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CHAPTER 10

Progress and Limits in Regional Cooperation: Australia and Southeast Asia

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INTRODUCTION

With the electoral defeat of the Howard government in November 2007, the incoming Rudd government attempted to revive active middle power diplomacy and extend Labor foreign policy traditions of global and regional multilateralism. The centrepiece of the latter was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s Asia-Pacific Community (APC), initially proposed as an ambitious European Union-style body additional to existing regional structures, none of which were considered adequate to a comprehensive and coordinated address of strategic dynamics. China’s rising economic and geopolitical significance and the growing importance of transnational security and environmental challenges were the chief items offered as the rationale for the APC.

Yet despite positive regional anticipation of enhanced engagement with the new Australian government, and some genuine concrete achievements in this vein, Southeast Asian leaders saw the APC as a threat to the status of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and therefore proved to be the principal opponents of Rudd’s new regional governance vision. Arguably the failure to mobilise effective regional coalitions around this key idea echoed some of Rudd’s domestic political problems, which contributed to his replacement as prime minister by Julia Gillard in June 2010 (Callick 2010a). In any case, following the August 2010 federal election resulting in a minority Labor government, Rudd’s appointment as foreign minister consolidated the government’s philosophical commitment to regional multilateralism.

Notwithstanding its limitations in addressing collective problems in Southeast Asia (Acharya 2009; Becson 2009; Nesadurai 2009), ASEAN had, in the lead-up to Rudd’s APC initiative, embedded itself in wider economic, security and other governance forums within East Asia, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN+3 (ASEAN
Plus China, Japan and South Korea. ASEAN members also enjoyed a growing sense of confidence and purpose during 2006–10 through such initiatives as the ASEAN Charter, signed in November 2007, and a range of collective free trade agreements (FTAs) either signed or in advanced stages of negotiation, including with China (Dent 2010; Tiwari 2010). To be sure, Australia was a significant player in some of these developments, not least through the ASEAN-Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (ANZFTA), comprising the most comprehensive coverage of all FTAs concluded with ASEAN. Yet ANZFTA underlined the importance Southeast Asian countries increasingly derived from their economic and strategic articulations with East Asia in addition to their more obvious intrinsic significance for Australian interests.

Naturally the 2006–10 period invites foreign policy approach comparisons between Coalition and Labor governments and their significance for relations with Southeast Asia. Michael Wesley reflected that, despite earlier Coalition rhetoric and predictions by Howard's critics, 'John Howard's conservative pragmatism, the government's preference for multilateralism over multilateralism, and the dogged insistence on the importance of interests, not identity, proved appropriate as the countries of Asia entered a difficult period of transition, and as global enthusiasm for multilateralism waned' (Wesley 2007: 216). However, Wesley also emphasised that rising concern about transnational dynamics—particularly security threats—was pivotal in fostering more extensive and creative Asian engagements than may have initially been envisaged (Wesley 2007: 17). This was certainly borne out in relations with Southeast Asia, and especially Indonesia, during 2006–10. Up to a point, this was consistent with the thinking behind the APC since it conceded the significance of transnational forces. However, the importance Rudd attached to the rise of China reinforced an already strong predisposition towards a rules-based multilateralism not shared by his predecessor. Yet the APC, emblematic of this approach, aroused consternation within Southeast Asia, highlighting the competing interests inherent in modifying regional governance arrangements. In effect, the political economy and geopolitical dynamics of the region posed challenges for the rhetoric and vision of Coalition and Labor governments alike.

Irrespective of the extent and nature of differences in foreign policy approaches by Australian governments in this period, there was striking continuity in the transnational issue attracting most domestic political attention; the passage by boat of asylum-seekers to Australia. As a signatory to the United Nations (UN) Refugee Convention in 1954, Australia is obligated to protect people who have fled their own country to apply to the government of another country for refugee status. Regardless of whether entry to Australia is illegal, this means people are protected from forcible return where they may face persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political views or membership of a particular social group and observance of their human rights. For varying reasons, the Howard, Rudd and Gillard governments all courted controversy through their attempts to contain or divert boats of asylum-seekers.

Despite all the media coverage of the APC and regional governance debates, the bilateral relationship with Indonesia continued throughout 2006–10 to be marked by increasing closeness and maturity, even if also by periodic episodes of friction. In significant part, this reflected the strategic importance to Australian policy-makers of a successful consolidation of democracy in Indonesia, which was only reinforced by a military coup in Thailand in September 2006 and subsequent events that saw the return of political violence and authoritarian rule. It was a stark reminder that the directions of political regimes in Southeast Asia are far from settled and that convergence towards any particular regime type is most unlikely, regardless of economic development (Jaysuriya & Rodan 2007).

### ASIA–PACIFIC COMMUNITY AND ASEAN SENSITIVITIES

Rudd launched his APC idea at the Asia Society in Sydney on 4 June 2008, identifying a series of challenges to an 'open, peaceful, stable, prosperous and sustainable region'. These challenges included the economic rise of China and India, and the need to ensure long-term energy, resource and food security, and also to build greater capacity for dealing with transnational phenomena such as terrorism, natural disasters and disease. Towards this end, Rudd proposed a regional institution that spans the entire Asia–Pacific region—including the United States, Japan, China, India, Indonesia and other states of the region'. Rudd warned, '[t]he danger in not acting is that we run the risk of succumbing to the perception that future conflict within our region may somehow be inevitable' (Rudd 2008g). Accordingly, he announced the appointment of retired senior diplomat and close adviser to former prime minister Bob Hawke in the APC initiative, Richard Woolcott, as Australia's envoy for advancing the APC idea in the region. Rudd’s target date of 2020 for this new regional architecture suggested some appreciation of the difficult task ahead: 'Our special challenge is that we face a region with greater diversity in political systems and economic structures, levels of development, religious beliefs, languages and culture, than did our counterparts in Europe. But that should not stop us from thinking big' (Rudd 2008k). What he possibly did not quite anticipate was how pivotal Southeast Asian governments would prove in frustrating his ambitions.

The APC concept enjoyed support among academics in Australia and the region, who periodically elaborated on the arguments for it (see, for example, Soesastro & Drysdale 2009). However, if Rudd was expecting bipartisan political support at home, it was not forthcoming. Opposition foreign affairs spokesperson Andrew Robb described the APC idea as ‘half-baked’, while former foreign minister in the Howard
government, Alexander Downer, dismissed the plan as simplistic and meaningless (Kerin 2009). More seriously, apart from endorsement from former Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan (Rudd 2008), the initial diplomatic reaction within Southeast Asia was generally lukewarm or negative, as Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith discovered at the 41st ASEAN ministerial meeting. Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and Indonesian Vice-President Jusuf Kalla unequivocally rejected the idea (Nicholas 2008). By late 2008, Woolcott reported that ‘[w]e have encountered some interlocutors who feel that some new arrangement may be necessary in the longer term, but the majority view so far is that it is likely to be more effective, or more workable, to deal through existing organisations’ (as quoted in Walker 2008).

According to Hugh White (2009a), from the outset the APC was marred by failures of preparation and presentation, a view shared by other analysts and commentators (ABC 2008c; Heslince 2009; Leaver 2008: 606–7; Sheridan 2010b). Lack of consultation with governments in Southeast Asia prior to the APC announcement was clearly one such problem, with the Indonesians especially irritated that a major issue of bilateral significance was not aired with them privately first. Former Singapore diplomat and head of the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies at Singapore’s Nanyang Technological University, Barry Desker, also promptly pronounced the APC idea ‘dead in the water’ (as quoted in Walters 2008), criticising the failure to initially institute a consensus-building process within the region (ABC 2008c). Potential concerns about the implications of a new regional body for the role and influence of ASEAN by some of its key players might have been predicted. ASEAN created opportunities for the leaders of the city-state of Singapore, in particular, to play a diplomatic role quite disproportionate to Singapore’s size. The absence of open public criticism of the APC by Singapore’s leaders certainly didn’t infer indifference to the idea, something that Rudd apparently was apprised of before mounting his second major attempt to advance the APC proposal at the eighth annual Shangri-La Dialogue, or Asian Security Summit, in Singapore in May 2009. Given that Rudd was the first political leader outside Singapore invited to deliver the keynote address (Choong 2009), it was clear that the APC was very much on the minds of the hosts.

Rudd’s Singapore address heaped praise on ASEAN as a great historic example, in the context of the Cold War, of regional countries forging a new mechanism to actively and collectively shape their future. Now, he argued, similar thinking was required in a region where security relativities are not static but dynamic, adding that in the absence of a new body like the APC, there is the long-term possibility of ‘strategic drift within our region or, even worse, strategic polarization’ (Rudd 2009a). As for the implications for ASEAN’s future status, Rudd attempted to reassure his hosts on the basis that “[a]n APC could be seen as a natural broadening of the process of confidence, security and community building in Southeast Asia led by ASEAN, while ASEAN itself would of course remain central to the region, and would also be an important part of any future APC” (Rudd 2009a). Referring to Woolcott’s report of ‘little appetite’ for additional institutions (Woolcott 2009), Prime Minister Rudd signalled his determination to explore possibilities ‘without any fixed or final views on a destination’ (Rudd 2009g).

Accordingly, he announced that Australia would host a conference in late 2009 to further advance the APC proposition by bringing together government officials, academics and opinion-makers from the region.

At the resulting Sydney conference of 3–5 December, Rudd resumed his attempt to reassure Southeast Asian leaders that Australia’s middle power diplomacy was no threat to their regional importance:

we claim no monopoly on these questions which is why I have valued the wise counsel of senior regional statesmen such as Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong, Lee Hsien Loong, President Yudhoyono and Prime Minister Najib. Our ambition in Australia has been to open paths to dialogue rather than to close them off, to listen as much as to speak, to encourage conversation rather than seek to dominate it (Rudd 2009a).

ASEAN, he reiterated, ‘should be very much at the core of any future Asia Pacific community’ (Rudd 2009a). Rather than starting afresh, Rudd countenanced the possibility of one or more existing regional institutions evolving in composition and mission to adapt to changing needs.

Nevertheless, by the end of the meeting it appeared that, far from being allayed, the concerns of key Southeast Asian invitees about the APC idea had been reinforced. In particular, Singapore’s Ambassador-at-Large, Tommy Koh, challenged the summing up by co-convenor Michael Wesley, Director of the Lowy Institute for International Policy. Wesley reflected that the meeting evidenced growing support for an APC, encapsulated in the proposal by former South Korean prime minister Han Seung-soo of an emanipulated persons’ group capable of devising a concrete plan for the eventual creation of an Asia-Pacific community (as quoted in Hatcher 2009b). However, Koh complained that Han’s proposal was not discussed at earlier breakout sessions and questioned claims that this proposal enjoyed strong support (Koh 2010). Given Australian officials believed that around 20 countries were in favour of the idea, with only Singapore firmly opposed, Koh’s protestations were disappointing for Rudd and others (Hatcher 2009b). Subsequently, Koh wrote an opinion piece for Singapore’s Straits Times daily newspaper contending the meeting was marked by a lack of clarity, consistency and process (Koh 2010). The March visit to Australia by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was therefore much anticipated, among other reasons, for a possible unequivocal endorsement of the APC to help boost its prospects. However, while Yudhoyono was not hostile to an APC, nor was he enthusiastic enough about it to take up a battle on its behalf with other Southeast Asian governments. Consequently, he sidestepped the issue by suggesting Smith and his Indonesian counterpart, Marty Natalegawa, continue to engage each other on the matter (Dodd 2010a).

Ironically, by June 2010, and on the eve of Rudd losing his prime ministership, Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo seemed to convey a degree of interest in the
essence of Rudd's concept, given that 'I think Australia is happy to leave it to A\nASEAN to discuss how that original configuration should evolve' (as quoted in Kerin 2010). It\nw\nas, however, the assertion of ASEAN's role as the prime mover and shaker on regional\ndiplomacy that was being emphasised here. As one commentator put it, the 'natural order' had been restored (Calicic 2010a). The following month, leaders at the ASEAN\nSummit in Hanoi requested that the United States and Russia become more formally\nintegrated with regional governance arrangements. Foreign Minister Smith explained\nthat '[t]he ASEAN group is now having a conversation about whether the best way\nto effect that is by expanding the East Asia Summit by two countries or by having a\nnew group called ASEAN plus 8' (as quoted in Kerin 2010). As one journalist observed,\neven the most grudging of ASEAN members are now giving the former Australian\nprime minister credit for getting the debate restarted and for doggedly pursuing his\nvision despite the initial furor over a lack of consultation' (Kerin 2010).

AANZFTA

Importantly, ASEAN contention over Rudd's APC initiative did not stand in the\nway of a host of other more cooperative joint endeavours between 2006 and 2010. In\np\np\nparticular, AANZFTA was negotiated by Australian Minister for Trade Simon\nCrean and signed in February 2009. AANZFTA is the largest FTA so far negotiated by\nAustralia, incorporating 12 regional economies, more than 600 million people and a\ncombined gross domestic product of A$3.1 billion. The agreement, which came\nto effect at the beginning of 2010, covers 20 per cent of Australia's total two-way\ntrade, worth A$112 billion, and is scheduled to eliminate tariffs on over 90 per cent of\nproduct lines, representing 96 per cent of all Australian exports to ASEAN countries,\nby 2020 (Ryan 2009; Walters 2009).

The comprehensiveness of AANZFTA is reflected in the fact that it covers not only\nthe cutting and elimination of tariffs, rules of origin and customs procedures impeding\nfree trade, but also sanitary and phytosanitary measures, product standards and\ntechnical regulations, trade in services, people movement, investments, intellectual\nproperty, electronic commerce, competition and dispute settlement (Severino 2010).\nThe harmonisation of national policy and cooperation of national regulators inherent\nin this agreement conforms with Kaniisha Jayasuriya's notion of regulatory\nregionalism that challenges neat dichotomies between national and regional\ngovernance (Jayasuriya 2009; see also Hameiri 2009).

Not coincidentally, AANZFTA was concluded against the background of the failed\nWorld Trade Organization Doha Round talks in mid-2006 and the related proliferation\nof negotiations towards various multilateral and bilateral FTAs (some of them\nconcluded) involving ASEAN member countries, including with emerging economic\ngiants such as China and India (Kowsmann & Venkat 2008). AANZFTA had first\nbeen mooted in 2000, but these developments engendered a greater sense of urgency\nabout consolidating Australia's economic integration with the world's fastest-growing\nregion. Announcing AANZFTA, Crean (2009a) declared that with a level of trade\nexceeding that currently between Australia and Japan or China or the United States, the\nagreement has 'great potential to increase job opportunities for Australian workers'.\n
However, the opportunities and challenges varied for different sectors of the\nAustralian economy. Australian exporters of dairy, horticulture, metals and\navto\n

cative components were projected to be among the main beneficiaries of the\nagreement (Harcourt 2010). With immediate effect from 1 January 2010, for example,\ntariffs were reduced on Australian exports such as wheat and lamb to the Philippines,\nand cheese and grapes to Malaysia. Yet, for workers in the textiles, clothing, footwear\nand automotive industries, the pressures of lower-cost imports were likely to be\nconsiderable, which, as Richard Leaver and Maryanne Kelton (2010: 274) suggest,\nmight help explain the lack of official fanfare surrounding the announcement of\nsuch a momentous agreement as AANZFTA. After all, workers in these industries\nwere the traditional political constituents of Labor. In the case of the car industry,\nCrean managed to negotiate a slower phasing out of tariffs on vehicles manufactured\nin Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand as part of reciprocal arrangements with those\ncountries.

Significantly, at the time AANZFTA came into effect Australia was importing\ntwice the value of merchandise from the region than it exported (Ryan 2009). Foreign\ndirect investment stock from ASEAN also grew 109 per cent from 2003 to 2008,\ncompared with 52.6 per cent growth from the European Union, suggesting ASEAN\nwas also rapidly increasing its investment role in Australia. Some of this involved\nsovereign wealth funds, such as Singapore's Temasek Holdings and the Government\nof Singapore Investment Corporation. Australia's senior trade commissioner for\nA\n

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canada, Rod Morehouse, thus set about trying to alert Australian-based companies to\nthe opportunities they could enjoy as exporters based within ASEAN: 'The clock\nhas started ticking towards 2015, when the ASEAN members state they wish to\nmove to free trade among themselves . . . So it is time for us to be inside the border'\n(Kitney 2009).

IF AANZFTA did not arouse much political and media attention, the proposed\nA$8.4 billion merger of the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) and the Singapore\nExchange (SGX) announced in October 2010 did. Under the plan, chief executive\nofficer and chairman roles would go to the SGX, while the ASX chairman would\nassume the deputy chairman position. Eleven of the 15 directors would also come\nfrom the SGX, which is partly owned by the Singapore government. Rationales for\nthe takeover, which would create the first pan-Asian and the world's fifth-largest stock\nexchange, included better liquidity for listed companies, higher trading volumes, more\ntrading and arbitrage opportunities, access to the biggest institutional investor base in\nthe Asia-Pacific and extended trading hours from two equity markets. SGX and ASX
also faced growing or imminent competition from rival companies and providers of alternative share trading systems (Crowe & Lioddis 2010). Yet some analysts were not persuaded by these arguments and instead saw the takeover as inimical to Australia’s regional financial hub aspirations (see, for example, Swan 2011). Among the hurdles needed to be cleared was gaining the approval of the Australian Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) and the Australian Parliament to exceed a 15 per cent cap on foreign ownership by a single shareholder of the ASX—all the more sensitive given the Singapore government’s stake in the SGX.

Easing political debate in Australia suggested the deal was no certainty, especially in the context (following the 2010 election) of a hung national parliament, where the views of Independent and Australian Greens Members of Parliament (MPs) could ultimately be decisive. Shadow treasurer Joe Hockey said his counterpart, Wayne Swan, needed to show how the merger was in the national interest (Lioddis & Crowe 2010). Meanwhile, Greens leader Bob Brown declared that his party would oppose the deal with Singapore: ‘This is a state that tramples all over freedom of speech, democracy, the rights of oppositions, the ability for public discourse. We don’t see an advantage for this nation in having the stock exchange controlled from Singapore’ (as quoted in Chan 2010). Independent MPs Andrew Wilkie, Tony Crook and Bob Katter were also opposed. Katter asserted that what was at stake was ‘a piece of governmental process; what you are actually handing over here is part of the sovereignty of the country. If you sell the ASX, you may as well put up the High Court for sale’ (as quoted in Uren 2010). Prime Minister Gillard took the opportunity during the October ASEAN Summit in Hanoi to discuss the contentious proposal with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. The latter subsequently declared that ‘whatever the regulators work out, and whatever the shareholders decide, so be it’ (as quoted in The Straits Times 2010), having obviously been appraised of the complex domestic Australian politics involved. An FIRB recommendation was not anticipated before mid-2011, after which a political decision would be required on the proposed merger.

SECURITY AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

As a stark example of a sustained absence of a domestic political consensus, the question of how to respond to asylum-seekers passing through Southeast Asia headed for Australian waters had few rivals during the period 2006–10. The issue had significant ramifications for bilateral relations with Indonesia and Malaysia in particular. This was especially evident—as further to the flight of civilians affected by events in Afghanistan—civil war in Sri Lanka and eventually the bloody defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam displaced around 200,000 people and accentuated Tamil fears of ethnic and political persecution (Leaver & Kelton 2010: 273). During the period under review, the Howard government’s ‘Pacific solution’ policy of transporting intercepted boats of asylum-seekers to Australian-funded detention centres for refugee processing in third countries—principally the tiny Pacific island of Nauru (not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention) and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea—was overturned by the Rudd Labor government. By 2010, though, Rudd and, in turn, Gillard saw the need for their own regional solutions in an attempt to limit the passage of boats.

Significantly, the extent of public controversy in Australia over so-called ‘boat people’ did not equate with any objective assessment of either the security threat or the absolute numbers of asylum-seekers involved, which accounted for as little as 1.5 per cent of Australia’s annual immigrant intake of 190,000. The approximately 140 boats carrying an estimated 6000 asylum-seekers between 2007 and mid-2010 was described in the Asian edition of the International Herald Tribune as ‘figures that pale in comparison with the tens of thousands of refugees and illegal migrants that converge on Europe and the United States every year’ (Foley 2010; see also van Onselen 2010b).

To be sure, since the Howard government’s establishment of the Bali Process in 2002, cooperation improved markedly among the 50 Asia-Pacific countries involved in trying to combat people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crimes. This particularly applied to the Bali Process joint chairs, the governments of Australia and Indonesia, who continued extensive collaborative efforts from 2005 to 2010 in these and other areas (see Cook 2009). Nevertheless, sensitivities over the management of asylum-seeker traffic did arise.

Indonesian concerns that West Papuan separatists could arrive by boat and secure asylum in Australia was one issue of bilateral tension to surface. In January 2006, 43 Papuans reached Australia’s shores at Cape York and immediately claimed asylum. By March, 42 had been granted asylum, with the other being granted the same status by August (McDougall & Edney 2010: 217). Accordingly, all were released from detention on Christmas Island and transferred to mainland Australia on temporary resident visas. Australia’s Ambassador to Indonesia, Bill Farrer, was called before an Indonesian parliamentary committee to explain the asylum decision. Among other irritations was the fact that whereas asylum-seekers from the Middle East were processed under the ‘Pacific solution’ on Nauru or Manus Island, West Papuans were processed domestically on Christmas Island and in strict accordance with Australian refugee law (Leaver & Machin 2006: 633–4).

Against this background, the Indonesian government welcomed the Howard government’s subsequent 2006 Asylum Bill, intended to move all refugee application processing, including cases where people have landed on the Australian mainland, to Nauru or Manus Island (Ungerer 2007a: 277–8). However, the withdrawal of the Bill after defeats in the Senate from government ranks reinforced Indonesian government anxieties. Ultimately, the Howard government addressed these through the Framework for Security Cooperation (known as the Lombok Treaty), signed in Lombok on 13 November 2006. This was more detailed than its four-clause precursor,
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which was initiated by Paul Keating’s government in 1993 (Walters 2006b). Ostensibly an agreement about how to cooperate on counter-terrorism and combating transnational crime, it covered defence, law enforcement, intelligence-sharing, maritime and aviation security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, emergency relief and people-to-people links. Fundamentally, it consolidated various preexisting initiatives (Cotton 2008: 128). However, Article 2 committed signatories to ‘not in any manner support or participate in activities by any person or entity which constitutes a threat to the stability, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of the other party’, including an unusual guarantee to include among such persons or entities ‘those who seek to use its territory for encouraging or committing such activities, including separatism, in the territory of the other Party’ (OAT 2006), a clear reference to the Free Papua Movement. In many ways the Lombok Treaty was emblematic not just of the depth and priority of the Howard government’s Asian engagement but also of the centrality of security considerations to this unanticipated foreign policy orientation. The Treaty was signed in February 2008 soon after Labor came to office, underlining its bipartisan support.

With the advent of the Rudd government, bilateral relations with Indonesia looked likely to strengthen further. In November 2007, Indonesian President Yudhoyono was among the first international leaders to congratulate Rudd by phone (malaysiahi 2007b), inviting him to the following month’s United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Bali. In the president’s keynote address in Bali, Yudhoyono further congratulated Rudd for immediately having ratified the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases, which Howard had refused to ratify. The tone was a warm one indeed: ‘To Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, I say to you: Welcome aboard, mate!’ (Yudhoyono 2007). By the end of 2008, Rudd had visited Indonesia three times and met with Yudhoyono half a dozen times, underlining the importance attached by the new government to the relationship, described in the same year by Rudd as one of ‘inescapable partners’ and as a ‘historic high’ by Smith (Anjiah & Budianto 2008). Yet among the issues that were to periodically temper this new high in bilateral enthusiasm, the issue of asylum-seekers loomed large.

Intensification of the civil war in Sri Lanka coincided with a sharp rise in the number of boats carrying asylum-seekers into Australian waters, from seven in 2008 to 59 the following year, and 82 in the first seven months of 2010. The numbers of asylum-seekers remained modest by international standards: 2726 for 2009 and 3532 by July 2010 (Maley & Taylor 2010; Tillett 2010). Nevertheless, domestic concerns, expressed through talkback radio in particular, combined with Coalition charges that Labor’s policy was responsible for the trend. In this context, the Rudd government looked to Indonesia and other regional neighbours to play an enhanced role in pre-empting the arrival of asylum-seekers in Australian waters. Yet despite cooperation between Australian, Indonesian and Malaysian authorities reportedly resulting in as many as 86 boat ‘dissolutions’ in the 12 months from November 2008 (Leaver & Kelton 2010: 274), bilateral tensions surfaced over the extent and nature of Australian government expectations in regional strategies to prevent boats entering Australian waters.

One controversial incident occurred on 16 October 2009, when Australia’s Customs and Border Protection Service vessel the MV Oceanic Viking rescued 78 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers on a sinking boat in Indonesian search and rescue area waters. The Australian government maintained that the asylum-seekers should disembark in Indonesia, a prospect not welcomed by Indonesian authorities, who were constrained by the limited resources available to assist the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in processing resettlement claims. Moreover, the asylum-seekers demanded that they be taken to Christmas Island for processing by Australian authorities, refusing to disembark at the nearby high-security Tanjung Pinang detention centre built with A$8 million of Australian funding on Indonesia’s Bintan Island (Leaver & Kelton 2010: 274). Provincial governor Tsmothz Abdullah asserted that Indonesia was not a ‘dumping ground’ for refugees and questioned where the money would come from for food and other expenses. Indonesian officials also declared that any forcible removal of individuals from the Oceanic Viking would be the responsibility of the Australian crew (Fitzpatrick & Maley 2009).

The month-long impasse only ended with asylum-seekers disembarking for Tanjung Pinang after negotiations between Prime Minister Rudd and President Yudhoyono resulted in the former offering rapid refugee claim processing and the Indonesians reluctantly accepting the boat ‘on humanitarian grounds’ because of a sick child on board. Opposition accusations of special treatment for these asylum-seekers added to the Rudd government’s problems at home (Budianto 2010; Doherty 2009). Meanwhile, on 11 October, at the request of Rudd to Yudhoyono (Allard 2010b), the Indonesian navy had already apprehended an Australia-bound boat carrying 254 Sri Lankans in Indonesian waters (SBS 2010). Taken to the port of Merak in northwest Java, these asylum-seekers were also engaged in a protracted stand-off with authorities, refusing to disembark and threatening to burn the boat. It took six months for the final 113 asylum-seekers to be coerced from Port Merak, many angered and frustrated that they could not extract the same deal of rapid resettlement that those on board the Oceanic Viking had secured from Australia. Complaints about harsh conditions at Tanjung Pinang followed (Fitzpatrick & Kervelas 2010).

Indonesia’s head of diplomatic security, Sujatmiko, explained that ‘[f]or the Indonesian Government these people are illegal people, illegal immigrants and the place for them is actually the jail’, adding that in this instance they would not be treated as such and that ‘as long as they are cooperating we will continue to assist them in the process of verification as well as resettlement process’. His invitation (not taken up) to Australian embassy officials to join him in a meeting with an asylum-seeker delegation to try to break the deadlock highlighted Indonesia’s rejection of the notion that this was simply Indonesia’s problem (ABC 2010e). Indonesian concerns were intensified when the Australian government announced on 9 April that it was suspending asylum
claim processing from Sri Lankan and Afghan asylum-seekers for three months. The Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Primo Alui Joelito, explained, ‘This means they have to transit in one place and unfortunately the place is Indonesia so to some extent of course we will feel the difficulty in having them in our territory’ (ABC 2010a). Greg Barton warned of an Indonesian perception that the carefully constructed and strong relationship with Indonesia was in danger of being imperilled for domestic political reasons (Callick 2010d).

Nevertheless, on 10 March 2010, in the first speech by an Indonesian leader to Australia’s parliament, and on his second official visit to Australia as president, Yudhoyono announced his loud applause that a new law to criminalise people smuggling, punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment, would be introduced in Indonesia (Dodd 2010b). Both countries also signed the Implementation Framework for Cooperation to Combat People Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons during Yudhoyono’s visit. Concerns were raised, though, that the proposed people smuggling law was not a new suggestion—the original proposal had nominated a ten-year jail sentence—and that it was not a high priority on the Indonesian legislative agenda (Fitzpatrick & Dodd 2010).

As it transpired, although the Bill to criminalise people smuggling was due to be voted on in December 2010, it was indefinitely postponed because of ‘language and editing’ problems (Alford 2010b). The Framework was also vague (see DPM&C 2010a). An inherent limitation to the scope for cooperation also arose from Indonesia not being a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and having no intention of becoming so (Sheridan 2010a).

More fundamentally, on 1 August 2010, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Four Corners television program exposed allegations of widespread and high-level corruption among Indonesian immigration officials, police, and military, who were accused of aiding people smuggling and taking bribes to let boats carrying asylum-seekers travel to Australia. These allegations included routine bribes of US$20,000 paid by people smugglers to army officers to secure protection for their boats (ABC 2010g). One of the smugglers filmed in the program was arrested in 2001 under laws introduced by the Howard government to prosecute people smugglers who arrived in Australia. Despite his two years in prison, he was shown to be back in business. Clearly, without addressing endemic problems of corruption in Indonesia, neither Labor nor Coalition policies appeared to have strong prospect of success (Neighbour 2010).

In any case, so problematic had the asylum-seeker issue become for Labor’s 2010 re-election prospects that it was among the first that new Prime Minister Gillard nominated as warranting urgent policy attention. With an eye to voters in marginal outer suburban electorates—especially in southwestern Sydney, where ‘shock jock’ talkback radio programs are disproportionately popular and Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott’s hyperbole of Australia being exposed to a ‘peaceful invasion’ appeared to resonate (van Onselen 2010a)—Gillard asserted that anxiety about border controls did not equate with racism or intolerance (Kearney 2010). Gillard also announced that she was seeking to negotiate a regional centre in Timor-Leste, already a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, for processing people seeking refuge in Australia. However, this proposition proved immediately contentious within Timor-Leste, prompting the passing of a parliamentary resolution rejecting the idea (Allard 2010a; Shanahan 2010b). It also generated concerns within the Indonesian government since Jakarta received no prior briefing, despite having hitherto been Australia’s closest, if not the most effective, partner in trying to counter people smuggling (Allard 2010c). Even after a subsequent briefing in Jakarta by Foreign Minister Smith, his counterpart, Nataprawira, was noncommittal about the concept (Garrill 2010).

Among additional measures announced by Gillard were new land-based policing surveillance and investigative equipment for partner law enforcement agencies in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Malaysia was recognised as a major staging post for asylum-seekers trying to reach Australia, often via Indonesia. In June 2009, the Sydney Morning Herald quoted Indonesian officials who claimed that as many as 10,000 would-be asylum-seekers in Malaysia were in readiness to start journeys to Australia (Allard & Narushima 2009). In July 2009, Rudd raised the issue with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak in Kuala Lumpur, and Najib offered ‘a categorical assurance to Rudd that we would do all that we can to prevent the flow of illegal immigrants to Australia and certainly we do not want Malaysia to be known as a transit point for smuggling’ (as quoted in malaysiakini 2009). Plans were afoot by mid-2010 to triple the maximum prison sentence for people smugglers to 15 years (Zappi 2010). More concretely, in October 2010, Malaysian authorities utilized information passed on from Australian counterparts to bust a major people smuggling ring targeting Australia-bound Afghan asylum-seekers (Probyn & Butterfly 2010).

After the August general election, the Labor government sought to advance its regional asylum-seeker processing strategy. This included a meeting in Dili between Minister for Immigration Chris Bowen and Timor-Leste President José Ramos-Horta. In an apparent reference to the limit of 1000–2000 people set by Timor-Leste in relation to any agreement for a potential processing centre in its territory, Bowen mentioned the possibility of “various models” that could include “a centre or centres elsewhere” (Maley 2010). Meanwhile, Gillard returned from Malaysia and Indonesia in early November without extracting any firm commitments. During the visit to Indonesia, at President Yudhoyono’s invitation, and during which Gillard announced Australia would spend A$500 million building schools in Indonesia, Yudhoyono simply declared that the Bali Process in early 2011 would provide an opportunity to discuss “how to best and efficiently deal with the issue of people-smuggling and trafficking in persons” (as quoted in Franklin 2010).

The breaking up and sinking of the SIEV 231 in wild seas against the coastal cliffs of Christmas Island on 15 December 2010 tragically and dramatically underlined the domestic and regional political challenges for Labor on asylum-seekers. An estimated...
48 men, women and children were lost, with only 30 bodies able to be recovered. Among the 53 survivors were three orphaned children (King 2010). As an inquiry began into how the boat could encroach so far into Australian waters without interception, the government hoped questioning of three Indonesian crew survivors might at least precipitate effective cooperation between Australian and Indonesian authorities and possible criminal charges under Australian law of manslaughter and reckless endangerment of life (Allard 2010a). Meanwhile, the Opposition renewed its call for a return to the previous Howard government's 'Pacific solution' and to temporary protection visas for unauthorised boat arrivals (Maiden 2010). Abbott also rejected an offer from Gillard of a bipartisan investigation into the facts of the Christmas Island tragedy, claiming instead that tougher border protection policies could have averted the disaster (AAP 2010b).

POLITICAL REGIME DYNAMICS AND BILATERAL RELATIONS

Southeast Asian political regime developments during the period 2006–10 included the consolidation of Indonesia's embryonic democracy, the brutal crushing of the 'saffron revolution' in Burma (Myanmar) in 2007, the return to authoritarian rule in Thailand and increasing tensions in Malaysia over the harnessing of state institutions for the political persecution of ruling coalition opponents and critics. Such dynamics did not chieflу shape Australia's bilateral relations but did at times generate opportunities or challenges for Australian diplomacy.

Most conspicuous in this regard was the maturing of Australia–Indonesia relations. During the Indonesian President's three-day visit to Australia in March 2010, Prime Minister Rudd was effusive in his praise of political regime developments since the fall of Suharto and the New Order regime in 1998. Welcoming President Yudhoyono to Canberra, Rudd observed that '[t]he people of Indonesia enjoy a free media, an open society and religious tolerance', adding that, '[i]n Indonesia, democracy now has strong foundations' (Australia, House of Representatives 2010b: 2134). Yudhoyono was appointed an Honorary Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia in recognition of his work in strengthening bilateral relations and in promoting democracy and development. While this may have been a generous interpretation of Yudhoyono's particular contribution to democracy in Indonesia, it highlighted the importance the Australian government attached to encouraging political pluralism and its perceived utility for peaceful and harmonious bilateral relations. The 2009 Defence White Paper, Defining Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030, speculated that an Indonesian retreat to an 'authoritarian or overtly nationalistic regime' could generate 'strategic risks' (DOD 2009a: 35). Rudd government assistance to the Bali Democracy Forum, launched in December 2008 to promote regional cooperation

on democratic political dialogue and practical initiatives, was another expression of support for Indonesia's democratic consolidation.

Yudhoyono acknowledged in his speech to the Australian Parliament that shared responses to non-traditional threats—including terrorism, infectious disease, the global financial crisis and climate change—were integral to increased cooperation during his tenure (Punnett 2010a). Significant events on his watch reinforcing and extending cooperation included the bombings at the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels on 17 July 2009, which killed nine people (including two suicide bombers) and injured a further 40 (Arshad 2010). The joint Rudd–Yudhoyono announcement that there would in future be annual meetings of the respective foreign and defence ministers underlined the desire to institutionalise and further develop collaboration on non-traditional security threats.

Significantly, Yudhoyono's speech included a preparedness to concede and engage differences of perspective in a constructive, critical manner (Australian 2010c), reflecting a growing maturity of the Australia–Indonesia relationship. This in part reflected the narrowing—due to democratisation—of what nevertheless remained a substantial gap in the respective political cultures. Accordingly, Yudhoyono cautioned that while government-to-government ties had never been better, he was concerned about ill-informed perceptions of Indonesian society on the part of Australians and vice versa. 'There are Australians who still see Indonesia as an authoritarian country or a military dictatorship or as a boodle of Islamic extremism, or even as an expansionist power', observed the Indonesian President (Yudhoyono 2010: 2139). Meanwhile, there were Australians suffering from what Yudhoyono labelled 'Australia-phobia'—those who believe that the notion of White Australia still persists, that Australia harbors ill-intention towards Indonesia', which led him to assert that '[w]e must expunge these preposterous mental caricatures if we are to achieve a more resilient partnership' (Yudhoyono 2010: 2139).

Yudhoyono said he was 'taken aback when I heard that in a recent Lowy Institute survey 54 per cent of Australian respondents doubted that Indonesia would act responsibly in its international relations' (Yudhoyono 2010: 2139), notwithstanding a degree of improvement—particularly among younger Australians—in public attitudes towards Indonesia as indicated in the Lowy Institute for International Policy polling conducted during and after Yudhoyono's visit, the President's concerns appeared well founded. For example, when asked whether 'Indonesia is more a threat to Australia or less a threat than it was 15 years ago', 38 per cent of Australians said there was 'no change', while 33 per cent said it was 'more of a threat' (Hanson 2010: 7; see also Pietsch, Clark & He 2010: 174–5).

Probably the most emblematic symbol of the maturing of the relationship, though, was Yudhoyono's gesture on the lingering diplomatic score caused when five Australian journalists were killed in Bali during the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1997. In 2007 the New South Wales Deputy Coroner, Dorelle Finch, found that the five were
executed to stop them revealing details of the invasion. The Australian film Balibo, released in 2009, portrays the five being executed by Indonesian troops and was banned in Indonesia on the grounds that it failed to show an Indonesian perspective and would strain relations with Australia (Australian 2011a). However, one of Indonesia's leading news magazines, Tempo, ran a cover story that included an interview with a witness corroborating the execution claims in the film. Yudhoyono, a former army general and platoon commander in East Timor, issued a joint statement with Rudd expressing sympathy for those bereaved by the tragedy, including Shirley Shackleton, the widow of journalist Greg Shackleton. Shirley Shackleton, who was present at the formal parliamentary lunch for Yudhoyono as the guest of Independent Senator Nick Xenophon, described the long overdue statement as 'a miracle' (Sheridan 2010b).

Meanwhile, Australian leaders were, for different reasons, in the sights of two former Malaysian ruling party colleagues: former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad and former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim. During his 22 years in office until 2003, Mahathir was consistently suspicious of, and even hostile towards, Australian attempts at leadership in regional integration initiatives. Howard government criticisms of Anwar's political persecution during the late 1990s added to those tensions. Yet notwithstanding the difficulties of the APEC issue already noted, formal ties between Australia and Malaysia improved significantly upon Mahathir's retirement. To be sure, Mahathir's spats with some former counterparts were not over. In early 2007, he launched the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal (KLWCT) to hear complaints by Iraqis, Palestinians and others against world leaders in relation to alleged crimes against humanity, believing that the existing International Criminal Court in The Hague was biased. His core targets were John Howard, George W Bush and Tony Blair for their roles in the Iraq War. Mahathir derided Howard as the 'pocket Bush of the bushlands of Australia' (malaymail.com 2007a). The KLWCT had neither legal authority nor the backing of any government, but it began in late October 2009 by putting on the record some harrowing torture allegations by former Guantánamo Bay detainees (Dass 2009).

During his first visit to Malaysia as prime minister in July 2008, Rudd sought to capitalise on Mahathir's departure and to foster more harmonious diplomatic relations with Prime Minister Badawi than Hawke, Keating or Howard had experienced with Mahathir. Abdulkhalq had already welcomed Rudd's position on Iraq and willingness to sign the Kyoto Protocol as a good basis for closer ties with Malaysia (malaymail.com 2007b). Joint training of regional personnel for UN peacekeeping operations was announced during Rudd's visit, which, together with a scheme to train teachers for Afghanistan, formed the basis of what the Australian Prime Minister described as a 'new phase in the relationship between Australia and Malaysia' (as quoted in malaymail.com 2008b). Rudd praised Malaysia's 'vibrant' and 'robust' democracy as an example to the Muslim world (Williams 2008). This was against the background of the March 2008 general election, at which Opposition parties, united by Anwar, improved from just 21 seats gained in 2004 to 82; meanwhile the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition dropped from 198 to 140 seats. Given the constraints within which political competition operates in Malaysia (Mohamad 2008), presumably Rudd's choice of words was meant to reinforce the legitimacy of those electoral gains and toleration of greater political pluralism.

However, subsequent to the 2008 elections, Anwar faced new charges of alleged sodomy, which he vigorously denied. He thus wanted Rudd to take this issue up during his visit: 'Abdullah needs to be told that he cannot use institutions like the police and attorney-general's office and the judiciary to intimidate witnesses and fabricate evidence' (as quoted in malaymail.com 2008a). Adhering to protocol to avoid a diplomatic row, though, Rudd declined to meet with Anwar or his wife, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, the President of the Opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat (malaymail.com 2008c). Later that year, while addressing the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne, Anwar criticised Rudd for being overly concerned with appeasing Malaysia's 'corrupt leaders' in a fashion that adversely affected the Opposition: 'To use terms like "robust democracy" when the entire battle is against an authoritarian order with all the institutions being corrupt or compromised, that is, of course, an issue', Anwar stated, adding, 'What is worse is when the ruling establishment highlighted this statement [by Rudd] and used it in their campaign against us' (as quoted in Rood 2009).

The period under review was also one in which one of the most celebrated recent transitions in Southeast Asia from authoritarian rule soured. Turbulent events in Thailand included a military coup in September 2006 that removed the elected Thaksin Shinawatra-led Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party government and a subsequent constitutional coup in December 2008 that brought down the elected successor to TRT, the People's Power Party, headed by Samak Sundaravej (Connors & Hewston 2008; Jagan 2008; Ungpakorn 2008). The resulting government, led by Abhisit Vejajiva and his Democrat Party coalition, had by the end of 2010 still not faced an election—an issue central to the mass mobilisation of the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship, or so-called 'Red Shirts', in their struggle with the pro-military and pro-monarchy 'Yellow Shirts'. At least 90 people were killed and 2000 injured when, in May 2010, security forces crushed a two-month Red Shirt occupation of Ratchaprasong Road in the centre of Bangkok. Subsequently, under a state of emergency, Opposition leaders were arrested or went missing while massive censorship was enforced, including the banning of pro-Opposition media and the blocking of more than 13,000 websites (Lopez 2010; Pavin 2010).

Such was the conflict that the planned December ASEAN Summit in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai was initially postponed for a month. At this time, both Bangkok airports were under Yellow Shirt occupation, and prospects of disruptions at the summit loomed, despite Somchai Wongswan's declaration of a partial state of emergency (Dodd 2008a). However, by January the constitutional coup had changed the government, and the jet carrying Prime Minister Rudd to the postponed summit
did an about-turn upon receiving news that the Pattaya conference venue had been stormed by hundreds of Red Shirt protesters (Allard & Gordon 2009). The ASEAN Summit was this time cancelled. The Rudd government was careful not to be seen to be taking sides in the deeply polarised struggle that was unfolding. In the face of the May 2010 violence, though, Foreign Minister Smith stated that ‘...the last thing that we ... want to see is Thailand revert to military rule and there have been plenty of urgings in recent times for the military to take charge’ (as quoted in the Age 2010).

Meanwhile, in military-ruled Burma, anti-government street protests involving thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns in the so-called ‘saffron revolution’ of September 2007 resulted in 31 people killed and 300 arrested (Age 2008). Consequently, in October 2007, financial sanctions were added by the Howard government to the existing ban on defence exports. Subsequently, in February 2010, Foreign Minister Smith aligned himself with the US government’s conclusion that a sanctions-only policy to isolate Burma’s military had not worked. Although neither US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton nor Smith publicly acknowledged it, China’s preparedness and growing capacity to supply arms, train defence personnel and provide investment, finance, technical support and assistance to build industrial infrastructure were among the countervailing factors at work (Sharma 2010).

Clinton argued that appropriate sanctions and humanitarian assistance were needed to influence the so-called ‘roadmap to democracy’, under which plan Burma’s generals claimed to be committed to potential political change. Smith also pointed out that detained National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi had offered in September 2009 to work with Burmese authorities to have international sanctions withdrawn. Accordingly, Smith announced a 67 per cent aid increase of A$50 million for each of the next three years. Among the early initiatives was a new scholarship scheme to ‘target Burmese with potential to build civil society and improve service delivery, including in health, education and agriculture’ (Smith 2010b).

Burma’s first elections for 20 years in November 2010 were widely criticised for severe restrictions on participation and competition, and for the preserving of 25 per cent of the parliament for direct military appointments. Predictably, pro-army parties enjoyed huge wins. Foreign Minister Rudd dismissed the results as ‘conducted under patently unfair election laws’ (as quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald 2010c). However, the subsequent release of Aung San Suu Kyi was welcomed. Prime Minister Gillard wrote personally to her, ‘Jo Aung San Suu Kyi can have in her hands words that express the emotions of the Australian people to her for her courageous struggle for democracy over such a period of time’ (as quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald 2010a). Rudd emphasised, though, that there was still ‘complete uncertainty’ about the conditions of her release and the freedoms available to her, and thus ‘the need for the entire international community to maintain pressure on the Burmese regime for the future’ remained (as quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald 2010a).

CONCLUSION

Australia—Southeast Asia relations during the period 2006–10 were consolidated and extended in relation to a range of cooperative economic and non-traditional security endeavours, despite ASEAN concerns about Australian ideas on wider Asia-Pacific governance arrangements for the future. However, the APC proposition was not formally abandoned by the Gillard government, nor had the rationale behind it been completely dismissed by ASEAN member country governments. Even embarrassing WikiLeaks revelations that Rudd had told Clinton that the real goal of the APC was to limit China’s dominance of the region (Callinicos 2010b), while clearly not helpful, did not necessarily mean the end of interest in some form of more comprehensive regional multilateralism. After all, Southeast Asian governments were seeking to strike a balance between a strong embrace of China’s economic rise, on the one hand, and continuing US engagement in the region, on the other. The prospects of anything approximating the APC emerging, though, seemed still to rest heavily on the strategic importance of ASEAN not being diminished in the process.

Yet ASEAN’s own limitations and internal tensions could also be important to the strategies and direction of Australian foreign policy. As the history and content of the 2008 ASEAN Charter revealed, ASEAN faced challenges in devising institutions that reflected pragmatically inspired commitments to the goals of democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance, constitutional government and social justice—goals echoed to varying degrees in Australian aid and foreign policy. Against the background of sustained international concern about ASEAN’s inaction on the Burmese military regime’s brutal repression of political opposition (Jones 2008), the Charter’s corollary, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), was established in 2009. However, AICHR’s lack of enforcement powers and its observance of the ASEAN principle of non-interference in members’ domestic affairs disappointed human rights advocates within and beyond the region and was a matter of contention between different ASEAN members (Kavi 2009).

Of course, competing interpretations of the Charter’s goals and institutions among different state and non-state actors within Southeast Asia may or may not become a significant site for conflict in the years ahead. Irrespective of the extent of conflict that results from the introduction of the Charter, struggles over how to interpret these goals are integral to continuing attempts to consolidate or transform political regimes in Southeast Asia. China’s emergence as a superpower who seeks to promote neither liberal nor democratic norms in Southeast Asia, but whose markets and investment will assume increasing importance, is potentially important in relation to the policy options and political strategies open to governments and other political forces in Southeast Asia—and those engaging with them. Moreover, if Australian foreign policy has effectively conceded the centrality of ASEAN to an enlarged regionalism, then the domestic character of the various ASEAN regimes could have a considerable bearing...
on exactly what sort of regionalism becomes possible. Hitherto, selective ASEAN recourse to the principle of non-interference has, for instance, limited collective action on pressing environmental issues, not just human and civil rights issues.

This could mean a far less comprehensive and ambitious form of regionalism than that envisaged by Rudd and the Labor government—and one with much less political accountability to citizens. Viewed in this way, struggles between democratic and authoritarian forces and ideologies in Southeast Asia are of increasing strategic importance to Australian foreign policy objectives.