

BOOK REVIEW

Does ASEAN Matter?: A View from within.

Natalegawa, Marty

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The author of this book is a highly regarded diplomat, former ambassador, and foreign minister of Indonesia. Therefore, the insider perspective regarding present and future relevance of ASEAN is analyzed in detail.

This book is about the present and future relevance of ASEAN. The author analyses how ASEAN can build upon its past contributions to the peace, security and prosperity of Southeast Asia to further contribute to the East Asia, Asia-Pacific, and Indo-Pacific Regions. More fundamentally the book explores how ASEAN can continue to ensure that peace, security and prosperity prevail in Southeast Asia, and asks how ASEAN can become more directly relevant to the people of ASEAN. The main objectives are to identify lessons learned over the past fifty years of ASEAN, to determine ASEAN's relevancy in addressing regional challenges, and to consider ASEAN's participation in regional opportunities.

This book is divided into five chapters, followed by three appendices.

Chapter 1 begins with the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, describing its formation as a primary bargaining power in Southeast Asia. The

author then elaborates how the nature of diplomacy-as-statecraft has been greatly transformed throughout the following five decades in addressing both positive and negative challenges, in addition to the rise of social media and the regional power ascribed to modern modalities of communication. In essence, when compared to the time of ASEAN's establishment, the contemporary world is one in which both internal and external issues are deeply intertwined.

Chapter 2 deals with Southeast Asia's journey from a deficit of regional trust to regional trust based on strategy. ASEAN has tried to develop a culture of peace by negotiating between the countries that were in conflict such as Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, and Thailand. ASEAN Political-Security (APSC), or more recently the APSC Blueprint 2015, has given further weight to such a commitment. More importantly, however, was the decision for ASEAN to expand its membership from ASEAN 5 to ASEAN 10. The author describes the prior formation of SEATO as notable for having more non-Southeast Asian Member States than Southeast Asian Member States until the formation of ASEAN 10. He further analyzed that the alternative of a "Union",

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much like the European Union, was not suitable for ASEAN because Southeast Asia was considered too diverse - politically, socially and economically - to pursue the establishment of a "Union". A "supranational" type of organization with decision-making powers increasingly devolved to ASEAN was certainly not suitable for the countries of Southeast Asia.

Chapter 3 describes ASEAN regional history from the Cold War to ASEAN Centrality. Significantly, the 2011 East Asia Summit (EAS) was concluded with the Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations on 19 November. This agreement enhanced mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity. While Southeast Asia is identifiable as a geographic space and construct, the region's fate is very much tied to the wider East Asia, Asia-Pacific, and Indo-Pacific regions. Regarding ASEAN's Code of Conduct, the author suggests negotiation with China as a major partner to develop cooperation within the economic framework. I agree with the author on this matter but it will take a long time for countries that have faced occupation in Southeast Asia, especially the Philippines and Vietnam, to agree to such cooperation.

Chapter 4 concentrates on ASEAN's policies, from state-centric to people-centric. I think a main challenge ASEAN is likely to encounter is how to attain equilibrium between the seemingly conflicting demands of the state and the people. ASEAN is an organization structured on loose cooperation and non-interference. Therefore, it takes time to reach a consensus on many issues. The member states should agree on solutions to major regional issues based on common

interest rather than making decisions based on their country's own national interests.

Chapter 5 concludes the book with the author's suggestion that "ASEAN must further enhance its people-centric and people-relevant outlook and in terms of process, ASEAN must actively seek to widen the engagement and involvement of relevant stakeholders in its policy making and policy implementation in order to develop a sense of ownership and participation in ASEAN's endeavors." I think the sense of ownership through ASEAN does not supersede the national interest of each country. As such, solutions reached by ASEAN tend to not be effective, like the case of Spratly.

In my opinion, this book will help academicians and students who study about Southeast Asia to review and analyze the past and to predict the future of ASEAN's social, economic, cultural, political, and transnational issues. Therefore, the author should more thoroughly analyze how a supra-national Union model would not be an effective ASEAN model.