

East Asian Regional Security

What the ASEAN Family Can (Not) Do

ABSTRACT

The “ASEAN family” of regional security institutions has a mixed record: it has proved very helpful in improving interstate trust, fairly helpful in managing peaceful change, somewhat helpful in enhancing regime stability, but virtually useless in resolving interstate conflict. Overall, East Asia remains dominated by conventional forms of international relations.

KEYWORDS: East Asia, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, regional security, international relations

FROM A WESTERN PERSPECTIVE, there is something paradoxical about the emergent East Asian international order. There is an apparent tension between globalization and interdependence on the one hand and the persistence of a fairly traditional regional nation-state system on the other. What is more, the countries of East Asia are upholding Westphalian-style sovereignty precisely at a time when significant parts of the West, most notably in Europe, are moving “beyond Westphalia.”¹ As a consequence, the emergent East Asian international order can be appropriately characterized by the term “Eastphalia.”²

There is indeed a notional paradox here, but only when we make the teleological assumption that globalization and interdependence inexorably

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1. Westphalia stands here for the modern system of sovereign nation states, the foundational moment of which is commonly held to be the Westphalian peace, concluded in 1648 at Münster and Osnabrück.

2. Tom Ginsburg, “Eastphalia as the Perfection of Westphalia,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17:1 (Winter 2010), pp. 27–45.

Asian Survey, Vol. 52, Number 4, pp. 754–776. ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X. © 2012 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: AS.2012.52.4.754.

lead the world "beyond Westphalia." In this article, I try to avoid this and similar teleological presuppositions by striving to understand the inherent "logic" of East Asian security regionalism from the perspective of the most relevant participants. It will be worthwhile, for a change, to try and see how regionalism works for East Asian elites, rather than stretching Western analytical frameworks and normative commitments to fit a regional political context where they hardly apply.³

Before I embark on this endeavor, a few conceptual clarifications are in order. Unless otherwise stated, by *East Asia* I mean the regional security complex encompassing Northeast and Southeast Asia (and sometimes extending to South Asia).⁴ By *regionalism*, I mean any political project geared to institutionalized regional cooperation, whether successful or not. This includes, but is not limited to, formal integration via regional institutions. The understanding of *security* underlying this article is not committed to any theoretical agenda but comprises whatever the relevant actors understand by the term.

The security agenda in East Asia is predominantly determined by the incumbent political (and sometimes military) elites of East Asian countries. For this simple empirical reason, my outlook is state-centered. Recent research indeed suggests that the importance of societal input to Asian regionalism should not be overestimated.⁵ It is therefore appropriate to focus on the perspective of national political elites. As my analysis shows, their perspective goes far beyond traditional military security. It includes confidence building, peaceful change, regime stabilization through the promotion of economic growth and the coercive consolidation of domestic control, and the resolution of interstate conflict.

In the absence of outright Chinese and/or Japanese regional leadership, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remains the most important institutional hub, or focal point, for security cooperation in East Asia. Accordingly, my analytical priority is to understand ASEAN-centered

3. For example, the fact that the "Responsibility to Protect" has gathered limited normative traction in East Asia may be surprising from a globalist perspective but not from a perspective genuinely taking the views of regional regimes and state-society relationships into account. See David Capie, "The Responsibility to Protect Norm in Southeast Asia: Framing, Resistance, and the Localization Myth," *Pacific Review* 25:1 (March 2012), pp. 75–93.

4. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 144–71.

5. David Capie, "When Does Track Two Matter? Structure, Agency, and Asian Regionalism," *Review of International Political Economy* 17:2 (May 2010), pp. 291–318.

security regionalism. To be more precise: my objective is to understand, or rationally reconstruct, how ASEAN-centered security regionalism works from the perspective of the most relevant participants involved, rather than imposing Western forms of security regionalism as a benchmark. Or, in brief: the question addressed in this article is what the ASEAN regional security toolbox can, or cannot, accomplish.

THE ASEAN FAMILY

At the center of the East Asian security regionalism is and remains the “ASEAN family” of regional institutions. Over the past two decades, ASEAN has been the main crystallization point of security regionalism not only in Southeast Asia but also in East Asia more widely. This is not to deny that there are other institutions relevant for regional security, such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and, to some extent, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).⁶ Nevertheless, it is uncontroversial that the most elaborate institutional fabric to meet East Asian security challenges is the cluster of regional institutions around ASEAN.⁷

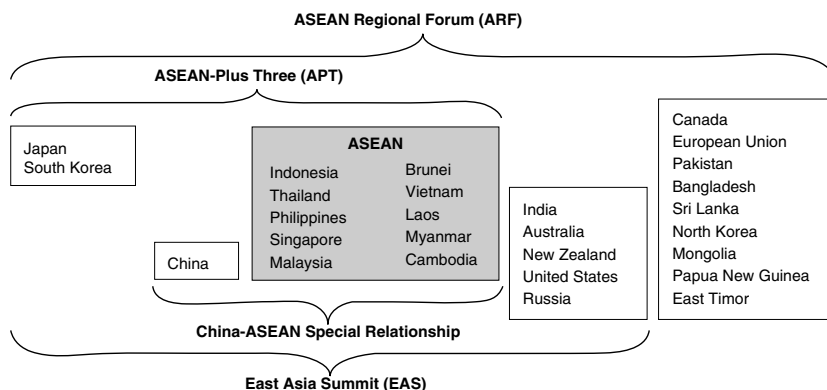
As Figure 1 shows, ASEAN is at the center of an intensely variable geometry of regional security institutions. Since 1994, ASEAN member states have held annual consultations on security with 17 dialogue partners in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).⁸ Since 1997, ASEAN members have held separate meetings with China, Japan, and South Korea in a framework called “ASEAN Plus Three” (APT). Since 2005, a more inclusive version of APT has existed called the East Asia Summit (EAS). In addition to China, Japan, and South

6. APEC has lost most of its importance since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Today, its most interesting feature lies perhaps in the fact that Taiwan is formally recognized as a “member economy” under the guise of Chinese Taipei. The Shangri-La Dialogue is an informal platform for defense diplomacy, organized since 2002 by the Singaporean branch of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), where defense ministers and top military brass from East Asia countries can meet in an informal atmosphere. See David Capie and Brendan Taylor, “The Shangri-La Dialogue and the Institutionalization of Defence Diplomacy in Asia,” *Pacific Review* 23:3 (July 2010), pp. 359–76.

7. China, Japan, and South Korea have recently started to occasionally meet separately from ASEAN. This development must be carefully watched, although for the foreseeable future ASEAN remains the focal point of East Asian regionalism. See Ralf Emmers and John Ravenhill, “The Asian and Global Financial Crises: Consequences for East Asian Regionalism,” *Contemporary Politics* 17:2 (June 2011), pp. 133–49, at pp. 142–43, 145–46.

8. In 1994, ASEAN had six member states: Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei. Vietnam joined in 1995; Laos and Myanmar in 1997; and Cambodia in 1999.

FIGURE I. The ASEAN Family of Regional Security Institutions



SOURCE: By author.

Korea, the EAS comprises India, Australia, and New Zealand. In November 2011, the EAS was joined by the United States and Russia. In recent years, another important forum for the discussion of security matters has been the China-ASEAN Special Relationship. Other “ASEAN Plus One” forums (ASEAN Plus Japan, ASEAN Plus Korea, ASEAN Plus India) have been far less important.

The ASEAN family of regional institutions, as outlined above, is the most important hub for multilateral regional security cooperation in East Asia. It would be a fallacy, however, to reduce the East Asian security dynamic to multilateral regional institutions. To properly understand what the ASEAN regional security toolbox can or cannot do, it is necessary to assess its various contributions to regional security against more conventional forms of international relations. This includes the hub-and-spokes system of U.S. military alliances with specific countries such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines; bilateral diplomatic relationships, e.g., between China and Japan; the (currently dormant) Six Party Talks featuring the permanent crisis on the Korean Peninsula;⁹ and, despite its focus on Central Asia rather than East Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

9. The participants were North Korea, South Korea, China, the U.S., Japan, and Russia. Although with limited success, there are also interesting experiments in trilateral diplomacy: for example, between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea; the U.S., Japan, and Australia; and Japan, China, and South Korea. See T. J. Pempel, “More Pax, Less Americana in Asia,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 10:3 (September 2010), pp. 465–90, at p. 475; Jae Jeok Park, “The U.S.-led Alliances in the Asia-Pacific: Hedge against Potential Threats or an Undesirable Multilateral Security Order?”

Unlike most academic scholarship on regionalism in East Asia, this article assesses the performance of East Asian security regionalism on its own terms but also from a wider perspective. First, it focuses not only on the most relevant multilateral regional institutions (ASEAN, ASEAN-China Special Relationship, APT, EAS, ARF) but also compares their performance to more conventional forms of international relations. Second, it assesses the performance of regional institutions in terms of their ability to meet key security challenges.

KEY SECURITY CHALLENGES

As a baseline for my comprehensive review of ASEAN-centered security regionalism in East Asia, let me first specify the security challenges that are to be handled by the East Asian regional security toolbox. Based on an examination of the situation, there seem to be four key security challenges (the list is not necessarily exhaustive).

To begin with, there is the risk of the so-called security dilemma. States are tempted to interpret increased military spending by their neighbors as a threat, whether or not the intentions of these neighbors are actually offensive; at the systemic level, this can trigger an arms race and/or other forms of military escalation. In the specific case of East Asia, military modernization programs do include the acquisition of destabilizing weapons systems.¹⁰ From 2001 to 2010, military expenditure in East Asia increased by 69% in real terms, i.e., adjusted for inflation (for China, the increase was by 189%).¹¹ Given East Asia's staggering rates of economic growth, this increase is hardly surprising. Over the past two decades, with the temporary exception of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, East Asia has seen exceptionally high economic growth rates. Since the world economic crisis of 2008, region-wide gross domestic product (GDP) growth has quickly recovered.¹² With a growing tax base, military

Pacific Review 24:2 (May 2011), pp. 137–58, at pp. 146, 153–54; Emmers and Ravenhill, “The Asian and Global Financial Crises,” pp. 142–43.

10. Robert Hartfiel and Brian L. Job, “Raising the Risk of War: Defence Spending Trends and Competitive Arms Processes in East Asia,” *Pacific Review* 20:1 (March 2007), pp. 1–22.

11. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Yearbook 2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 159, 194, 208, 215–16.

12. World Bank, *East Asia and Pacific Economic Update: Securing the Present, Shaping the Future* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, March 2011); idem, *Navigating Turbulence, Sustaining Growth* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, November 2011).

expenditure has skyrocketed in absolute terms but not in terms of its share of national income. Nevertheless, increasing military expenditure can lead to negative security externalities. When unchecked, this security dilemma may undermine interstate trust and lead to an arms race. To prevent that from happening, one function of security regionalism is *improving interstate trust*.

Another regional security challenge, partly related to differences in economic growth, is the competitive rise and decline of powers. The two most important examples of this are the latent contest for hegemony between rising China and declining Japan, as well as the wrangling between the U.S. in its traditional role as offshore balancer and an increasingly assertive China. Despite occasional tensions, the situation has so far been managed without major military clashes. Nevertheless, these crucially important relationships could easily get out of hand. Because of the high economic and political volatility in the region, other countries could also be tempted to engage in military brinkmanship to settle accounts. So far the region has been remarkably stable, but there have been cases of military brinkmanship in the East and South China Seas, as well as recent border clashes between Thailand and Cambodia. The latter go back to a long-standing territorial dispute but have escalated since 2008, with violent skirmishes in 2011.¹³ To defuse the conflict potential engendered by the competitive rise and decline of powers, another important function of East Asian security regionalism is the *management of peaceful change and adjustment*.

A third security challenge is the fragility of East Asian regimes. In the region, there is still a high prevalence of weak postcolonial states caught in the process of nation building. Their legitimacy depends on the ability to contain domestic challenges to their authority and improve the economic well-being of their citizens.¹⁴ In the words of David Arase, "The key political traits of what might be called East Asian developmentalism have been development before democracy; policy making by a professional bureaucracy insulated from civil society by a political class; and the

13. Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "Embedding Embittered History: Unending Conflicts in Thai-Cambodian Relations," *Asian Affairs* 18:1 (March 2012), pp. 81–102.

14. This is in line with Mohammed Ayooob's theory of "subaltern realism"; for a survey, see Robert E. Kelly, "Security Theory in the 'New Regionalism,'" *International Studies Review* 9:2 (Summer 2007), pp. 197–229, at pp. 215–21; for applications, see Shaun Narine, "State Sovereignty, Political Legitimacy, and Regional Institutionalism in the Asia-Pacific," *Pacific Review* 17:3 (July 2004), pp. 423–50; idem, "ASEAN in the Twenty-First Century: A Sceptical Review," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22:3 (September 2009), pp. 369–86.

exclusion of independent critics, labor, and consumer interests in order to speed capital formation and growth.”¹⁵ The instability of authoritarian developmentalism stems from the fact that social change in the wake of globalization and rapid economic growth poses considerable challenges to the maintenance of political stability and order. This includes a rising middle class demanding more participation, “modernization losers” demanding patronage, and burgeoning organized crime in the shadow of the legal economy. All of this is posing challenges to the time-honored formula of authoritarian rule upon which most East Asian countries, with some notable exceptions such as Japan and South Korea, continue to rest. To reduce the security risks emanating from authoritarian developmentalism, a third function of East Asian security regionalism is *buttressing regime stability*.

While the first three regional security challenges are related to globalization and East Asia’s spectacular economic growth, the fourth and final one is related to a rich legacy of interstate conflict. The most notorious cases are, of course, the long-standing conflicts surrounding North Korea and Taiwan. Other bones of contention, e.g., the territorial disputes in the resource-rich waters of the East and South China Seas, pale in comparison to these two conflicts, where there is a low but ever present risk of war. In the case of North Korea, this is compounded by the risk of state implosion and mass exodus. Therefore, another important challenge for East Asian security regionalism is to *resolve acute conflicts*.

WHAT THE ASEAN REGIONAL SECURITY TOOLBOX CAN (NOT) DO

In what follows, I provide an analytical overview of how successfully East Asian security institutions, particularly the various components of the ASEAN family, have met the regional security challenges outlined in the last section. In line with the considerations presented there, the following specific security challenges are discussed: (1) improving interstate trust; (2) managing peaceful change; (3) buttressing regime stability; and (4) conflict resolution, particularly with regard to Taiwan and North Korea.

15. David Arase, “Non-traditional Security in China-ASEAN Cooperation: The Institutionalization of Regional Security Cooperation and the Evolution of East Asian Regionalism,” *Asian Survey* 50:4 (July/August 2010), pp. 808–33, at pp. 810–11.

Interstate Trust

In East Asia, the requirement of interstate trust is far from trivial because, truth be told, sometimes states have good reason to distrust each other. Despite close integration in international markets, the region is predominantly populated by statist-nationalist regimes.¹⁶ With some notable exceptions such as Japan and South Korea, most East Asian countries are ruled by authoritarian political regimes watching jealously over the vested interests of their state apparatus. As noted, there are several unresolved territorial disputes: in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, between Japan and Russia, and between Cambodia and Thailand. Such disputes are instrumental in rallying political support and justifying the continued ascendancy of military establishments. The result is an "anarchical society" of sovereignty-minded nation states where confidence needs to be systematically built and maintained because unconditional trust would be too risky.¹⁷

To gauge the paramount importance of interstate trust, just imagine that countries such as Thailand and Vietnam were still confronting each other in a Cold War world where consultations were taking place only through formal negotiations and/or diplomatic back-channels. A simple thought experiment like this makes it easy to understand that while formal political integration at the regional level is likely to remain a mirage, interstate trust is one of the most important contributions regionalism can make in East Asia. This is, of course, not to say that taken by itself, confidence building resolves any conflicts. The eruption of a conflict may be less likely in a climate of improved interstate trust, but it still remains possible.

From its inception, ASEAN has had a positive record of confidence building. As Khong and Nesarurai have pointed out, "Confidence building has been the hallmark activity of the ARF in its first decade."¹⁸ In fact, one of the most important achievements of ASEAN during the first few years after its founding in 1967 was its contribution to the diplomatic reconciliation of Indonesia and Malaysia. Between 1963 and 1966, Indonesia under President

16. Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

17. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1977).

18. Yuen Foong Khong and Helen E. S. Nesarurai, "Hanging Together, Institutional Design, and Cooperation in Southeast Asia: AFTA and the ARF," in *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 32–82, at p. 37.

Sukarno had pursued a confrontational foreign policy against its recently independent neighbor, Malaysia. Subsequently, the transition of presidential power in Indonesia from Sukarno to Suharto ended the conflict. The establishment of ASEAN, of which both Indonesia and Malaysia were founding members, certainly did not end all disputes between the two countries, but it inaugurated and consolidated a new era of more amicable relations.¹⁹

Given the limited political and military clout of the ASEAN member states in the region, today successful regional confidence can only happen in wider regional forums that encompass the most relevant great powers such as China, Japan, and the U.S. Thus, the ARF can be interpreted as an attempt to replicate ASEAN's early success with confidence building in the post-Cold-War world. According to the initial plan, outlined at the second ARF meeting in Brunei in 1995, confidence building was only the initial stage of the ARF's institutional development. It was hoped that after the firm establishment of confidence building as a diplomatic habit, the ARF would transition to more demanding forms of cooperation such as preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. Despite these ambitious plans, the ARF has remained stalled at the first stage of confidence building.²⁰

The China-ASEAN Special Relationship has also been instrumental in defusing latent distrust between China and the countries located in its Southeast Asian periphery.²¹ APT and the EAS may also have made a contribution to confidence building, but this has been limited by the fact that China prefers the former forum while Japan prefers the latter. What seems to be missing is the willingness of China and Japan to agree on one multilateral regional institution as a diplomatic focal point. Therefore, the most important regional institutions for confidence building remain the ARF and the China-ASEAN Special Relationship.

It is important to note that by default, conventional bilateral diplomacy remains a paramount tool for East Asian states to build interstate trust. This

19. Brigitte Weiffen et al., "Democracy, Regional Security Institutions, and Rivalry Mitigation: Evidence from Europe, South America, and Asia," *Security Studies* 20:3 (August 2011), pp. 378–415, at pp. 407–08; Shaun Narine, "Forty Years of ASEAN: A Historical Review," *Pacific Review* 21:4 (December 2008), pp. 411–29, at p. 414.

20. Takeshi Yuzawa, "The Evolution of Preventive Diplomacy in the ASEAN Regional Forum: Problems and Prospects," *Asian Survey* 46:5 (September/October 2006), pp. 785–804; Khong and Nesadurai, "Hanging Together," pp. 62–63.

21. Arase, "Non-traditional Security."

has been particularly true of the relationship between China and Japan.²² However, an obvious downside of such bilateralism is the risk of negative externalities for those excluded from the relationship. For example, if China and Japan suddenly began having intensely trustful relations, this might be viewed with concern by other countries in the region. Similarly, particularly amicable and trustful relations of one Southeast Asian country with China might be resented by others and thus reduce overall regional interstate trust.

To prevent such adverse international externalities, it is important for bilateral relations to be embedded in multilateral platforms. Apart from the components of the ASEAN family that have already been discussed, the Six Party Talks are an important case in point. This is certainly not to say that the Six Party Talks have eliminated distrust between North Korea and its neighbors. On the contrary, they collapsed in 2009 around mutual allegations of broken commitments. Nevertheless, the Talks were uniquely effective in building a modicum of trust among the key international stakeholders negotiating with North Korea, namely, the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea. Therefore, in early 2012 there was once again talk about the resumption of the Six Party Talks (so far inconclusive).

Peaceful Change

Clustered around ASEAN, East Asia's multilateral regional security institutions have played and are still playing a significant role in the management of peaceful change. As we shall see, however, one should not underestimate the relative importance of bilateral arrangements, notably the continued importance of the military alliances between particular East Asian countries and the U.S. as the offshore manager of East Asian security.

In principle, peaceful change as enshrined in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) has always been one of ASEAN's core missions. In practice, however, there are very few cases where this has actually worked out. During the Cold War, ASEAN was successful only once, to a significant extent, in managing peaceful change. This was in the 1980s, when the organization was instrumental in preventing a further escalation of the situation created in 1978 by Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and the concomitant displacement of the Khmer Rouge to eastern Thailand. Even

22. Men Honghua, "East Asian Order Formation and Sino-Japanese Relations," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17:1 (Winter 2010), pp. 47–82.

though the situation was extremely murky, with the Khmer Rouge operating from Thailand against Vietnam's puppet regime in Cambodia, and ASEAN's position far from internally coherent, the conflict was effectively kept on the back burner until the end of the Cold War made a peace deal possible.²³

It can be argued that this is Cold War history and that today ASEAN is an entirely different institution. Unfortunately, however, ASEAN's Cold War success in directly managing the Vietnam/Cambodia situation has never been replicated. Today, ASEAN continues to make a significant contribution to peaceful change, but it is far more indirect. Whereas during the Cold War ASEAN was directly grappling with the specific security challenge of the Cambodia conflict, today its importance consists in the provision of an institutional hub and informal test ground for different kinds of regional great-power leadership. While ASEAN itself is keeping a lower profile, this apparent weakness is also its strength.

In fact, the absence of an explicit bid for regional leadership by any of the surrounding great powers offers a unique opportunity for ASEAN to catalyze great-power leadership and potentially transform great-power relations. Precisely because ASEAN constitutes an enticing block of follower states, it has some leeway to balance the great powers against each other. To some significant extent, ASEAN's notorious "promiscuity" in its relationships with great powers enables it to orchestrate the meeting of competing great powers.²⁴ This is important because it offers the regional giants an opportunity to exercise various kinds of informal regional leadership²⁵ but without incurring the considerable cost of openly exercising regional hegemony. While this is certainly a significant contribution to peaceful change, it falls short of a "great power bargain" that secures a peaceful strategic transition.²⁶

The most obvious case in point is, of course, the China-ASEAN Special Relationship, which combines the socialization of China into the region with an unobtrusive opportunity for Beijing to exercise informal leadership.²⁷ The other relevant components of the ASEAN regional toolbox such as the ARF,

23. Narine, "Forty Years of ASEAN," pp. 415–17; Khong and Nesadurai, "Hanging Together," pp. 42–44.

24. Narine, "ASEAN in the Twenty-First Century," pp. 380–83.

25. Douglas Webber, "The Regional Integration That Didn't Happen: Cooperation without Integration in Early Twenty-First Century East Asia," *Pacific Review* 23:3 (July 2010), pp. 313–33, at pp. 323–24.

26. Evelyn Goh, "Institutions and the Great Power Bargain in East Asia: ASEAN's Limited 'Brokerage' Role," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11:3 (September 2011), pp. 373–401.

27. Alice D. Ba, "Who's Socializing Whom? Complex Engagement in Sino-ASEAN Relations," *Pacific Review* 19:2 (June 2006), pp. 157–79; Arase, "Non-Traditional Security."

APT, or EAS can also be seen as focal points for great powers to be both socialized into the region and to engage in informal regional leadership.

In this context, it is useful to deploy the concept of institutional balancing, introduced to the study of Asian regionalism in an interesting article by Kai He.²⁸ He distinguishes between "hard" military and "soft" institutional balancing. Within institutional balancing, he further distinguishes between an inclusive and an exclusive strategy. Inclusive institutional balancing tries to control great powers by yoking them together within one and the same institutional framework. Exclusive institutional balancing tries to exert control by setting up an institutional framework to include one great power while deliberately excluding another.

A paradigmatic case of *inclusive* institutional balancing is the ARF, which has kept the U.S. engaged in Asia after the partial retreat of U.S. troops in the early 1990s, while contributing to the socialization of an increasingly assertive China.²⁹ This is, of course, not to deny that the practical contribution of the ARF has been severely limited: it has largely come to be seen as a noncommittal discussion forum or "talk shop."

A paradigmatic case of *exclusive* institutional balancing is APT, which on the eve of the 1997 Asian financial crisis offered a platform to engage China and Japan in an effort to counterbalance the hegemony of the U.S.³⁰ The ability of APT to contribute to peaceful change is, however, severely limited by the presence of a rival institutional framework: the EAS.

Since APT is driven by rising China rather than declining Japan, Tokyo prefers the EAS as a hedge against the risk of Chinese hegemony. In the EAS, Japan can team up with India, Australia, and New Zealand to institutionally counterbalance China. The accession of the U.S. and Russia in November 2011 distances the EAS even further from *exclusive* institutional balancing and brings it closer to *inclusive* balancing, as with ARF. At the same time, the trans-Pacific expansion may somewhat blur the distinction between the EAS and the ARF. In any case, the significance of the EAS is limited by the fact that China continues to prefer APT because in the latter it has a greater relative weight.³¹

28. Kai He, "Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory: Economic Interdependence and Balance of Power Strategies in Southeast Asia," *European Journal of International Relations* 14:3 (August 2008), pp. 489–518.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 497–505.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 505–10.

31. Emmers and Ravenhill, "The Asian and Global Financial Crises," p. 139; Park, "The U.S.-led Alliances in the Asia-Pacific," p. 152.

In Kai He's original vision, "hard" military and "soft" institutional balancing are mutually exclusive. Within institutional balancing, the inclusive and exclusive balancing strategies are equally seen as mutually exclusive.³² In East Asia, however, all of these different approaches to balancing are being practiced at the same time. Thus, traditional "hard" military balancing is taking place alongside various forms of "soft" institutional balancing. Furthermore, East Asian countries are members of a variety of forums practicing inclusive and/or exclusive institutional balancing. While this is confusing to external observers, it may actually be desirable for the sake of peaceful change because at least to some extent the East Asian-specific form of institutional "promiscuity" helps to manage a difficult power transition.

Despite the importance of ASEAN as an institutional hub and test ground for different forms of informal regional leadership, however, the importance of multilateral regional institutions such as the APT, EAS, and ARF to peaceful change should not be overstated. They complement but by no means replace the traditional U.S.-centered security regime. In fact the importance of the U.S. as an offshore balancer seems to be increasing, not declining, as a consequence of China's continuing rise.³³

Ever since the Cold War, the so-called San Francisco System has profoundly shaped the East Asian security architecture.³⁴ Named after the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan, the San Francisco System is a system of bilateral alliances with the U.S. at its core. Precedence is given to Japan and South Korea as Washington's closest allies and hosts of an important U.S. military presence. This is complemented by lower-key military and strategic relationships with other Asian nations such as Thailand and the Philippines. While this "hub and spokes" system has enabled Washington to act as the offshore manager of East Asian security, its lack of multilateral connectivity means the system has never been able to smooth difficult dyads such as the troubled relationship between Japan and South Korea. More than two decades after the end of the Cold War, some authors argue that the San Francisco System is past its prime and needs to be gradually supplanted by

32. He, "Institutional Balancing."

33. Webber, "The Regional Integration That Didn't Happen," p. 320.

34. Kent E. Calder, "Securing Security through Prosperity: The San Francisco System in Comparative Perspective," *Pacific Review* 17:1 (March 2004), pp. 135–57; also note the more fine-grained analysis by Leszek Buszynski, "The San Francisco System: Contemporary Meaning and Challenges," *Asian Perspective* 35:3 (August 2011), pp. 315–35.

region-specific multilateral arrangements such as the ASEAN family or the Six Party Talks.³⁵

Despite all its imperfections, the San Francisco System is likely to retain its centrality for regional security in East Asia as long as there is no alternative multilateral security architecture, presumably centered on China, that is acceptable to the U.S. and all other relevant regional players.³⁶ In fact, the U.S. has recently gained diplomatic attractiveness because of Washington's declared intention to start reengaging in East Asia and reinforcing military cooperation with regional stakeholders such as Australia, India, Indonesia, and Singapore.³⁷ Given China's more assertive military stance, the "hub and spokes" system of U.S.-led alliances is once again seen as an indispensable hedge against the eventuality of Beijing trying to establish an "undesirable" security architecture in the Asia-Pacific.³⁸

Regime Stability

While regime stability is primarily a domestic concern, international cooperation in general and regional institutions in particular play significant roles in furthering this end. As Shaun Narine has stated, "[T]he regional attitude towards multilateral institutions is that they should assist in the state-building process by enhancing the sovereignty of their members."³⁹ From a more domestic viewpoint, nation-state attitudes toward regional cooperation are shaped by incumbent coalitions of political, military, and business elites trying to entrench their predominant position in the context of ongoing domestic power struggles.⁴⁰

35. Pempel, "More Pax, Less Americana." Despite their limitations and failure, between 2003 and 2009 the Six Party Talks were instrumental in engaging both the U.S. and China in the "management" of the intractable North Korean problem. At the time of writing (March 2012), there is once again talk about the eventuality of resuming the Six Party Talks.

36. Youngshik Daniel Bong, "Past Is Still Present: The San Francisco System and a Multilateral Security Regime in East Asia," *Korea Observer* 41:3 (Autumn 2010), pp. 471–95.

37. Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* 189 (November 2011), pp. 56–63.

38. Park, "The U.S.-led Alliances"; Buszynski, "The San Francisco System."

39. Narine, "State Sovereignty," p. 423; see also Min-hyung Kim, "Theorizing ASEAN Integration," *Asian Perspective* 35:3 (August 2011), pp. 407–35; Wooyeal Paik, "Authoritarianism and Humanitarian Aid: Regime Stability and External Relief in China and Myanmar," *Pacific Review* 24:4 (September 2011), pp. 439–62.

40. Lee Jones, "Beyond Securitization: Explaining the Scope of Security Policy in Southeast Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11:3 (September 2011), pp. 403–32.

Especially in Southeast Asia, the social contract, or formula for rule, in most countries can still be characterized as authoritarian developmentalism. Even in Northeast Asia, this is the dominant regime type. There is no denying that particularly in Northeast Asia, there are stable democracies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Likewise, some Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand have become significantly more democratic. Nevertheless, in East Asia there is still an overwhelming prevalence of authoritarian countries deeply concerned with regime stability.

Under the logic of authoritarian developmentalism, the greatest challenges to regime stability are loss of legitimacy and the inability to control domestic dissent. These can be caused by widespread economic discontent and/or the inability of a regime to quell various challenges to its authority such as democratic opposition or insurgent movements. At least in the short term, international cooperation offers two ways to prevent this from happening and thus enhance regime stability: (1) promoting prosperity to enhance *economic security*, and (2) buttressing coercive capacity to safeguard *state security*.

Economic Security

The first way by which international cooperation can prevent threats to the domestic stability of developmentalist regimes (whether authoritarian or not) is to improve economic performance and growth. Insofar as the legitimacy of a regime is premised on domestic expectations of increasing prosperity, its stability can benefit from the promotion of foreign investment and international trade. In this area, some limited regional cooperation is taking place through the frameworks of ASEAN, the China-ASEAN Special Relationship, and APT.

Although with limited effect, ASEAN member states are trying to promote the economic integration of Southeast Asian nations. The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), concluded in 1992, is the most prominent case in point, but after two decades its contribution seems still relatively limited. Only about 20% of Southeast Asian trade actually operates under the scheme, and visionary talk about a much more ambitious “ASEAN Economic Community” has not been matched by the facts on the ground.⁴¹

41. World Trade Organization (WTO), *World Trade Report 2011. The WTO and Preferential Trade Agreements: From Co-existence to Coherence* (Geneva: WTO, 2011), pp. 76–77; John Ravenhill, “East Asian Regionalism: Much Ado about Nothing?” *Review of International Studies* 35, Special Issue (February 2009), pp. 215–35; idem, “The ‘New East Asian Regionalism’: A Political Domino Effect,” *Review of International Political Economy* 17:2 (June 2010), pp. 178–208, at p. 196.

Over the past decade, various regional partners have concluded free trade agreements (FTAs) with ASEAN. Given the economic clout of a rising China, the most important one is the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA), which entered into force in January 2010. As in the case of AFTA, however, the symbolic importance of the agreement is not matched by its economic relevance, and only a fraction of ASEAN-Chinese trade operates under the scheme.⁴²

ASEAN has concluded broadly comparable but even less-substantial agreements with other regional partners such as Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand.⁴³ Despite its limited scope, this cluster of FTAs surrounding ASEAN is the hallmark of regional economic integration in East Asia. There have been tentative discussions about an East Asian Free Trade Zone, but they have been inconclusive.⁴⁴ The same applies to the vision of a Northeast Asian FTA to include China, Japan, and South Korea.

At least in the field of monetary cooperation, the APT process has enabled some significant progress. However, the so-called Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), widely touted as a success, was originally limited to a bundle of minor bilateral currency swap agreements. More recently, there has been accord on the "multilateralization" of the CMI. Despite the huge symbolic significance of this step, the reform is largely incremental, and the CMI continues to fall far short of an "Asian Monetary Fund." While in theory there is an unusual element of majority voting in the new multilateralized version of the CMI, many technical issues remain to be clarified, and the sums involved are insignificant compared to the massive foreign currency reserves held by the central banks of individual East Asian countries. For the foreseeable future, East Asia has no firm institutional architecture in place for the contingency of a serious financial calamity such as the 1997 crisis.⁴⁵

At any rate, there is a serious risk of overstating the real economic importance of institutional arrangements such as multilateral free trade and currency swap

42. Gregory Chin and Richard Stubbs, "China, Regional Institution-Building, and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area," *Review of International Political Economy* 18:3 (August 2011), pp. 277–98; Ravenhill, "The 'New East Asian Regionalism,'" pp. 196–99.

43. WTO, *World Trade Report 2011*, pp. 157–59.

44. Webber, "The Regional Integration That Didn't Happen," p. 318.

45. John D. Ciorciari, "Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization: International Politics and Institution-Building in Asia," *Asian Survey* 51:5 (September/October 2011), pp. 926–52; Jikon Lai and John Ravenhill, "Asia's Multi-level Response to the Global Financial Crisis," *Asia Europe Journal* 9:2 (March 2012), pp. 144–46; Emmers and Ravenhill, "The Asian and Global Financial Crises," pp. 140–42.

agreements. In practice, economic cooperation in East Asia mostly continues to rest on a mixture of direct world market integration and production sharing networks. Dense production sharing networks and other forms of informal market integration have preceded rather than followed formal integration, and arguably East Asia is the world region that has benefitted most from trade liberalization within the multilateral global framework of the WTO.⁴⁶

Preferential trade agreements, by contrast, have been less important. With the exception of AFTA, the conclusion of preferential trade agreements started only after the 1997 Asian crisis. Over time, this has led to the East Asian “noodle bowl” of bilateral FTAs. Despite a huge number of agreements, however, the noodle bowl suffers from three weaknesses. First and foremost, there are no bilateral agreements in force among the economic heavyweights, China, Japan, and South Korea. Second, East Asian bilateral FTAs mostly share the same lack of substance as AFTA, ACFTA, etc.⁴⁷ Third, the East Asian noodle soup is far from being contained in a neat regional “bowl.” There appear to be more FTAs concluded with countries outside the region than among East Asian countries. The most recent development in this regard is an attempt to multilateralize the noodle bowl under a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement that would include the U.S. but almost certainly exclude China.⁴⁸

State Security

The second way in which international cooperation can prevent threats to domestic stability is the collaborative management of non-traditional security threats. Promoted by China, the term “non-traditional security” is basically code for mostly authoritarian regimes collaborating against whatever non-military issue they perceive as a transnational threat undermining their domestic stability.⁴⁹ This is particularly appealing to the majority of East Asia’s developmentalist regimes, which share an authoritarian outlook. From the viewpoint of East Asia’s beleaguered authoritarian elites,

46. WTO, *World Trade Report 2011*, pp. 146–49.

47. Ravenhill, “The ‘New East Asian Regionalism’.”

48. Ann Capling and John Ravenhill, “Multilateralising Regionalism: What Role for the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement?” *Pacific Review* 24:5 (December 2011), pp. 553–75.

49. This is broadly comparable to China’s role in the SCO in Central Asia, where China promotes the objective of tackling “the three evils” of terrorism, extremism, and separatism. See Stephen Aris, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: ‘Tackling the Three Evils’. A Regional Response to Non-Traditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western Bloc?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61:3 (May 2009), pp. 457–82.

the management of non-traditional threats to regime stability is certainly one of the most enticing aspects of regional security cooperation: it can improve the prospects for the elites' own survival. Unsurprisingly, regional cooperation in this area is mostly concentrated on the China-ASEAN Special Relationship.

It is easy to see why the China-ASEAN Special Relationship, rather than ASEAN itself or any of its other institutional offshoots, is a hotbed of non-traditional security cooperation: ASEAN is premised on the principle of non-interference, a principle that has had a highly ambiguous effect in this specific field of regional cooperation.⁵⁰ On the one hand, non-interference has sometimes kept member states from actively destabilizing one another. On the other hand, and for the very same reason, ASEAN member states traditionally view cooperation involving the armed forces as too intrusive upon national sovereignty.

This is not to deny that, in theory, ASEAN is supposed to promote the "resilience" of its member states, i.e., their capacity to withstand non-military challenges. Accordingly, meetings on non-military threats to regime stability have for a long time been held below the ministerial level. At the same time, however, the principle of non-interference places a practical limit on higher-level collaboration to counter such non-military threats. For example, until 2006, regular meetings of defense ministers were seen as anathema.⁵¹

Over the past 15 years, China has increasingly assumed the role of external sponsor of non-traditional security cooperation in the framework of the China-ASEAN Special Relationship.⁵² The conceptual origin of non-traditional security is the "new security concept," introduced by China to the ARF in 1996. At the 2002 ARF meeting, China rebranded the new security concept as "non-traditional security." In the following two years, China shifted its efforts to promote non-traditional security from the ARF to the more suitable China-ASEAN Special Relationship. In 2009, this culminated in the release of the *China-ASEAN Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Non-traditional Security Issues*.

The China-ASEAN Special Relationship is clearly at the vanguard of international non-traditional security cooperation and goes beyond what is conventionally understood as the "ASEAN Way." Under the guise of

50. Arase, "Non-Traditional Security."

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 815, 828.

52. Informally, defense diplomacy also takes place in the Shangri-La Dialogue.

non-traditional security, even defense diplomacy is increasingly taking place in the context of this special relationship.⁵³

With China being the main sponsor, it is hardly surprising that there is nothing comparable to this security cooperation within those regional forums where large consolidated democracies are members. ARF, APT, and EAS are useful discussion forums for any kind of issue, including non-traditional security, but the scope for actual cooperation on non-military threats is limited by the heterogeneity of the political regimes represented in these forums. APT includes two consolidated democracies, namely, Japan and South Korea. The EAS further includes India, Australia, and New Zealand. The ARF additionally includes the U.S., Canada, and the European Union. Because of the presence of large consolidated democracies, these forums lack the political consensus necessary for the more repressive aspects of non-traditional security collaboration.⁵⁴

It should not be forgotten that more conventional forms of international relations also play an important role in the management of threats to regime stability. This includes bilateral Chinese defense consultations with Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam. In June 2009, China and Singapore held a joint counterterrorism exercise.⁵⁵ Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore directly collaborate at the operational level to patrol the Strait of Malacca in order to secure stable access to international trade and prevent terrorist threats. Apart from such interesting sub-regional developments, most maritime security initiatives are spearheaded by the U.S. rather than by East Asian countries themselves.⁵⁶

Another hotbed for more conventional international diplomacy is the crisis surrounding the Korean Peninsula. The implosion of North Korea would be a blow not only to Pyongyang but also to South Korea, China, and Russia. The concomitant military fallout and mass migration could easily destabilize neighboring countries. Diplomatic efforts to manage North Korea are therefore a potentially important contribution to regime stability.⁵⁷

53. Arase, "Non-Traditional Security."

54. Cooperation on non-coercive, non-traditional security threats such as earthquakes and tsunamis is a different matter.

55. Arase, "Non-Traditional Security," p. 829.

56. Suk Kyoong Kim, "Maritime Security Initiatives in East Asia: Assessment and the Way Forward," *Ocean Development and International Law* 42:3 (August 2011), pp. 227–44.

57. Especially in the case of China, another significant mechanism to buttress regime stability is the SCO.

Conflict Resolution

Regional institutions in East Asia are largely unable to contribute to the resolution of acute interstate conflict. As we have seen, the ASEAN family has a positive track record with regard to confidence building and peaceful change. It also provides a useful platform to buttress the regime stability of authoritarian countries. When it comes to acute militarized conflict, however, ASEAN is simply not in a position to galvanize adequate action.

For example, ASEAN did not contribute to the resolution of the East Timor crisis in 1999–2000. Or take the territorial conflicts in the South China Sea, where several ASEAN members and China are at loggerheads. It is true that ASEAN has a record of conflict mitigation through confidence building and the constructive engagement of China.⁵⁸ ASEAN has also tried to promote peaceful change by “socializing” China into renouncing violence. This includes the *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea*, signed by ASEAN and China in 2002. And yet, while all of this may have contributed to conflict management, ASEAN cannot do anything to defuse military incidents, such as when Chinese patrol boats harass Philippine or Vietnamese survey ships exploring for oil and gas. Whenever China chooses to exploit its naval supremacy, ASEAN is doomed to irrelevance.⁵⁹

The same pattern can be observed in a recent border conflict between two ASEAN members, Thailand and Cambodia. In February and April 2011, after serious border shootouts, ASEAN sent the foreign minister of Indonesia to offer his good offices. However, the mediation attempt was hardly welcomed by either party. For domestic reasons, Thailand in particular did not want ASEAN to become seriously engaged as a peacemaker.⁶⁰

More significantly, neither the conflict surrounding North Korea nor the conflict between China and Taiwan is addressed by any of the regional institutions of the ASEAN family. This failure is not surprising in the case of ASEAN itself, which represents Southeast Asia, while both Taiwan and North Korea are located in Northeast Asia. However, various offshoots of ASEAN

58. Mikael Weissmann, “The South China Sea Conflict and Sino-ASEAN Relations: A Study in Conflict Prevention and Peace Building,” *Asian Perspective* 34:3 (July 2010), pp. 35–69.

59. Ralf Emmers, “The Changing Power Distribution in the South China Sea: Implications for Conflict Management and Avoidance,” *Political Science* 62:2 (December 2010), pp. 118–31.

60. Chachavalpongpan, “Embedding Embittered History,” p. 96; “Loose Stalks Posing as a Sheaf: ASEAN Grapples with the Thai-Cambodia Conflict,” *Economist* (London), February 12, 2011; Holly Haywood, “Examining ASEAN Capacity in the Context of the Thai-Cambodian Border Dispute,” *NTS Alert* (Singapore), September 2011.

extend to Northeast Asia: the ARF, APT, and EAS. One might expect these institutional derivatives of ASEAN to offer useful multilateral venues to discuss and eventually resolve these long-standing conflicts. In reality, however, Taiwan and North Korea have been entirely off limits.⁶¹

Acute conflicts are apparently too sensitive for the “talk shops” of the ASEAN family. At best, these offer an opportunity for delegates to meet on the sidelines and coordinate their approach to regional conflicts. For example, then-U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates met his Japanese and South Korean counterparts on the fringes of the 2009 meeting of the Shangri-La Dialogue to coordinate responses to the latest events in the North Korean nuclear crisis.⁶² Similar encounters certainly take place on the fringes of ARF, APT, and EAS.

Such informal encounters aside, the Taiwanese and Korean conflicts are managed by more traditional forms of international diplomacy. In the Taiwanese case, the strategic triangle connecting the U.S. with China and Taiwan has thus far kept the situation from escalating. Taiwan may be reconsidering its relationship with China, but the situation is still very much characterized by a diplomatic triangle of bilateral relationships.⁶³

The North Korean nuclear crisis appears to be an altogether intractable quagmire. During the Clinton years, the U.S. tried bilateral diplomacy to denuclearize North Korea. After the abject failure of these bilateral attempts, in 2003 the Bush administration initiated the multilateral Six Party Talks (suspended since 2009). In both cases, the outcome was the same: diplomacy could not prevent Pyongyang from renegeing on its commitments and continuing its nuclear program. Currently, under the Obama administration, there is somewhat desperate experimentation with various constellations of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

Diplomacy has clearly not been able to solve the Taiwanese problem, but it has worked for more than half a century to prevent the situation from deteriorating. Similarly, diplomacy is unable to solve the Korean question, and it is a fairly moot point whether bilateral or multilateral diplomacy is less efficient.⁶⁴ But even though diplomacy is far from being a panacea, if anything has prevented these conflicts from escalating it has been diplomacy rather

61. Webber, “The Regional Integration That Didn’t Happen,” p. 320.

62. Capie and Taylor, “The Shangri-La Dialogue,” p. 368.

63. L. H. M. Ling, Ching-Chane Hwang, and Boyu Chen, “Subaltern Straits: ‘Exit’, ‘Voice’, and ‘Loyalty’ in the United States-China-Taiwan Relations,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 10:1 (January 2010), pp. 33–59.

64. Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2007).

than more formal multilateral regional institutions. When it comes to conflict resolution in East Asia, diplomacy seems to be the worst alternative except for all the others. As Douglas Webber has noted, "[S]ecurity cooperation remains substantially bilateral, with the U.S., through its alliances with Japan and South Korea and lower-key cooperation with various states in Southeast Asia, still playing a key role providing regional security."⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

There is one common denominator to the confusing variety of regional security institutions in East Asia in general and the ASEAN-centered regional security architecture in particular: tailoring to the real or perceived needs of "Eastphalian" states and their political elites.

Table 1 synthesizes the pattern emerging from my analytical overview of what the ASEAN family can or cannot do when it comes to East Asian regional security. Overall, my analysis yields the following picture. The ASEAN family is very helpful for the improvement of interstate trust. It is fairly helpful for the management of peaceful change. Within certain limits, it can enhance domestic regime stability, in two distinct ways: by promoting economic performance and by buttressing coercive capacity. However, the ASEAN family makes hardly any contribution to the resolution of acute interstate conflict. It appears that other forms of international relations are at least as successful, if not more successful, than multilateral regional institutions in addressing East Asia's various security challenges.

While analytically separate, my four categories overlap practically in various ways. For example, by improving interstate trust, regionalism enables regimes to focus on their domestic socioeconomic development and thus to enhance their regime stability. Similarly, while peaceful change by itself does not resolve any conflicts, it can make future conflict resolution more likely. Despite such potential for overlap and synergies, my analysis has also shown that such coincidences are not automatic. On a positive note, the Cambodian conflict was resolved via peaceful change in the 1980s despite the fact that interstate trust was relatively low at the time. On a more negative note, regime stabilization and improved interstate trust have not enabled the resolution of the Korean and Taiwanese conflicts.

65. Webber, "The Regional Integration That Didn't Happen," p. 320.

TABLE I. What the ASEAN Regional Security Toolbox Can (Not) Do

	<i>Interstate Trust</i>	<i>Peaceful Change</i>	<i>Regime Stability</i>		<i>Conflict Resolution</i>
			<i>Economic</i>	<i>Coercive</i>	
ASEAN	+	+	±	±	–
APT	±	±	±	–	–
EAS	±	±	–	–	–
ARF	+	±	x	–	–
ASEAN-China Special Relationship	+	+	±	+	–
Other forms of international relations	±	±	+	+	±

SOURCE: By author.

NOTE: + = significant contribution; ± = weak contribution; – = no contribution; x = not applicable.

In practice, most of the ASEAN family's activities boil down to diplomatic encounters at regional summits, plus the meetings of seasoned state officials preparing these summits. It appears that ASEAN-centered regionalism is a *supplement to* and an *expression of*, but not a *substitute for*, more conventional forms of international relations, which remain paramount. From the perspective of "post-Westphalian governance," this is disappointing. However, teleological presuppositions and normative commitments should not stand in the way of a hard analytical look. In this spirit, my task has been to comprehensively assess how security regionalism works for Asian elites and entrenches the emerging "Eastphalian" order.