

Indonesia in ASEAN: Foreign Policy and Regionalism

By Dewi Fortuna Anwar. *Regional Strategic Studies Programme, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, n.d. xiii + 335pp.*

This book analyzes Indonesia's political and economic commitment to ASEAN. ASEAN comprises six Southeast Asian countries: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. To clarify that commitment, Anwar makes a deliberate attempt to investigate ASEAN's underlying assumptions. Specifically, the organization is intended to promote harmony and peace in the region, given that ASEAN countries are relatively more politically stable and economically developed compared to the nearby Indochinese states. In addition, ASEAN has been perceived as attempting to manage regional order against nonregional powers such as China while strengthening Western ties. The author examines these assumptions on the premise that ASEAN is mainly a distinctive vehicle of Indonesian foreign policy. To do so, he follows Weinstein's approach, which is based on the uses of foreign policy, that is, his analysis does

not adopt a common theory. Thus, he unintentionally goes back and forth to verify what seems to be the main theme of the book: how Indonesia sought regional leadership through ASEAN to achieve its main goals of foreign policy.

To be sure, although Anwar's statement of the problem in the Introduction is rather unclear, he succinctly goes through a historical development of the Indonesian political structure in chapter 1. Essentially, chapter 1 envisages the postindependence nationalist "guided democracy" period of Sukarno to the mid-sixties, when Suharto's military regime took over. In chapter 2, Anwar takes the reader through Suharto's new order, which gave birth to ASEAN in 1966 and 1967. It translates into an attitude of strong anti-communism, a commitment to stability and economic development, a pragmatic (less confrontational) international outlook, and a greater emphasis on the country's economic interests. Chapter 3, develops a thorough examination of the economic and functional cooperation of ASEAN countries inside the bloc and with respect to international problems. This excellent chapter successfully shows that ASEAN's initial goals of separating political from economic goals contradict reality because economic benefits of cooperation are hardly divisible among member countries. Essentially, the largest member country, Indonesia, opposed intraregional, mutually beneficial trade. Instead, ASEAN's main function was relegated to lower levels of economic cooperation, in such a way as to serve Indonesian foreign policy aspirations. From the military side, chapter 4 makes a concise yet clear point that the existence of a nonsecurity aspect of ASEAN helped secure a bilateral military cooperation which is immune to regional disagreements, making ASEAN "a de facto military alliance." Chapter 5 delves into the political aspects of ASEAN. The chapter presents a lucid discussion of the political cooperation enunciated within the ASEAN agreement. In addition, the political significance of ASEAN, as an international bargaining tool to member countries and as conceived by the Indonesian elite, is discussed as it relates to Indonesian international credibility, regional peace and autonomy, and the alleviation of Chinese hostility.

The discussion in chapter 6 mainly focuses on the conflicting perceptions of ASEAN by Indonesian nongovernmental organizations. It reflects mainly on the ambivalence of a large portion of Indonesians such as Muslims, nationalists, counterelite groups, and representatives of the private sector from one side, as opposed to other private authorities who were hoping for a more economically and politically integrated ASEAN. For the ambivalent Indonesian, ASEAN is more a foreign policy vehicle than a development strategy.

In a way, the author has done his succinct analysis a disservice by omitting a discussion of the economic and political ramifications of such vague approaches to regionalism. Understandably, Indonesia and other member countries may have had a different hidden agenda when ASEAN was formed, but the success of such covert goals is, inevitably, a function of the strength of the regional bloc itself. That is, unless ASEAN itself is recognized by other countries as a strong economic and political coalition, any efforts to use ASEAN as a foreign policy shield are unlikely to succeed. As a matter of fact, Indonesia has not seriously considered ASEAN as a means of fostering higher capital formation, pooling regional resources, and expanding intraregional trade. As explained in chapter 7, in order to maintain its competitive edge, Indonesia does not want that to happen.

Furthermore, the book's emphasis on Indonesian foreign policy strategies seems to be period-specific, being more relevant to the 1967-87 time period. As the author acknowledges in his epilogue, the demise of the Eastern bloc and the inception of the "new world order" requires a totally different approach by countries. In fact, the recent trend toward formation of regional blocs in Europe, North America, and the Pacific Rim (not to mention the formation of a free trade area among ASEAN countries themselves in 1992) may strengthen the need for a bolder approach to ASEAN.

Notwithstanding any unintentional flaws, the book will remain a major source for documenting Indonesia's foreign policy tactics and how it approached ASEAN between 1967 and 1987. This book will undoubtedly take those interested in the ASEAN countries and all students of political economy a long way.

Osman Suliman
Department of Economics
Millersville University
Millersville, Pennsylvania