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Book Reviews

Hard choices: Security, democracy and regionalism in Southeast Asia. Edited by Donald K. Emmerson. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009, pp.398. ISBN 978-981-230-914-3 (soft cover).

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This book combines a number of contesting issues in the context of regionalism in Southeast Asia. In ten compiled essays the book touches upon issues such as political sovereignty, non-traditional security, democracy, civil society and regionalism. Although the title sounds sceptical, the book analyses the interplay between regionalism and democracy in Southeast Asia at length. The book uses two approaches: multidimensional and regional. Its main novelty lies in its discussion of the issues from the country's own individual perspective, not of the main extra-regional powers such as China and the United States. It rests on the two main principles of Southeast Asian regionalism – non-interference and solidarity. The first implies indifference to domestic political change and development which impedes neither democracy nor autocracy, and the second implies consensus defined as unanimity. Within these principles the Southeast Asian regional interactions are explored in this book.

With regard to sovereignty (Chapter 2), Jorn Dosch argues that democratization in Indonesia and the Philippines and greater economic liberalization in Vietnam have ushered new institutional frameworks for regional policy making and civil-society participation in the political process. These two factors have contributed to greater regional cooperation on various security issues. However, the author cautions that the solidarity among the member-states of the Association of Southeast East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has not been

able to eliminate mutual suspicions and disputes in over four decades of its existence. This has led the author to conclude that national sovereignty still rules.

The view that sovereignty still rules is greatly reflected in Rizal Sukma's "Political Development: A Democracy Agenda for ASEAN?" (Chapter 4). Rizal argues that democracy is incompatible with the regional security parameter envisaged in the ASEAN Security Community (ASC). He points out that the imposition of democracy on a member state or making it a central requirement of the ASC may trigger inter-state tension, making it difficult to cooperate in the field of security. Therefore, he concludes, "[F]orcing democracy onto the region is something the Association has not done, cannot do, and should not try to do" (p.136) based on ten constraints which are non-interference principles, official regionalism, comfortable inconsistency, nationalist feelings, diverse regimes, different motives, problematic democracy, stability first, disinclined neighbours and global backlash. Precisely, these are the limitations that prompt Kyaw Yin Hlaing to label Myanmar as ASEAN's pariah (Chapter 5). [The main argument presented here to explore insecurity and autocracy in Myanmar is the nature of non-intervention and non-imposition contained in the ASEAN approach.](#) The ASEAN has taken Myanmar into its fold without requiring its democratic transformation first and this is an indication that regionalism, and non-interference outweigh the requirement for democracy.

A somewhat optimistic tone is obvious in Mely Caballero-Anthony's chapter on non-traditional security, democracy and regionalism (Chapter 6). Caballero-Anthony argues that non-traditional security challenges are forcing the ASEAN-member states to engage at multiple levels from states to societies and private sectors. This trend is eroding the old fashioned regionalism based on the longstanding elite norms and consensus. However, on a cautionary note, the author maintains that this development is neither preconditioned by democracy nor may it overtake non-traditional security concerns over democracy. In contrast to non-traditional security concerns, a more direct traditional security concern of the region is related to nuclear energy security, dealt with by Michael S. Malley (Chapter 8). According to Malley, the issue is given a low profile status despite the fact that the ASEAN-member states are

increasingly moving to nuclear energy option. The author argues that peripheralization of nuclear security issue is rather due to the absence of inclination to acquiring nuclear weapons by the member states. So, the ASEAN puts greater weight on non-ASEAN institutions to deal with it; however, democracy has little role to play in it.

The most critical stand in this book is taken by Erik Martinez Kuhonta in “Towards responsible sovereignty: The case for intervention,” (Chapter 10). Kuhonta strongly criticises the ASEAN approach for failing to bring democratic change in Myanmar on the pretence of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. The criticism rests on two grounds. First, the global trend has shifted to humanitarian or even military intervention for greater cause, and second, the ASEAN’s default position of constructive engagement has failed in the case of Myanmar. So, if not hard, at least soft intervention in the form of sanctions should be adopted by ASEAN to deal with Myanmar. Questioning its relevance, the author emphatically suggests “if ASEAN’s vision of its region as a truly caring society is to seem anything but hypocritical, its leaders must venture beyond current practice and try more forcefully and creatively to moderate and reform the flagrantly offending state in their own backyard” (p.313).

Evidently, the core concept of the book is to explore the relationship between democracy, regionalism, and security. The first two concepts are largely well explored with powerful arguments identifying the successes and failures of the ASEAN and suggesting ways for improvement. Most of the contributors to the book have attempted to relate democracy in regional relations, but at the same time maintained a sceptical stand on that. As Myanmar remains the most prominent failure of democracy in the region, the country has received wide attention throughout the book. As such the book is of particular interest to the readers having interest in Myanmar.

Although security is one of the three main concepts of the book, it is less explored compared to the other two – regionalism and democracy. In particular, the issues linked to traditional security concerns such as the military power is not dealt with at all, and even the non-traditional security or human security issue is not given

measured attention. Besides, any consideration of economic aspect of the ASEAN is completely missing in the book which neglects its main identity. The various chapters in the book do not necessarily present a coherent analysis of the concepts that the title reflects. Rather, all the chapters stand on their own with enough background information for the reader to understand the context. The editor has rightly claimed that “Southeast Asia is attractively difficult, creatively diverse...” (p.50), which is reflected in the elaborative analysis of Termsak Chalermphanupap’s “One charter, three communities, many challenges” (Chapter 3). As such the sceptical title “hard choices” really puts the ASEAN-member states in a difficult position to choose between security, democracy and regionalism.

Muhammad Asad: His contribution to Islamic learning. By Abroo Aman Andrabi. New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2007, pp.173. ISBN 978-81-78-98589-3.

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A number of studies on Muhammad Asad have been published over the past years in the form of journal articles and online texts. But there has not been any extensive study of his ideas and works to date. Therefore, Andrabi’s book, which is based on his Ph.D. thesis, is a welcome addition to the life and works of Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss).

Andrabi’s book under review consists of six chapters. In the first chapter, the author shares his thoughts on Asad’s life before his conversion from Judaism to Islam. It successfully chronicles Asad’s experiences in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan while serving the governments of these countries. One of the major shortcomings of this chapter, indeed the book is that it lacks a theoretical framework, which could have been used to assess Asad’s general contributions as a Muslim intellectual.

In the second chapter, Andrabi undertakes an ambitious task because it is not easy to discuss and analyse all of this pragmatic