Constructivism and realism and the crucial nature of security
ASEAN and Myanmar (1991-2012)

This research concerns the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional actor and aims to explore ASEAN's policies related to Myanmar (1991-2012) at the same time dealing with challenges to the region. It is built around the research question that investigates what was the most important dimension in ASEAN's action regarding Myanmar. Though various kinds of interactions exist between the Association and Yangon that include economic and cultural aspects, the emphasis of this research is on the security element. A focus on the recent literature on the security challenges in Southeast Asia creates scope for this research to engage with constructivist and realist perspectives to explain ASEAN's affairs in Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War period. Applying both views, this research explores how ASEAN engaged in certain practices and behavior concerning Myanmar that may be found to be logically understandable by explaining these as 'balance of power', 'policy of communication' and 'ASEAN's policy of restructuring itself'. It argues that these actions are complementary, and shows that the findings highlight that the range of policies explored clarifies the fact that the most important dimension in ASEAN's affairs with a direct or indirect link to Myanmar was the pursuit and maintenance of security in the region. This investigation encourages other researchers to focus on ASEAN's interactions with different countries in the region, either discussing how ASEAN has dealt with the challenges and attempted to heighten its image, or implementing a different methodology, eventually confirming or supplementing the findings provided here.

Introduction

The persistently increasing threats in East and Southeast Asia particularly in the region around Myanmar prompt us to recall that the latter is set in a crucial geopolitical area. The unpredictability of certain actors and the risks regarding the use of a nuclear-powered arsenal, together with the tensions elicited by the division-reunification dynamics of the Korean peninsula, underline the centrality of the security dilemma for the region around Myanmar and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (hereafter ASEAN) itself.[1] Furthermore, and especially during the period from 1991 to 2012, specific challenges, partly connected to

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[1] ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967, in Bangkok, by the five original member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Later, other nations joined: Brunei Darussalam (8 January 1984), Vietnam (28 July 1995), Laos and Myanmar (23 July 1997) and lastly Cambodia (30 April 1999).

Myanmar, weighed on ASEAN. Yangon's favorable attitude towards Beijing was perceived as a threat to ASEAN's union and security. The risk of spillover to the region of Myanmar's domestic unsettling matters was cause for ASEAN's security concern, while the prospect that external state- and regional-actors would encroach on the affairs of Yangon and the region was a constant preoccupation. Also the aspiration to a greater recognition in international politics was an ambition underlying ASEAN's activities. These challenges imply a variety of dimensions within ASEAN's affairs concerning Yangon and raise the question: what was the most important dimension in ASEAN's action regarding Myanmar?

This investigation falls into the debate on ASEAN as a regional actor[2] and aims to explore ASEAN's policies related to Myanmar before and after its accession to the organization, at the same time dealing with challenges to the region. Economic, trade, financial and cultural dimensions to ASEAN's policy on Myanmar were fundamentally important to the latter's development. Yet, security was imperative in order to safeguard the expansion of the economic and commercial development not only of Myanmar but also of the region, which explains the reason why the security focus is vital to this investigation. This research relates to the period defined by Myanmar's entry into ASEAN's official dialogue in 1991, leading to Yangon's bid to join ASEAN, and by the country's by-elections and transfer of power to a civilian military-sponsored government in 2012. It regards a period before the outbreak of the Rohingya crisis which gave ASEAN's policies towards Yangon a new dimension. It may appear that ASEAN mostly acted as a homogeneous entity, but this is far from being true.[3] Diversities within the organization were due, for example, to the fact that certain countries, enjoying a deeper political link to China, or, being ruled by strong governments, were more tolerant of the authoritative and repressive system rooted in Yangon. Hence, dissenting views on how and whether to intermingle with that country existed. However, in terms of pushing to boost interactions with Myanmar, Indonesia as well as Malaysia and Thailand were particularly active within the Association. The investigation avails itself of archival primary sources and official documents produced by ASEAN leaders at their meetings and at the Asia-Europe Meeting (hereafter ASEM). It benefits of observations derived from interviews with ASEAN officials and security analysts conducted by the author between 2014 and 2019 in Myanmar, Singapore, Shanghai and Macau. The input contributed by the interviewees (acknowledged in the footnotes) is particularly relevant

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[2] See: Mely Caballero-Anthony. "Understanding ASEAN's centrality: bases and prospects in an evolving regional architecture". *The Pacific Review*, 27, no. 4, (2014): 563-584. Robert Yates. "ASEAN as the 'regional conductor': understanding ASEAN's role in Asia-Pacific order". *The Pacific Review*, 30, no. 4, (2017): 443-461. Alice Ba. "Institutional divergence and convergence in the Asia-Pacific? ASEAN in practice and theory" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 27, no. 2 (2014): 295-318. Evelyn Goh. "Institutions and the great power bargain in East Asia: ASEAN's limited 'brokerage' role". *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 11, no. 3 (2011): 373-401.
[3] See: Jurgen Haacke. "Myanmar and ASEAN". *The Adelphi Papers*. No. 46, (2007): 41-60; and Lee Jones. "Democratisation and foreign policy in Southeast Asia: the case of the ASEAN Interparlamentary Myanmar Caucus". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. 22, no. 3, (2009): 387-406.

to the analysis, to the extent that the interviewees provide opinions and interpretations and offer a bridge between information and explanation. All interviews have been organized under the agreement that the anonymity of the interviewees would be maintained in accordance with the Chatham House Rules. This enquiry finds that the policies examined highlighted that the most important dimension in ASEAN's affairs, directly or indirectly connected to Myanmar, was the pursuit and maintenance of security in the region.

The investigation is organized as follows: it explores how scholars have treated ASEAN's affairs in the region and how they contribute to this work, especially how the recent literature on the security challenges in Southeast Asia generates space for this research to employ constructivist and realist lenses to explain ASEAN's affairs in post-Cold War Southeast Asia. Subsequently, it focuses on the methodology of this research and considers how these two perspectives are justified. It then debates in three different sections how ASEAN engaged in certain forms of behavior regarding Myanmar that may be logically explained as the 'balance of power', 'policy of communication' and 'ASEAN's policy of restructuring itself'. Following this, it argues how these policies are complementary, before questioning how the constructivist and realist lenses as applied to ASEAN's affairs operated, and successively focuses on how the inputs of the interviewees have been useful to the analysis. The conclusion outlines the findings and the research's main contribution.

The literature

Around the end of the 1990s, ASEAN affairs have been the focus of an intense debate. Some scholars discussed ASEAN policies as better explained by observing them through a lens on realism. They claimed that realism challenged the traditional constructivist ideas which led to the creation of the ASEAN group.[4] Others argued that, at least in Southeast Asia, realism and neo-liberalism offered a logical interpretation of ASEAN's affairs.[5] The extent to which realism and institutionalism interweaved in the region was similarly argued by maintaining that, when realism was on the ascendant, an 'institutionalist reordering of the Asia-Pacific region' was also influential.[6]

Other studies on ASEAN as a regional actor contemplating security challenges in Southeast Asia, or its foreign relations more generally, rejected the realist and institutionalist approaches,[7] or found unproductive the theoretical inputs derived from exchanges between

[4] Jurgen Ruland. "ASEAN and the Asian Crisis: Theoretical Implications and Practical Consequences for Southeast Asian Regionalism". *The Pacific Review*. 13, no. 3, (2000): 421-451, 421.

[5] Sheldon Simon. "Realism and neoliberalism: International relations theory and Southeast Asian security". *The Pacific Review*, 8, no. 1, (1995): 5-24, 6.

[6] Amitav Acharya. "Realism, Institutionalism, and the Asian Economic Crisis". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21, no. 1 (1999): 1-29, 1.

[7] Caballero-Anthony. "Understanding ASEAN's centrality". Yates. "ASEAN as the 'regional conductor'". Ba. "Institutional divergence and convergence in the Asia-Pacific?". Goh. "Institutions and the great power bargain in East Asia".

constructivists and realists.[8] They claimed that state-centered analysis was no longer meaningful owing to changes in the international security environment and the growth of trans-national connections. Investigating ASEAN in the regional security architecture of Asia, these studies defined in detail the notion of centrality as well as of leadership.[9] This strand of research framed the analysis through the perspective of the social network approach and argued that the density of networks and the links that ASEAN established was evidence of its guidance.[10] The idea of centrality has been captured by other enquiries[11] that discussed ASEAN in the Asia-Pacific as an entity that developed a role for its contribution to regional order. Again, this research argued that a social roles analysis, this time rooted in the English School's conceptual framework, adds the opportunity to provide certain flexibility that is necessary to explain ASEAN-great power negotiations.[12] Other research paid attention to the geopolitics related to ASEAN as an alternative model of regionalism in theory and practice.[13] It incorporated the idea of ASEAN as a 'diplomatic conductor', since actors external to the region were visibly more powerful players than the ASEAN states.[14] In fact, 'ASEAN's ability to transcend the Cold War circumstances from which it' has been born was one of the skills that was overwhelmingly recognized.[15]

If several studies refuted the realist and constructivist understanding of the dilemmas associated with ASEAN's dealing with the problems of the region, and defended this by highlighting how the alterations in the global and regional security sphere 'helped to transform the dynamics of governance',[16] they also agreed on more positive terms concerning these two perspectives. They indicated that both constructivism and realism well represented the kind of regional order in Southeast Asia which dominated the aftermath of the Cold War,[17] and recognized that both perspectives 'created a healthy debate' in a field where realism had previously 'dominated by default'.[18] To the objection that the 'major shortcomings' of the realist and constructivist perceptions were recognizable in the extent to which their prevailing paradigm of security was stuck in state-centricity,[19] it can be answered that the period under consideration by the present investigation ignored the changes in the global security environment that occurred later. For example, many security challenges, such as terrorism, were only later trans-national in nature, and similarly security actors were only later no longer limited to states. Since the years under investigation fall into the kind of

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[8] Jones. "Democratisation and foreign policy", 402.
[9] Caballero-Anthony. "Understanding ASEAN's centrality".
[10] Ibid., 563.
[11] Yates. "ASEAN as the 'regional conductor'".
[12] Ibid., 444.
[13] Ba. "Institutional divergence and convergence in the Asia-Pacific?", 295.
[14] Ibid., 296.
[15] Ibid., 304.
[16] Mely Caballero-Anthony. *Negotiating Governance on Non-Traditional Security in Southeast Asia and Beyond*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 24.
[17] Ba. "Institutional divergence and convergence in the Asia-Pacific?", 303.
[18] Ibid., 306, a position that contrasts Jones' view quoted above (Jones, 2009, 402).
[19] Caballero-Anthony. *Negotiating Governance on Non-Traditional Security*, 7.

regional order that characterized post-Cold War Southeast Asia, both constructivism and realism emerge as having the potential of being helpful tools to perceive how dynamics unfolded. Placing more emphasis on the virtues of constructivism and realism, the suggestion that the dichotomy between the two limited the interpretational scope of ASEAN's affairs was advanced, and the combination of the two was proposed.[20]

The methodology: how would the policy mix be defendable in ASEAN's affairs?

While the processes through which the ASEAN states interacted have expanded through the creation of new institutions and further cooperation (constructivism), ASEAN's basic structure continued to be shaped by its member states and their different capabilities and potentials (realism). Constructivism recognized cooperation as the basis of ASEAN's policies; yet, cooperation only works if the actors' expectations converge, since it demands acceptance of absolute gains for members, rather than rivalry over relative gains. Realism will continue to persist in Southeast Asia, because the ASEAN states face mutual unresolved conflicts, and no consensus exists. An example is the lack of agreement on 'whether external threats to regional order exist or who they may be'.[21] ASEAN's conduct was motivated by both constructivist and realist drives[22] and each of these frameworks explains some of the variance in regional development.

The constructivist component

After ASEAN established itself as a regional group,[23] Myanmar joined three decades later. Constructivists predicated an 'evolutionary, auto-dynamic concept' of integration and cooperation, believing that the latter encouraged the formation of collective identities, the search for shared principles, values and traditions (ASEAN Way). These theorists' understanding of the transnational conditions and regional order held that the security dilemma and power politics were socially constructed phenomena.[24] They argued that the fast propagation of the transnational economic connections in the Asia-Pacific region was underpinning the regional stability. A link to how constructivists engaged with Myanmar's governance was offered by the spillover issue, which was based on the trust in a 'process-oriented concept' of integration, and the idea that 'functional cooperation' produced greater harmonization leading the members of the group to adapt to the normative behavior.[25]

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[20] Ruland. "ASEAN and the Asian Crisis: Theoretical Implications", 424.
[21] Simon. "Realism and neoliberalism: International relations theory", 7.
[22] Ruland. "ASEAN and the Asian Crisis: Theoretical Implications", 423; Simon. "Realism and neoliberalism: International relations theory", 6.
[23] Thanks to the Bangkok Declaration, 1967. Bangkok Declaration. August 8, 1967. Accessed October 30, 2019. http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Transnational/bangdec.pdf
[24] Acharya. "Realism, Institutionalism, and the Asian Economic Crisis", 4-5. Narayan Ganesan and Ramses Amer (eds.). *International Relations in Southeast Asia. Between Bilateralism and Multilateralism*. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010).
[25] Ruland. "ASEAN and the Asian Crisis: Theoretical Implications", 422-3.

With these premises entrenched in the Association, Myanmar was expected to absorb the spillover's encouragement to cooperate. Yet, the repression of ethnic minorities, imprisonment of political opponents, use of forced labor and similar misconduct were not invisible to ASEAN. The latter affirmed adherence to 'justice and the rule of law' and loyalty to the United Nations Charter, but ASEAN held mutual respect for the sovereignty of its members.[26] Changes were hoped for, and were to mature gradually and deliberately, without coercion. All of this applied to Myanmar. Hence, in this enquiry, the constructivist inspection is expected to highlight how ASEAN trusted the benefits of increased regionalism as developments which conveyed economic strength and stability to the region, and by reflection, to Myanmar. It is also expected to stress ASEAN's discreet attitude to Myanmar, relying on the beneficial effect of practical cooperation, trusting Yangon's ability to absorb from the group and harmonize with it.

The realist element

The realist logic followed a different path. The mid 1997 (with its problems owing to the economic crisis in East and Southeast Asia (1997-8)) resuscitated the realist key elements of stability depending on how power was distributed among the main actors of the region. Realists believed that, as the Cold War was concluded, the 'conflicts that had been suppressed by superpower dominance' were going to be unleashed and affect the region.[27] Practical 'self-help' and building up individual state military capabilities was the increased inclination of the ASEAN states.[28] The realists assumed that the excessive creation of transnational economic links carried a 'substantial conflict-causing potential' and expected 'trade-wars and competition for resources and investment' to proliferate. The most visible indication of the realists' pragmatist approach to ASEAN-Myanmar's affairs was their censure of ASEAN's enlargement in 1997, an issue that Myanmar helped to create.

Realists argued that a crucial factor for a successful and viable Southeast Asia-Ten was the economic convergence between mainland Southeast Asia and the new entrants.[29] At the end of 1997, the crisis had reached the economically less integrated Myanmar, which was considerably reliant on Asia's mainland with regard to trade and economics. The military junta had, in that year, freshly concluded a new Sino-Myanmar trade agreement.[30] The extent to which ASEAN felt that Myanmar relied more on China than on the Association[31]

[26] As signatory of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, 1976. Accessed October 3, 2019. http://www.asean.org/1217.htm
[27] Acharya. "Realism, Institutionalism, and the Asian Economic Crisis", 1, 3.
[28] Simon. "Realism and neoliberalism: International relations theory", 5.
[29] Acharya. "Realism, Institutionalism, and the Asian Economic Crisis", 4.
[30] Ruland. "ASEAN and the Asian Crisis: Theoretical Implications", 435, quoting *The Jakarta Post*, May 31, 1997. Accessed October 18, 2019. https://www.thejakartapost.com
[31] Author's interview with ASEAN leader (A). Macau, July 2014; and interview with security analyst (F). Shanghai, July, 2019.

reinforced the realists' prime argument about the mistaken hastened enlargement. It also raised ASEAN's tension about its own limited influence.[32]

The vision of the ASEAN states still being obsessed by pre-colonial imaginations of the external world was a perception that was well rooted in the realist beliefs of certain regional actors. It was particularly strong among the military elites and the way they looked at foreign policy formation. Myanmar was the case in point with its intuitions about unstable interstate relations, strong sense of nationalism and ethno-centrism.[33]

In this investigation, the realist lens is expected to expose ASEAN's preoccupations with external threats and its destabilizing effects, and the fear that China took control of the region with negative consequences with regard to the safety and freedom of the ASEAN states and Myanmar itself. It is likely to reveal suspicions of Yangon's bilateral relations with states external to the group as a symptom that Myanmar's trust in ASEAN was on the decrease. It is believed to reveal ASEAN's less prone attitude, than the constructivist tendency, to rely on the cooperation's positive outcomes on Myanmar. Overall, due to their promise to offer logical explanations of ASEAN's action, the constructivist and realist perspectives are employed to enquire how ASEAN built up its conduct in consideration of the challenges connected to the region and arising from Myanmar.

Balance of power

A sense of uncertainty in the post-Cold War Southeast Asian region was due to a certain conviction that China had aspirations to become the region's absolute power and might decide for military intervention. This possibility would have had deleterious effects on the states of the region in terms of security and independence. In fact, some of the ASEAN's actions was vindicated by the purpose that the region and its members should be neither constrained nor endangered by the dominant presence of China (or of other global hegemons).[34] ASEAN's action has always been characterized by an apparent balance of power factor.[35] Though this vision was associated with realism, it did not include material propagation and military build up; ASEAN supported it normatively.[36] ASEAN's fears of domination well characterized Myanmar regime's perceptions. The military junta was no less nervous concerning external threats, showing paranoia about subversion inside the country and suspicion that insurgent and ethnic groups, helped by their foreign sponsors, planned attacks.[37] This type of Myanmar's behavior has been discernable several times, and more

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[32] An important consequence that was raised at the: Author's interview with security analyst (B), Singapore, February 2014.
[33] Relevant points that have been argued at the: Author's interview with security analyst (C). Yangon, August, 2015.
[34] Michael Leifer. *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia.* (London: Routledge, 1989).
[35] A position that was discussed at the: Author's interview with ASEAN leader (A). Macau, July 2014.
[36] Haacke. "Myanmar and ASEAN", 52.
[37] This judgment was confirmed during the following interviews: Author's interviews with security analyst (B), Singapore, February 2014, and with security analyst (C). Yangon, August, 2015.

recently when the military junta refused international assistance for fear of external intrusion in the country's affairs, in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis' destruction in 2008.

The political challenge

The pressure and provocation that China represented to Southeast Asia (as felt by ASEAN) was based on its military, air and naval power projection. Those states with internal minorities from that country and/or territorial conflicts with it (Malaysia, Indonesia) engaged in a mixed strategy of cooperation and independent military development. In contrast to its distrust of foreign actors, Yangon developed a foreign policy of reception of Beijing,[38] encouraged by the late 1980s western sanctions that isolated Myanmar. A wide Sino business and migrant presence set itself in upper Myanmar,[39] and trade, economic and military assistance and physical access to the Indian Ocean resulted from Myanmar accommodating Beijing's policies.[40]

From the balance of power as a policy perspective it appears that, for its visible connection to China, in the early 1990s Myanmar military junta raised some tension in the old ASEAN nations. It also generated disagreement among the states of the region about the principles of the ASEAN Way. The whole influenced the context of ASEAN's policies.[41] 'A common sense, or even subregional identity', or interest, would have helped to decrease tensions. However, it was no simple to promote, since what may be perceived as essential by one associate to the group may be insignificant to another.[42]

Releasing tensions

By including Myanmar in the Association (1997), ASEAN engaged more openly in the practice of balancing extra-regional influences. Ideally, realists would have suggested greater economic consistency between the new participant, Myanmar, and the old member states in order to obtain a more sustainable Southeast Asia-Ten. They diverged from the constructivists' opinion and pressure to bring Yangon within the group sooner rather than later. However, they also argued that 'membership of ASEAN [had] evident practical utility by comparison with the problems which could arise in its absence'.[43] Preventing the establishment of excessive control on Yangon was a principle to defend. ASEAN showed the ability to react to China's pressure and implication in providing aid and development to Myanmar.

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[38] Simon. "Realism and neoliberalism: International relations theory", 15; Marchi, Ludovica. "Myanmar's Diversification of its Foreign Relations: The European Union". *Asia-Pacific Journal of EU Studies*, 15, no. 1, (2017): 15-32, 20, 22.
[39] Joseph Liow. *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*. (London: Routledge Fourth Edition, 1995), 29.
[40] Thant Myint-U. *Where China meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).
[41] These themes were debated at the: Author's interview with ASEAN leader (A). Macau, July 2014.
[42] Leifer. *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia,* 157.
[43] Leifer. *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia,* 143.

At the same time, ASEAN felt no confidence regarding the risk that Yangon regime's internal dissention might degenerate and spillover, destabilizing the close neighborhood. Although it chose not to interfere with the states' internal decisions by underwriting the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, such concern did not prevent ASEAN from communicating with Yangon,[44] making clear to the military junta that it should undertake steps to initiate a transition process. We explain such behavior as a policy of communication.

Policy of communication

Supported by the same aim of sustaining security and stability in the region, ASEAN also practiced a 'policy of communication'. It was a goal of great interest to both the constructivist and realist narratives. Diversely from the balance of power mode, however, this approach focused on Myanmar's intramural affairs. It was characterized by messages and requests to the military junta to introduce reforms and adopt more respectful behavior concerning essential freedoms. It was driven by the fear that the tensions associated with the conducting of internal affairs impinged on the region undermining it. The calls or warnings that ASEAN used while it focused on Myanmar were a deliberate and motivated choice.[45] It is not to be undervalued that the non-interference discourse of the ASEAN Way was regularized because each member had no desire of renouncing its sovereignty and because it avoided external inquiry about the legitimacy of ASEAN governments, when dictatorship, money politics, human rights abuses and recurrent coup d'états were regionally widespread.[46]

The spillover effect

The idea that problems internal to a state could expand, migrate outside its borders and infect the region was a risk recognized by several observers of ASEAN's affairs.[47] It is well known that the main contribution that the Southeast Asian states could provide to a regional order was to demonstrate themselves capable of resolving an internal debility that has been their striking common feature since independence.[48] It is, likewise, recognized that regional security 'rest[s] on the ability of Southeast Asian states to put their political house in order'.[49] Also, it is acknowledged that the spillover effect of a regime's internal dissension was principally due to the tendency of fragile states, governed by insecure regimes, to surrender to the temptation to strengthen their domestic governance. Such action was done at the price of

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[44] A position that was supported during the: Author's interview with security analyst (B), Singapore, February 2014.

[45] This opinion was strengthened at the: Author's interview with ASEAN leader (A). Macau, July 2014.

[46] Pavin Chachavalpongpun. "Neither Constructive, Nor Engaging: The Debacle of ASEAN's Burmese Policy". In Johan Lagerkvist (ed.). *Between Isolation and Internationalisation: The State of Burma*. (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper 4, 2008: 201-222), 203.

[47] As discussed during the Author's interview with International Relations analyst (D). Yangon, August, 2015.

[48] Michael Leifer. *Foreign relations of the new states*. (Camberwell: Longman Australia, 1974), 109.

[49] Alan Chong. "Southeast Asia: Theory between modernization and tradition?" In Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (eds.). *Non-Western International Relations Theory*. (London: Routledge, 2010: 117-147), 133. Leifer, Michael. "The Security of Southeast Asia". *Pacific Community: An Asian Quarterly Review*, 7, no. 1, (1975): 14-27, 26-7 as reported in Chong (2010, p. 133).

their neighbors, leading to strain and resentment.[50] Since the stability of the region lay at the heart of ASEAN, the latter embarked on a policy of conveying messages to Yangon.

ASEAN's message

The type of message that pervaded its discourse was easily discernable when ASEAN straightforwardly requested the military junta to promote public participation within the country,[51] and to show special responsibilities as outlined by the 'democracy' and 'transition' emphasis of its address.[52] Further developments illustrated by a number of claims indicated that the group employed instruments (denunciation) to exhort change.[53] ASEAN expressed its desire that the junta manage the restructuring,[54] and even spoke strongly for the lack of reform.[55] ASEAN has not held itself back from giving directions. Asking to comply with their commitments and to facilitate society's involvement in the country's matters as well as accelerate transformation were instruments that ASEAN adopted in its communication policy with the military junta. ASEAN's strength materialized in terms of disallowing the military junta to avoid being questioned about the legitimacy of its governance. These messages were largely motivated by ASEAN's need that the tensions related to the junta's domestic conduct did not affect the region, and for security and stability to continue.

A further threat to the ASEAN group's unity was Yangon's feared disenchantment with ASEAN. A weakened ASEAN militated against its aspiration for greater recognition within the international arenas. It also endangered the prospect of security in the region. Encouraging Yangon towards more active participation and contribution to the cohesiveness of the group through dynamic involvement was ASEAN's task.[56] ASEAN tried to motivate

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[50] Acharya, Amitav. *Rethinking Power, Institutions and Ideas in World Politics. Whose IR?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014b), 100.
[51] ASEAN ministers Joint Communiqué. ASEAN 36th Ministerial Meeting. Phnom Penh, June 17, 2003. Accessed September 28, 2019. https://asean.org/joint-communique-of-the-36th-asean-ministerial-meeting-phnom-penh/
[52] ASEAN Declaration Concord II. Bali, October 7, 2003. Accessed October 17, 2019.
www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Transnational/2003Declaration.pdf
[53] For example the demand that Yangon should be excluded from the Association unless certain conditions were met (Malaysia' Prime Minister; Year in Review, 2003), or the call for 'every ASEAN leader [to] send a strong individual message to Yangon' (Siang 2003). Year in Review. "Myanmar (Burma): Year In Review 2003". Accessed October 11, 2019.
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/916894/Myanmar-Burma-Year-In-Review-2003 ; Lim Kit Siang. (2003).
"Malaysian Democratic Action Party". Accessed September 29, 2019.
http://dapmalaysia.org/all-archive/English/2003/sep03/lks/lks2650.htm
[54] An indication of this was the offer, by Thailand's Prime Minister, to mediate between the military junta and the larger regional and international society, and discuss a 'roadmap towards democracy' with all of the countries concerned.
[55] For example, by announcing its opposition to the junta's assumption of the rotating chair of the group's Standing Committee in 2006-7 (ASEAN, Cebu, 2005), and by warning the junta that investment in Myanmar would rapidly cease unless political restructuring were set in motion (ASEAN, Singapore, 2007; Jones, 2009, 392).
ASEAN meeting of Foreign Ministers. Cebu, the Philippines. April 2005. Accessed October 3, 2019.
http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=2005041101.htm
ASEAN, Chairman's Statement of the 13th ASEAN Summit. One ASEAN at the Heart of Dynamic Asia. Singapore, November 20, 2007. Accessed October 3, 2019.
https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/2007
Chairmanâ%C2%80%C2%99s-Statement-Of-The-13th-ASEAN-Summit.pdf; Jones. "Democratisation and foreign policy", 392.
[56] A fundamental view supported at the: Author's interview with ASEAN leader (A). Macau, July 2014; Author's interview with official (F) ASEAN Secretariat. Singapore, August, 2015.

Yangon to conform to the Charter's request to develop good governance[57] and to build up the 'ASEAN Community' through actions that were included in ASEAN's project of restructuring itself.

ASEAN's policy of restructuring itself (hereafter 'ASEAN's restructuring policy')

Taking advantage of the dynamism inspiring the 'one vision, identity, and community sharing' proposing the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN engaged in re-vitalizing the Association. This attitude impacted on Myanmar. The evidence that ASEAN was innovative is suggested by the observation that, '[a]fter suffering a major blow from the Asian financial crisis, ASEAN ha[d] made a recovery, and [wa]s slowly reforming, and perhaps reinventing itself'.[58] Following the reorganization of the economy, ASEAN had an old ambition and vital interest to focus upon, the aspiration of seeking credit more globally. This coincided with enhancing its role as a regional actor.

ASEAN's ambition

The Association's enhanced role could possibly take shape if Yangon were to recognize itself fully as a member of the group. The latter prospect would also have contributed to ASEAN's other aim of preserving security regionally. Weighing against these goals was the risk that Myanmar could discover that ASEAN solidarity was in progressively reduced supply. Some member states were preoccupied that, if ASEAN placed too much pressure on Yangon, the latter might react and abandon the Association.[59] Yangon had already demonstrated its disaffection with ASEAN by being the only state not turning out at the first-ever ASEAN defense ministers' formal meeting, in May 2006. It also gave signs that ASEAN's relevance to Myanmar's foreign policy deteriorated by concentrating on state-to-state bilateral relations in its close neighborhood.[60] If Myanmar were leaving the group, ASEAN's representativeness of the region would have been impaired[61] with obvious repercussion also on its ability of being guardian of security in the region.

The ASEAN Charter and the Community's Social Responsibility

Against the prospect that ASEAN could not represent the Association of Southeast Asian Nations due to Yangon's slipping away were the efforts that ASEAN made to support the ASEAN Charter.[62] Myanmar could not escape the judgment of having a poor 'capacity for

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[57] The ASEAN Charter was published in 2007 by the ASEAN Secretariat in Singapore. Subsequent reprints have been made, as the 21st Reprint of May 2017 which is used in this paper as a source, p. 4. It fixed the six fundamental principles that ASEAN members adhere to. See: https://asean.org/storage/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf Accessed October 5, 2019.
[58] Amitav Acharya. *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*. Third edition. (London: Routledge, 2014), 264.
[59] A relevant opinion sustained at the: Author's interview with ASEAN leader (A). Macau, July 2014.
[60] Haacke. "Myanmar and ASEAN", 58, 60.
[61] A judgment confirmed by the: Author's interview with official (E) ASEAN Secretariat. Singapore, August, 2015.
[62] Author's interview with official (E) ASEAN Secretariat. Singapore, August, 2015.

cooperation ventures'.[63] ASEAN aimed at Myanmar's cooperation, hoping that Yangon would interconnect more widely with the group. This meant trying to motivate Myanmar's goodwill 'to realise an ASEAN Community' that was 'socially responsible'[64] and comply with the Charter's resolution to 'enhance good governance',[65] and join cooperation initiatives including also on security. ASEAN's action demanded more solidarity from Myanmar and contribution to the group's evolution and transformation.

In the context of the innovations owing to the Charter and the chance that Myanmar would connect with the process of structuring the Community, a new fresh indication emerged reversing the feared Yangon's disillusionment with the Association and its demands. Though several steps failed to offer concrete achievements,[66] eventually Yangon's response had later partially taken shape with the reforms by the new President Sein in 2011, and with the April 2012 by-elections and subsequent agreement on a semi-civilian government. Given ASEAN's aspiration for a significant political change as an indication of solidarity, the changes finally (partially) materialized. ASEAN could not object that Yangon was drifting away. ASEAN could believe that it gained some credit internationally in terms of a regional actor aiming at building up some cohesiveness in the group, and at the same time maintaining its ambition as a guardian of security in the region.

The complementarity of ASEAN's policies

We observed that the combination of the actions identified as a 'balance of power', 'policy of communication' and 'restructuring policy' highlight a fair proportion of the developments describing how ASEAN operated in response to the challenges connected to the region and arising from Myanmar. Essentially, each of these policies adds emphasis or stress to the other. For example, the 'balance of power' and the 'policy of communication' are mutually strengthening. Both originated from a sense of uncertainty and lack of security, although the former was concerned with external developments, whereas domestic matters motivated the other. Together, these two policies expanded the grasp and comprehension of ASEAN's behavior in terms of attention to regional security.

Also, the 'policy of communication' and 'ASEAN's restructuring' complement each other. Both contributed to ASEAN's aspiration for a growing role in the region, and by

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[63] Acharya. *Constructing a Security Community*, 58.
[64] ASEAN Charter, Accessed October 5, 2019.
 https://asean.org/storage/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf, 2.
[65] Ibid., 4.
[66] Yangon was expected to engage in a process on national consensus (ASEM7, Beijing, 2008) and accept all political parties' participation in the 2010 general elections (14th ASEAN, Cha-am Hua Hin, Thailand, 2009, paragr. 42) and move towards a 'civilian system of government' (ASEM8, 2010, paragr. 73). ASEM7. Chair's Statement of the Seventh Asia-Europe Meeting. Beijing, October 24-25, 2008. Accessed October 8, 2019. https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/asem/asem7/index.html; ASEAN. Chairman's Statement of the 14th ASEAN Summit. ASEAN Charter for Asian Peoples. Cha-am Hua Hin, Thailand. February 28–March 1 (2009). Accessed September 20, 2019. https://asean.org/chairman-s-statement-of-the-14th-asean-summit-asean-charter-for-asean-peoples-cha-am-28-february-1-march-2009/; ASEM8. Chair's Statement of the Eight Asia-Europe Meeting. Brussels, October 4-5, 2010. Accessed October 4, 2019. https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/asem/asem8/pdfs/chair_state.pdf

consequence raising its profile as an international actor. To comply with this aspiration, Yangon's capacity for cooperation was needed. Omitting the 'communication policy', the idea of Myanmar being encouraged to face its responsibilities of lawful governance and show efforts and capability to sustain the cohesiveness of the group and join the cooperation and security initiatives in the region requested by the 'restructuring policy' would remain unclear.

Likewise, 'ASEAN's restructuring' and the 'balance of power' logics are mutually supportive. The first, by establishing the Charter and supporting the ASEAN Community, intended to contribute to the strengthening and consolidation of the Association and aimed to inhibit outside actors from interfering with the group and the region, which was also the very purpose of the 'balance of power' strategy.

On the whole, these three distinct dimensions of ASEAN's activity, highlighted separately for analytical purposes, contribute towards a better understanding of its conduct and stress that the most important dimension in ASEAN's direct or indirect link to Myanmar was the pursuit and maintenance of security in the region.

The constructivist and realist focus

The review of the literature on the security challenges in Southeast Asia made space for this research in applying the constructivist and realist perspectives to ASEAN's affairs in post-Cold War Southeast Asia. What was helpful in the following of these two lenses? Many instances were found where one or the other focus assisted in pointing out ASEAN's position. The realist view, for example, in the 'balance of power' policy, highlighted ASEAN's reaction to the unintended prospect that the ideology, past inheritances and military and economic supremacy of ASEAN's neighbors interfered with Myanmar's policy. In the 'policy of communication', the realist rationale led to the perception of the influence held by the ASEAN's chair admonishing the military junta (2007) that investment in Myanmar would rapidly cease unless political restructuring were set in motion. In the 'restructuring policy', the realist view helped to detect ASEAN's suspicion that both China's connections with Myanmar and the latter's concentration on state-to-state bilateral relations in the close neighborhood indicated Myanmar's reduced trust in the Association.

The constructivist focus offered further examples. Motivated by the belief in the positive influence on Myanmar of functional cooperation and confident in Yangon's capability of sharing and learning from the group, the constructivist rationale helped to single out ASEAN's hope that the 'restructuring policy' and the 'policy of communication' could produce a positive impact on Yangon by encouraging it to develop legitimate governance and begin to pay attention to security cooperation. In the 'balance of power' action, the constructivist vision helped to recognize the expanded membership of the group as a response to the ASEAN's ambition of confirming the Association's existence. Similarly, within the

same policy, the constructivist emphasis helped to point out how ASEAN consolidated Myanmar's position regionally and in the wider ASEM's sphere by supporting Yangon's participation in the Asia Europe Meeting framework.

The observation through these two lenses led us to uncover how the policies interacted, and distinguish how, from a lens' point of view, policies developed whereas, from the other viewpoint, they materialized. Given that the post-Cold War dynamics of power politics and the prospering of the ASEAN-Way characterized the period under investigation, and that we were backed by the assumption that constructivism and realism 'created a healthy debate',[67] the adoption of these two lenses suited well the enquiry of ASEAN dealing with the challenges to the region while it developed policy on Myanmar.

The support of the interviewees' observations

This investigation also relied on observations resulting from interviews; what was helpful in questioning ASEAN officials and security analysts? The interviewees assisted in offering opinions in support of interpretations, thus providing a link between researched information and analytical elaboration. They helped to explain the purposes behind ASEAN's action and the reasons that backed its policies. They contributed credibility to explanatory details and strengthened our interpretations of the phenomena under investigation. Their comments added authority to the suggestion that certain actions responded to specific tasks. The interviewees' involvement contributed in several ways towards generating insights. For instance, they explained the extent to which Myanmar's behavior was justified by Yangon's military elites' state of mind concerning nationalism and external intervention, underscored ASEAN's fear that the regime's internal dissention would produce multiplying effects compromising the region, and confirmed the claim that ASEAN disliked Myanmar's foreign policy that was friendly towards Beijing. They, again, reinforced the belief, and explained why, ASEAN's action has always been characterized by an apparent balance of power dimension, and also made clear the connection that, if Myanmar had left the group, ASEAN's chances to progress in the international arena as a regional actor would diminish.

Revealing ASEAN's task of encouraging Yangon to interconnect more actively with the group, and explaining that the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Community provided a chance for Myanmar to build greater cohesiveness with ASEAN, the interviewees offered an additional layer to the analytical investigation. Their perceptions of ASEAN's action were also linked to the idea that protecting and enhancing security in the region were the major task of ASEAN's policy. On the whole, the interviewees' commentaries had relevance as ingredients to the substance of the analytical explanation.

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[67] Ba. "Institutional divergence and convergence in the Asia-Pacific?", 306.

Conclusion

This research was set within the observation of ASEAN as a regional actor and aimed to explore ASEAN's policies related to Myanmar before and after its accession to the organization (1991-2012) at the same time dealing with challenges to the region. It argued that the threats of instability in the area around Myanmar, due to several strains there, were a remainder that the country is located in a critical geopolitical space. As those challenges implied a complex variety of ways in which ASEAN related to Myanmar, it was important to place them in focus. This puzzle led to the creation of the central question of this research, which enquired into what was the most important dimension in ASEAN's action regarding Myanmar. Though several kinds of interactions develop between the Association and Yangon which also include economic and cultural aspects, this research placed emphasis on security. Reviewing the explanatory frameworks of ASEAN's affairs in post-Cold War Southeast Asia proposed by the literature, this research found that the dichotomy between the constructivist and realist analytical tools limited the interpretational scope of ASEAN's activity. Applying these two perspectives to ASEAN's interaction with Myanmar, the investigation's findings led to two main conclusions:

• Constructivist and realist lenses assisted in indicating that ASEAN engaged in certain forms of behavior concerning Myanmar that were found to be logically understandable when described as 'balance of power' (explained as a norm, and not as a military build up), 'policy of communication' and 'ASEAN's restructuring policy'. Showing that each of these policies highlighted a proportion of the developments that characterized ASEAN's involvement with Myanmar, the investigation argued that they were complementary. It indicated that if one of the three types of actions were to be omitted, several important details would remain unclear, such as ASEAN's encouragement of Yangon to join its security cooperation initiatives in the region. It ultimately found that this range of policies highlighted that the main dimension in ASEAN's action related to Myanmar was the pursuit and maintenance of security in the region.

• Constructivist and realist lenses together with the observations provided by the interviewees have also been instrumental in highlighting the purposes that lay at the basis of ASEAN's policies. How each operated was shown in the investigation, yet together they contributed towards indicating: ASEAN's expansion as a calculated strategy, ASEAN's perception of Myanmar's reduced faith in the Association, the powerful influence of ASEAN's chair pressing Myanmar, ASEAN's hope to produce positive impacts on Yangon, ASEAN

consolidating Myanmar in the wider ASEM's sphere, and lastly ASEAN's logic of protecting security.

Finally, in terms of its contribution, this investigation encourages other research to widen the discussion on ASEAN as a regional actor by focusing on its interactions with different countries in the region, either debating how ASEAN dealt with the challenges and attempted to enhance its image or, following a different methodology, eventually confirming or supplementing the findings proposed here.

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