the context of the Cold War. In this view, any successes have been overshadowed by the continued existence of territorial disputes between member-states; halting efforts at deeper economic integration; an ineffective and incoherent response

to the Asian financial crisis of 1997; an inability or unwillingness to respond to a number of humanitarian crises that have originated from within the region; and a failure to prevent external actors from intervening in the region and dividing the Association. The ASEAN Way's emphasis on consensus 'has meant that the politics of the lowest common denominator has tended to prevail and difficult problems have been avoided rather than confronted'.[15] For Weatherbee, on ASEAN's 'singularly important regional politics and security issues, rather than solidarity, there is disunion, and rather than common action, national self-interest determines policy choices'.[16] This has been exacerbated by ASEAN expansion in the immediate post-Cold War period, and the inclusion of disparate states that each seek to pursue their own state interests.

ASEAN's endurance since the end of the Cold War has precipitated an extensive and contentious debate. The degree to which the Association has achieved the aims codified in the Bangkok Declaration, and remained relevant in the contemporary international system, is contested. These debates hinge upon broader themes of state autonomy, regional order, and the role and purpose of regional organizations. As is argued here, these themes can be addressed alongside those of ASEAN's origins and future, through deeper analysis of the Association and its responses to intervention.

Questioning ASEAN resistance to sovereignty violation

This book addresses this history of external interference in Southeast Asia, through analysis of the ability of regional states to resist sovereignty violation from external powers. It answers one central question: when has ASEAN state resistance to sovereignty violation succeeded, and when has it failed? In addressing this question, the book analyses past instances of (non)resistance to sovereignty violation, considers the degree to which the Association has realized its founding aim of stability from external intervention, and provides a predictive tool that can be used for future interactions between ASEAN member states and external states. Southeast Asia's experience of intervention is still relevant today. The region remains of geopolitical importance for great powers, and future interventions cannot be ruled out. An understanding of the ways in which these regional states utilize state and institutional balancing and bargaining strategies to help defend state sovereignty and territorial integrity is therefore critical.

ASEAN state preoccupation with resisting intervention and upholding state sovereignty cannot be overemphasized. ASEAN's 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia codifies a number of principles designed to structure relations within the institution, and with actors external to the region. These principles continue to dominate ASEAN's practice. The TAC contains articles that refer to ASEAN's territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, and the principle that 'every state [has the right] to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion'.[17] It is important to note that this final principle is not unique to ASEAN. The UN Charter endorses this concept of sovereignty by confirming 'the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members'.[18] This article of the TAC is based on this conception of sovereignty, which stresses, 'territoriality and the exclusion of external actors from domestic authority structures'.[19] For many, the principle of non-intervention is the key element of sovereign statehood.[20] Despite the centrality of the principle of sovereignty, it has often been contravened, with external actor intervention the most common form of sovereignty violation. Because powerful states often intervene in the internal affairs of less powerful states, the latter have always been the strongest supporters of the rule of non-intervention.[21] The difficulty for small states lies in their ability to uphold this principle. This is something that this book addresses directly, through analysis of the different mechanisms for resistance available to ASEAN member states.

The book addresses a number of important questions pertaining to ASEAN, its characteristics, and its member state behaviour since inception. It considers the degree to which a group of small, vulnerable regional states are able to exercise autonomy, and continue to survive in an environment dominated by great powers. This includes an investigation into the potential role of ASEAN as an organization, both regionally and internationally, with a specific focus on ASEAN's ability to uphold regional order, and engage in regional conflict and dispute resolution. The analysis brings to the fore the impact of state membership within the institution during times of conflict. Rather than view ASEAN as a monolithic entity, the book engages in a deeper assessment of the interaction and behavioural patterns of ASEAN member states during periods of regional and international crisis. This process unveils the complexities of regional state relationships, both internally and with external powers, in addition to inter-organizational power dynamics and the resulting impact that these have in dictating ASEAN policy.

An introduction to existing ASEAN scholarship

ASEAN's ability to resist sovereignty violation and defend regional autonomy from external intervention is contested within the existing ASEAN scholarship. Since the turn of the 21st century, the most prominent of these bodies of literature is that which is most closely aligned to the constructivist school of thought.[22] Constructivist authors emphasize ASEAN state autonomy, the transformative power of ASEAN's norms, the socializing impact that these norms have on member state identities and behaviours, and ASEAN's ability to uphold regional order, even when directly challenged. Constructivist scholarly works employ a breadth of variables, ranging from norms to culture, identity and ideas, to understand and explain ASEAN's ability to uphold sovereignty and resist intervention. The strengths of this argument lie in the desire to look beyond the impact of material forces to explain ASEAN's deepening cooperation and resilience since the end of the Cold War.

Taking an alternative approach to that described above are works most closely aligned with realist theory.[23] A realist approach to Southeast Asian regionalism is predicated on state centricity, the critical role of the US in maintaining a regional balance of power, and state concern with self-interest and zero-sum bargaining. Unlike the argument presented by the constructivists, these scholars take a less positive view of ASEAN autonomy. Instead, ASEAN's ability to resist sovereignty violation is wholly contingent upon the actions of great powers. In their explicit challenge to constructivist theorizing, they have opened and widened the debate on Southeast Asian regionalism. The arguments these authors present are compelling. Rooted in material explanations and using structural variables, they provide a view of the Southeast Asian region that goes beyond the domestic level, to consider the influential role of great powers.

In a more recent addition to the literature, the critical theoretical approach emphasizes state contestation, the scope of political conflict, and the struggles between and within Southeast Asia's social forces.[24] This critical approach to Southeast Asian regional order provides an alternative theoretical account that stands apart from the constructivist–realist debate. Its strengths lie in its non-statist approach, which allows greater emphasis for the role of domestic groups, their interests and their interactions. In doing so, it provides an explanation for ASEAN's mixed record of non-interference and intervention in a way that existing accounts of the region lack. This book engages with these different scholarly explanations for ASEAN's ability to defend regional

autonomy and resist intervention. By analysing the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments, it highlights the gaps evident in the literature upon which vanguard state theory seeks to build. In doing so, it presents a theory that both complements and advances the existing account of ASEAN resistance to sovereignty violation.

Explaining ASEAN resistance to sovereignty violation

The argument presented here occupies a middle ground within existing ASEAN scholarship. ASEAN's history is understood according to a realist theoretical logic, in terms of the relationship between an ASEAN 'vanguard state' and selected external powers. A 'vanguard state' is defined as an ASEAN state that comes to the fore of the Association when it has vital interests at stake that it wishes to pursue. While a state's interests may vary, vital interests relate to state survival and the preservation of state sovereignty. An ASEAN state only begins to assume the role of vanguard when state security is threatened. This study contends that a convergence in interests between an ASEAN vanguard state and an external actor will cause the success of ASEAN vanguard state resistance to sovereignty violation (see Figure 1). When an ASEAN vanguard state has interests that converge with those of an external power, it has an active and substantial role in resisting sovereignty violation. In addition to seeking external power guarantees, a vanguard state will also seek to secure its own interests within the Association. It will do so by attempting to set ASEAN's agenda, by garnering great power security commitments, and seeking to portray a united ASEAN front in support of vanguard state policy. Conversely, an absence of interest convergence between the ASEAN vanguard state and a designated external actor will cause the failure of ASEAN vanguard state (and by extension ASEAN) resistance to sovereignty violation. While the ASEAN vanguard state clearly has an important role to play in preventing external actor intervention, an equally important factor explaining ASEAN resistance to sovereignty violation resides in the critical role played by selected external powers. Indeed, this study shows how ASEAN is unable to resist challenges to its sovereignty when its interests do not converge with those of an external actor.

This argument contains a number of strengths that together offer a contribution to the field. First, by focusing on both the roles of, and interrelationship between, regional states and external actors,

it offers a more expansive argument for resistance to sovereignty violation than currently exists in the ASEAN literature. Additionally, through the creation of a 'vanguard state' concept, it provides a new theory that allows the reader to reconsider individual and group state behaviour within a regional organization, particularly as it pertains to foreign policy strategy, and to re-evaluate the impact of regional institutional membership for state security and survival. To support the theory presented here, an array of primary source information has been collected covering a time span from 1975 to present day. This information provides a comprehensive account of shifting state interests, both within ASEAN and of states external to the region, and the impact of varying interest convergence on ASEAN-state security and territorial integrity.

Outline of the book

The book comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 explores in more depth the contending arguments for sovereignty violation in Southeast Asia. It highlights the ways in which constructivist, realist and critical theorists have approached the topic of ASEAN regionalism and member state autonomy, followed by an introduction to vanguard state theory and the ways in which the argument presented can build upon existing literature. Chapters 2 to 5 provide in-depth case study analysis of ASEAN's mixed resistance to sovereignty violation, both during the Cold War and in the post-Cold War period. This begins with an analysis of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975, providing evidence to show how the Cold War regional environment created a convergence of interests between Indonesia, the ASEAN vanguard state, the US and Australia regarding the newly decolonized territory of East Timor. With external and regional power backing, Indonesia was able to invade East Timor without any repercussions from the international community, despite considerable attempts by the UN to intervene in Indonesia's internal affairs to allow the East Timorese an act of self-determination.

Continuing the examination of the Cold War period, Chapter 3 reviews the events of the Third Indochina War between 1978 and 1991. Analysis of recently declassified US documents helps shed light on the informal alliance that developed between Thailand, China, the ASEAN states, the ousted Khmer Rouge, and to a lesser extent the US, in an effort to contain Vietnamese and Soviet influence in Southeast Asia following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978. As

a consequence of high interest convergence between Thailand and a designated external power, China, ASEAN was able to resist violations to the sovereignty of Thailand from a Soviet-backed Vietnam. This brings us to the beginning of the post-Cold War period, with Chapter 4 analysing the East Timor humanitarian crisis of 1999. It shows how interest divergence between Indonesia, the US and Australia, following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, led to external powers applying pressure on Indonesia to elicit regime change in East Timor. In a weakened state, Indonesia was coerced into accepting an international peacekeeping force in East Timor, despite asserting that such a force would constitute an unacceptable breach of its state sovereignty. Critically, ASEAN institutional cohesion alone was not sufficient to prevent Indonesian sovereignty violation at this time.

The final case study chapter analyses the South China Sea dispute from 1992 to present day. It shows how partial interest convergence between the Philippines, Vietnam and the US has been insufficient to prevent these dual vanguard states from having their maritime sovereignty violated by an assertive China. Through the analysis of three separate time periods, 1992–2012, 2012–2016, and 2016 to present, the chapter traces the varying levels of interest convergence and intra-ASEAN cohesion, both of which have failed to reach the robust levels required to satisfy vanguard state theory. The book concludes by analysing the research findings to provide a definitive response to the central research question advanced here. In doing so, it assesses the applicability of vanguard state theory to sovereignty violation in Southeast Asia, and concludes by considering the potential effects of humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) on the future of ASEAN sovereignty.

Notes

1 Speech by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Minister Mentor, at the S Rajaratnam Lecture, 09 April 2009, 5.30pm at Shangri-La Hotel, *Prime Minister's Office Singapore*, https://www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom/speech-mr-lee-kuan-yew-minister-mentor-s-rajaratnam-lecture-09-april-2009-530-pm-shangri.

2 Vincent K Pollard, "ASA and ASEAN, 1961–1967: Southeast Asian Regionalism", *Asian Survey* 10, no. 3 (1970), 254.

3 Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia* (Lynne Rienner Publishers: London, 2002), 9.

4 Michael Leifer, "Southeast Asia", in *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Michael Howard and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 227–8.

5 Leifer, "Southeast Asia", 227–8.

[6] Narine, *Explaining ASEAN*, 10.
[7] Narine, *Explaining ASEAN*, 12.
[8] Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989), vii.
[9] The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Bangkok Declaration, Bangkok 8 August 1967, http://asean.org/the-asean-declaration-bangkok-declaration-bangkok-8-august-1967/.
[10] ASEAN Bangkok Declaration, Bangkok 8 August 1967.
[11] Narine, *Explaining ASEAN*, 13.
[12] Kin Wah Chin and Leo Suryadinata, ed. *Michael Leifer: Selected Works on Southeast Asia*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 1.
[13] Leszek Buszynski, "Southeast Asia in the Post-Cold War Era: Regionalism and Security", *Asian Survey* 32, no. 9 (1992), 833.
[14] Rodolfo Severino, "ASEAN Beyond Forty: Towards Political and Economic Integration", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29, no. 3 (2007), 422.
[15] Mark Beeson, Can ASEAN Cope with China?" *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 1 (2016), 10.
[16] Donald Weatherbee, "Southeast Asia and ASEAN: Running in Place", *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2012), 20
[17] ASEAN, Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, Article 2(b). See http://www.asean.org/news/item/treaty-of-amity-and-cooperation-in-southeast-asia-indonesia-24-february-1976-3.
[18] United Nations Charter, "Chapter I: Purposes and Principles", Article 2(1).
[19] Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 20.
[20] Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, 20.
[21] Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, 21.
[22] Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*. 3rd ed. (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2014); Amitav Acharya, *The Making of Southeast Asia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012); Amitav Acharya, *Whose Ideas Matter?* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009); Alice Ba, *[Re]Negotiating East and Southeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Jürgen Haacke, *ASEAN'S Diplomatic And Security Culture* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).
[23] David M Jones and Michael LR Smith, "Constructing Communities: The Curious Case of East Asian Regionalism", *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 165–186; David M Jones and Michael L Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress", *International Security* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 148–184; David M Jones and Michael LR Smith, *ASEAN and East Asian International Relations: Regional Delusion* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006); David M Jones and Michael LR Smith, "ASEAN's Imitation

Community", *ORBIS* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 93–109; Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[24] Lee Jones, "Sovereignty, intervention, and social order in revolutionary times", *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 1149–1167; Lee Jones, *ASEAN, Sovereignty and Intervention in Southeast Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).