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Chapter 9

Contrasting Cases: Explaining Interventions by SADC and ASEAN

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Regional integration organizations (RIOs) sometimes intervene to preserve and promote democracy in their member states: Mercosur intervened in Paraguay (see Ribeiro Hoffmann, chapter 10), EU member states agreed sanctions against Austria, Caricom intervened in Haiti and ECOWAS intervened in Sierra Leone to restore an overthrown democratic government. Nonetheless, RIOs also sometimes accept member states' violations of democratic principles. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has intervened in Lesotho, but not in Zimbabwe. ASEAN intervenes in Myanmar,¹ but not in Thailand. This chapter explores the conditions under which a RIO is willing to intervene if democratic principles are threatened in its member states, as an aspect contributing to the output legitimacy of a RIO.

RIOs, Interventions and Democracy

For our purposes, an intervention is defined as the interference in the domestic affairs of a member state with the aim of preserving democracy – for instance, ensuring that the outcome of an election is respected or defending a democratically elected government against an actual or imminent military coup. Such interventions may range from verbal condemnation to economic sanctions or military invasion (Nye 2005, 158). There is a large body of literature on interventions, primarily focusing on the humanitarian interventions of the United Nations (see Wheeler 2000). However, these UN interventions differ in both aim and scope from the interventions made on the part of RIOs. The aim of the UN interventions is the protection of civilians against genocide and large-scale killing, rather than the protection of democracy. In terms of scope, meanwhile, UN interventions have an out-of-area character, while the interventions by RIOs studied here take place within the borders of their region. For that reason, decision making concerning 'regional interventions' may follow a different logic to out-of-area interventions, due to the perceived consequences on regional and domestic stability. In addition, it is argued that RIOs play a special role in the promotion of democracy.

¹ Myanmar is also called Burma, notably by Western states and international non-state actors.

Jon Pevehouse (2005) shows *how* RIOs influence democratization and democratic consolidation: by changing the costs and benefits of democracy to important societal groups such as business elites and the military. Membership of a RIO confers legitimacy to young democratic regimes. RIOs can be used by domestic elites to socialize other elite groups, such as the military, and to teach them how to behave in a democratic society. Using sanctions, RIOs can pressure member states to democratize or redemocratize. The observation that RIOs are *able* to promote democracy begs the question of *whether* a RIO will use this ability. In the following section, four potential explanations are elaborated for the behaviour of RIOs in cases where democracy is under threat in a member state. Next, the validity of these explanations will be explored investigating SADC and ASEAN, two RIOs which have, on occasion, intervened and, on other occasions, refrained from intervention. Both lack a *democratic clause*, unlike the EU and Mercosur (see Ribeiro Hoffmann, chapter 10), but they both claim to be more than a purely economic organization (see Reinalda, chapter 4).

One caveat should be added. Just as states do not always intervene for primarily humanitarian reasons, the question arises of whether a regional intervention really concerns the preservation of democracy *per se*, or rather the preservation of the *status quo*. Interventions may also aim to keep a government in power, even if the democratic credentials of that government are unconvincing. Söderbaum has termed the actions of political leaders who behave 'as promoters of the goals and values of regionalism which enables them to raise the profile and image of their often authoritarian regimes' as *regime-boosting* (Söderbaum 2004, 96). This chapter will show that political leaders not only 'boost' their own regime but also the domestic regimes of fellow member states. A RIO is used 'as an image-boosting arena whereby the leaders show support for each other, regardless of the character of their regimes' (Söderbaum 2004, 98). The label 'promotion of status quo legitimized by referring to democracy' may well cover some interventions better than the label 'promotion of democracy'.

Explaining Interventions

One potential explanation of RIO behaviour is rooted in social-constructivist thinking. According to Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998), identities, norms and interests are mutually constitutive. If a RIO has internalized democratic values and acquired a democratic identity, non-intervention in case of violation of democratic principles by one of its member states will no longer constitute an appropriate course of action. Keck and Sikkink argue that in the realm of human rights violations, the vulnerability of the target country not only varies according to its material capabilities. Even significant material pressure will be ineffective as long as leaders are unconcerned with the normative message. 'Pressures are eventually most effective against states that have internalized the norms of the human rights regime and resist being characterized as pariahs. [...] certain aspects of national identity or discourse may make some states vulnerable to pressures' (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 118–9). If we take this argument to the regional level, this may explain both the

differences between RIOs, as well as changes in the behaviour of RIOs over the years. A RIO which has internalized norms of democracy and legitimate governance will feel compelled to act if these values are violated by one of its member states.

A democratic identity, which is produced by and reproduced in the interactions of its member states, presupposes a rather homogeneous membership of democratic states. If member states perceive each other as democracies, they will define the RIO as a 'club' where democracy is one of the constitutive norms to be respected and reproduced. The probability that a RIO will intervene to promote or preserve democracy will therefore be higher when democratic values are perceived as part of its identity and when its member states are themselves more democratic. If democratic identity is weak, a RIO will be more reluctant to intervene as its member states will fear that this creates a precedent and may highlight their own weaknesses in this respect. In order to explore the value of this argument, I will assess the strength of the regional democratic identity based on the founding documents of the RIO and on the member states' democracy ratings.²

A second argument focuses on the role of domestic and transnational pressure. A RIO may offer non-state actors new points of access to the political process. As societal groups gain political access and resources, they are able to put pressure on their own government as well as on other governments (Keck and Sikkink 1998). A RIO would then offer the option of simultaneous action 'from above' (transnationally) and 'from below' (subnationally), putting a government 'in pincers' (Van der Vleuten 2005). The effectiveness of their action is also influenced by the identity of the RIO, because 'the more homogeneously democratic a regional organization's membership..., the more likely the regional IO will be used by domestic groups to encourage and cement democracy' (Pevehouse 2005, 3–4). If non-state actors mobilize nationally and transnationally in favour of democracy and the RIO does not act, its credibility as 'safeguard for democracy' will be damaged in the eyes of member-state citizens. Non-intervention will confirm the idea that a RIO is an elite project which does not serve the interests of society. I will investigate the access of non-state actors to regional policy making and the link with (non-)intervention.

A third argument is rooted in realist thinking about the role of power. RIOs are sometimes considered to be the servants of the interests of major powers. Here, we should distinguish between the interests of regional major powers – the hegemon within the RIO – and the interests of 'external' major powers (see next section). A RIO is expected to intervene in a member state if it is in the interest of the regional hegemon to do so. The interest of the regional hegemon has several dimensions: a geopolitical dimension, aimed at preserving or strengthening its relative power position; a material dimension, aimed at controlling wealth and resources; and an immaterial dimension, aimed at safeguarding its prestige. Following this argument, a RIO primarily *legitimizes* an intervention in the interest of the regional hegemon (Pevehouse 2005, 132). To test this proposition, I will try to establish which state is the major regional power in the examples studied, and what its interests are.

2 Democracy ratings are based on Freedom House and Polity IV data. I am aware of the limitations and possible bias of these ratings, but they enable a simple comparison across time, between countries and even between RIOs.

The distribution of power and ideas in the wider international system offers a fourth potential explanation for RIO interventions. An 'external' major power or another RIO may exert pressure on a RIO to undertake action in order to stop the violation of democratic values in one of its member states. The effectiveness of this pressure will depend on the material capability of the external actor to threaten the RIO with credible sanctions. However, I contend that this also depends on the match between the identity of the RIO 'in the dock' and the identity of the external 'Other'. A RIO with a regional identity which differs from the identity of the 'Other' will be less sensitive to external pressure than a RIO which shares the same identity. The former will consider such pressure as illegitimate interference with 'domestic' regional affairs and will be able to legitimize its non-intervention by referring to its own identity, as opposed to the Other's identity. I will thus seek to establish the nature of this regional identity and its compatibility with external actors' identities.

In the following sections, guided by these propositions I will analyse interventions and non-interventions by SADC and ASEAN.

Exploring Interventions and Non-interventions by the SADC

The history of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is rooted in the democratization processes of the region. Its predecessors, the Frontline States and the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) were created to resist apartheid South Africa, to coordinate development aid and foster economic integration (Bauer and Taylor 2005). In 1992, SADCC was renamed and reorganized as SADC. It welcomed South Africa as member state in 1994. Since 1997, the organization has had 14 member states.³ It has so far intervened only once to safeguard democracy in one of its member states.⁴ This happened in September 1998, in Lesotho (Operation Boleas).

In May 1998, the Lesotho Congress of Democrats (LCD) party, under the leadership of Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, had won all but one seat in the parliamentary elections. Observers from domestic and international organizations (including SADC) agreed that the elections had been conducted in a manner 'which should be considered acceptable according to international standards' (Southall and Fox 1999, 678). The LCD owed its massive victory to the structure of the first-past-the-post electoral system, not to fraud (Polity IV 2004). The opposition parties, however, rejected the results, engaging in violent street protests and turning to the army for support.

Fear of a military coup prompted SADC to act. The SADC Summit of Heads of State or Government appointed a commission headed by Judge Pius Langa of South Africa to investigate the conduct of the elections. The Langa report argued that the

3 Member states: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo (since 1997), Lesotho, Madagascar (since 2005), Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe. The Seychelles left in 2003 for financial reasons.

4 The SADC intervention in the Congo war in 1998 was aimed at peace enforcement, not at promoting or preserving democracy (President Laurent Kabila came to power through victory in a civil war, the DRC had no constitution and democratic debate was non-existent).

electoral process showed irregularities but that: 'We cannot however postulate that the result does not reflect the will of the Lesotho electorate' (cited by Southall and Fox 1999, 681). Meanwhile tensions in the military had mounted and the Lesotho government had lost control of the domestic situation. Mosisili appealed to the SADC for military intervention. On 22 September, a SADC force – made up of troops from South Africa and Botswana – entered Lesotho to prevent an 'unconstitutional change of government' and restore the democratic process (De Coning 1998, 8). A disastrous start, leading to many casualties in the first two days and widespread rioting and looting, provoked widespread criticism of this 'invasion' (De Coning 1998). Yet, in the end, the intervention had a positive outcome since the SADC troops, later joined by Zimbabwe, succeeded in securing military restructuring in Lesotho and in promoting inter-party negotiations that led to the adoption of a more appropriate electoral system (Southall 2003). The troops left Lesotho in 2000, and elections held in 2002 and 2007 were considered free and fair by all observers.

The success that the SADC enjoyed in promoting democracy in Lesotho contrasts sharply with its reluctance to intervene in Zimbabwe. Since its independence in 1980 Zimbabwe has been a democracy in the sense that parliamentary and presidential elections are held regularly. However, the increasingly authoritarian and violent behaviour of the regime led by President Robert Mugabe has turned Zimbabwe into an international pariah (Bauer and Taylor 2005, 171). The 2002 presidential elections were heavily criticized by the SADC Parliamentary Forum and international election monitors alike. The 2005 parliamentary elections were considered 'one of the most cynical frauds perpetrated on the international community in electoral history' (*afrol News* 2005), but the SADC endorsed the elections as free and fair. In March 2007, the Zimbabwean police killed an opposition supporter and severely battered the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, Morgan Tsvangirai, and other members of the opposition. Individual SADC leaders, such as the president of Zambia, Levy Mwanawasa, have started to express their discomfort with the political situation in Zimbabwe (IRIN News 2007), but the SADC has decided against an explicit condemnation of the Mugabe government. They prefer 'quiet diplomacy' and mediation by South African president Thabo Mbeki between the Zimbabwean government and opposition. In the remainder of this section, we investigate possible explanations for SADC decisions concerning (non-)intervention.

Democratic Identity

The promotion and consolidation of democracy is stated as an explicit goal of SADC. One of its objectives is to 'promote common political values, systems and other shared values which are transmitted through institutions, which are democratic, legitimate and effective' (Art. 5). The Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (2001) includes the objective to 'promote the development of democratic institutions and practices within the territories of State Parties and encourage the observance of universal human rights' (Protocol, Art. 2) and entitles intervention by SADC in case of 'A military coup or other threat to the legitimate authority of a State' (Protocol,

Table 9.1 SADC Member States and Democracy

Member States	Freedom House Status, 1995*	Freedom House Status, 2006*
South Africa	1–2	1–2, Free
Mauritius	1–2	1–1, Free
Botswana	2–2	2–2, Free
Namibia	2–3	2–2, Free
Malawi	2–3	4–4, Partially Free
Madagascar	2–4	3–3, Partially Free
Mozambique	3–4	3–4, Partially Free
Zambia	3–4	4–4, Partially Free
Lesotho	4–4	2–3, Free
Tanzania	5–5	4–3, Partially Free
Zimbabwe	5–5	7–6, Not Free
Swaziland	6–5	7–5, Not Free
Angola	6–6	6–5, Not Free
DRC (Congo)	7–6	6–6, Not Free
SADC Average	3.7	3.5

* Rating depends on the assessment of political and civil rights between 1 (positive) and 7 (negative). First score indicates political rights, second indicates civil liberties; source: Freedom House.

Art. 11).⁵ In 2004, the SADC approved the *Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections* and a *Code of Conduct for Election Observers*. Missions were deployed to elections in Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, which were all considered to be a ‘testimony of the consolidation of democracy in the region’ (SADC homepage). Furthermore, the SADC has included gender equality in its vision of democracy. It has set targets for achieving equal representation of women in its member states’ parliaments (50 percent) and governments (30 percent). Although targets and deadlines have only been met by a small minority of member states, progress is being made in the region in this regard (Nduru 2007). The preservation and promotion of democracy is presented clearly as an important objective of the SADC and of the wider African Union of which

5 The Protocol was tabled for signature on 14 August 2001; it has been ratified by nine member states (including South Africa and Zimbabwe) and has entered into force on 2 March 2004 (SADC website).

all SADC member states are also members. Yet there is no 'democratic clause' for candidate member states, unlike the EU and Mercosur, and judging by the level of democracy of its member states, the SADC is not homogeneously democratic (see Table 9.1).

Between 1995 and 2006, major positive changes were recorded for Lesotho and Tanzania while in Malawi and Zimbabwe, the rating has declined (shown in bold in Table 9.1). This decline indicates that an intervention to safeguard democracy could have been justified.⁶ The average rating for the SADC improved only slightly between 1995 and 2006, so in spite of its verbal support for democracy, the democratic identity of the SADC remains relatively weak and does not lead to expectations of any increasingly pro-active stance in the case of violations of democratic values. Member states fear that a more interventionist line 'could set an uncomfortable precedent and scrutiny of their own systems of government' (Mills 2002, 150; Nathan 2005, 367).

Double pressure by non-state actors

The SADC is a purely intergovernmental organization. In the region, civil society is well developed, including strong women's movements, churches and human rights organizations (Bauer and Taylor 2005). At the transnational level, in July 1996 the SADC Parliamentary Forum was launched. This Forum is an autonomous institution, composed of members from the national parliaments. It sends observers to elections, whose conclusions are generally more in line with those of international observers than of the official SADC missions, as was the case with the 2005 elections in Zimbabwe. The Forum has no access to SADC Summit meetings and lacks the instruments to influence regional decision making. Other transnational organizations, such as the SADC Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus, SADC Youth Movement and the Southern African People's Solidarity Network (SAPSN), also promote democracy, empowerment and human rights (Mavela 2004; Bauer and Taylor 2005, 322). They have not managed to establish ties with SADC structures. The SAPSN has criticized SADC member state governments for 'using SADC as a self-serving old boys club' (Söderbaum 2004, 98). Both the Forum and transnational organizations receive support from the European Parliament and Europe-based non-state actors such as Oxfam. As they have no access to regional-level decision making, they have not been able to put effective pressure on the SADC to intervene for the preservation of democracy or even disapprove of rigged election results.

⁶ Malawi's rating declined due to serious irregularities at the 2004 presidential elections which were deemed 'free but not fair' by foreign observers (Freedom House 2006) but were not criticized by SADC observers (SADC homepage). After one month of rioting, the political situation stabilized as the main opposition leader accepted a post in the government (Bauer and Taylor 2005, 21).

The interests of the regional hegemon

From the start, the SADC suffered from the rivalry between South Africa and Zimbabwe. Until 1992, Zimbabwe was the uncontested leader of the Frontline States. When South Africa joined the SADC, Mugabe felt that Zimbabwe had a right to a commanding position equivalent to its former leadership of the frontline states. Other member states, however, preferred South African leadership because of Nelson Mandela's international prestige. As a compromise, Zimbabwe was granted the chairmanship of the Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, the forum for security and defence cooperation, preventive diplomacy and regional peacekeeping (Neethling 2004).

In terms of its economic capacity, South Africa ranks easily as the regional hegemon (Hammerstad 2005, 83). Its GDP is four times that of the other 13 SADC countries combined (Bauer and Taylor 2005, 334). South Africa had a geopolitical interest in intervention in Lesotho, a landlocked enclave within South African territory: a military coup and political violence in its 'backyard' would have damaged the political climate in the region and could have invited other coups. The same argument, however, applies to neighbouring Zimbabwe where there is a risk of instability and insecurity spilling over. South Africa had no clear material interests in Lesotho, whereas in Zimbabwe it may well fear an economic meltdown. The Zimbabwean crisis cost South Africa an estimated US\$1.9 billion between 2000 and 2003 alone; South African public and private firms face huge losses of investments in the mining industry, telecom and energy; and millions of refugees from Zimbabwe have ended up in South Africa (Bauer and Taylor 2005, 349; Hammerstad 2005, 74).

Yet, South Africa is reluctant to assume its role of hegemon and take the lead in regional intervention. The hegemon is a Gulliver (Kwasi Tiekue 2004), because 'given the history of apartheid destabilization, South Africa is acutely sensitive to being perceived by other African countries as a bully' (Nathan 2005, 365). Its vanguard role in the intervention in Lesotho, for instance, was not appreciated by other SADC members (De Coning 1998).

Regional identity and external pressure

There has been strong international pressure on the SADC to withdraw its support from Mugabe, but this has failed due to clashing identities. The identity of the SADC is rooted in anti-colonialism and its anti-apartheid past, as well as in the concept of *African renaissance*, or *Ubuntu* in Zulu, which was launched by Mandela in 1994 and is now being championed by current South-African President Thabo Mbeki. The vision of African renaissance refers to the 'emergence of the continent from a long period of darkness and fear into one of light and a dream fulfilled' in which 'through our personal efforts we have redefined ourselves ... and succeeded to create a new world of peace, democracy, development, and prosperity' (Thabo Mbeki, cited in Nathan 2005, 363). This Africanist, anti-colonial identity undermines the legitimacy of Southern African critics of authoritarian regimes in general, and of Mugabe in particular, as they are accused of siding with the former colonial powers. Mbeki's

open condemnation of undemocratic governments in Africa in the 1990s angered some African leaders, many of whom had supported the ANC during the liberation struggle; they accused him of ‘pursuing a Western project’ and of being ‘little more than the West’s lackey on the southern tip of Africa’ (Landsberg 2000, 107).

Mugabe has skilfully used international pressure to undermine the credibility of Zimbabwean opposition leader Tsvangirai by repeatedly referring to him as ‘Tony Blair’s pet dog’ (NRC 2005, 18 October, p. 4), and claiming that ‘a vote for the opposition is a vote for a return to colonial rule’ (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2005). He has also undermined SADC credibility, branding the human rights debate as ‘Western’ (Irin News 2007) and arguing that African countries’ interest in Zimbabwe ‘was more to do with pressure from Western governments’ than with their own convictions (*afrol News* 2006). Zimbabwe considers itself to be ‘under assault from Western countries (...). This is a moment for SADC to show solidarity with Zimbabwe’ (BBC News 2007, 29 March). This solidarity, ‘forged in the heat of the struggles against colonialism and apartheid’ (Nathan 2005, 367), is referred to every time the region is criticized by former colonial powers. Many SADC leaders still see Mugabe as a hero of the fight against colonial rule. Mugabe has succeeded in cornering them: they cannot criticize him without being accused of serving ‘colonial’ interests.

Thus, the SADC has condemned international criticisms of Mugabe as an ‘intervention in African affairs’ (Söderbaum 2004, 99) and SADC observers found that the parliamentary elections in April 2005 ‘were credible, legitimate, free and fair’. In July 2005, Tanzania, the then SADC President, cast one of the no-votes blocking the adoption by the UN Security Council of a critical report concerning the situation in Zimbabwe (NRC 2005, 28 July, 4). Mbeki has accused Western powers of using Zimbabwe as a smokescreen in order to avoid facing Africa’s real problems (Neethling 2004), and the Commonwealth of using ‘megaphone diplomacy’ when Mugabe was banned from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Nigeria in December 2003 (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2003). He has stated that the largest single obstacle to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe was ‘the intensive international “campaign” to firmly establish the view that these elections were irredeemably unfree and unfair’ (*afrol News* 2005). In March 2007, South Africa is reported to have ‘thwarted a British-sponsored motion to put Zimbabwe on the UN Security Council agenda’ because Zimbabwe does not ‘pose any threat to international peace and security and that its political problems did not, therefore, belong to the Security Council’ (*The Herald* 2007, 29 March).

Yet, soccer – a factor usually not considered in IR theories – has intervened in the situation. South Africa will host the Soccer World Cup in 2010, the first ever on African soil. For that reason, Mbeki does not support Mugabe’s plan to postpone the Zimbabwean presidential elections, scheduled for 2008, until 2010 to have more time in office. Mbeki does not want to see the World Cup disrupted by controversial presidential elections in Zimbabwe and concomitant Western sanctions, as he has told Mugabe (Plaut 2007). African prestige is at stake, and this might contribute to a change in the Southern African attitude towards Mugabe.

From this exploration, we can conclude that SADC decisions for or against intervention cannot be explained by strong regional democratic identity or pressure

from non-state actors. The geopolitical interests of South Africa as regional hegemon, on the other hand, play an important role, while external pressure for intervention has been counterproductive due to the anti-colonial identity of the SADC.

Exploring Intervention and Non-intervention by ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was set up in 1967 by Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore. Brunei joined in 1984, followed by Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999. The fundamental goals of the Association are:

(i) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region ... and (ii) to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among the countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter (The Bangkok Declaration of 8 August 1967, ASEAN 2005).

Stability is a key word in ASEAN documents and non-intervention is its corollary. All member countries except Thailand were subjected to colonial rule and are very keen on preserving their sovereignty. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (1976) confirms that the member states should be guided in their mutual relations by 'non-interference in the internal affairs of one another' (ASEAN 2005). In general, this rule has been strictly respected. Upon closer examination, there have been some interventions, but they have all been done 'the ASEAN way' – through quiet, discreet bilateral diplomacy rather than multilateral action. Since the 1970s, for instance, Indonesia and Malaysia have facilitated negotiations between Muslim rebels and the Philippine government. In 1987, ASEAN supported Philippines' president Corazon Aquino when her regime was under pressure from these rebel groups (Beng 2003a). Most explicitly, Myanmar has been the target of ASEAN interference. In 2003, ASEAN foreign ministers openly departed from the non-intervention principle for the first time, because the military junta in Myanmar had detained democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi. At their meeting in Phnom Penh on 16–17 June, the ministers issued a joint statement saying that they 'discussed the recent political developments in Myanmar, particularly the incident of 30 May', and 'looked forward to the early lifting of restrictions placed on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi' (ASEAN 2003). At the 9th ASEAN Summit in October 2003, ASEAN endorsed a seven-step roadmap to democracy in Myanmar, thus making Myanmar's democratization a regional concern (Areethamsirikul 2007, 13). In November 2004, Myanmar released 400 political activists and dissidents, a move interpreted as an attempt 'to win good publicity ahead of the ASEAN summit' and to create 'some room to argue at ASEAN that the junta remains genuinely committed to democratic reform' (Cheng 2004). Some months later, in July 2005 at the ASEAN summit in Vientiane (Laos), Myanmar announced that it was renouncing its turn at

chairmanship.⁷ It explained that the government was too busy building democracy and it ‘wanted to focus on its ongoing national reconciliation and democratisation process’ (BBC News 2005). In March 2006, ASEAN sent a special envoy, the Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar, to Yangon to monitor progress of the roadmap to democracy. The visit was a failure: Syed Hamid was denied entry to Pyinmana, the new capital, and was unable to meet either General Than Shwe, the head of state, or Aung San Suu Kyi. ASEAN is increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress in Myanmar, and has implicitly threatened that Myanmar membership could be suspended if there is no improvement (Areethamsirikul 2007, 14–15).

These interventions contrast with the silence of ASEAN vis-à-vis the September 2006 military coup in Thailand which ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Sinhawatra. Western countries emphasized that they were very concerned, whereas the ASEAN members ‘gave encouraging words, light words of disappointment, or “no comment”’ (Areethamsirikul 2007, 19–20). How can we account for ASEAN’s intervention in Myanmar and non-intervention in Thailand?

Table 9.2 ASEAN Member States and Democracy

Member States	Freedom House Status, 1995*	Freedom House Status, 2006*
Philippines	2–4	3–3, Partially Free
Thailand	3–4	3–3, Partially Free
Malaysia	4–5	4–4, Partially Free
Singapore	5–5	5–4, Partially Free
Cambodia	6–6	6–5, Not Free
Brunei	7–5	6–5, Not Free
Laos	7–6	7–6, Not Free
Indonesia	7–6	2–3, Free
Vietnam	7–7	7–5, Not Free
Myanmar	7–7	7–7, Not Free
ASEAN average	5.5	4.75

* Rating depending on the assessment of political rights (1–7) and civil liberties (1–7); first score indicates political rights, second indicates civil liberties; source: Freedom House.

⁷ ASEAN has a yearly alphabetically rotating chairmanship, which in July 2006 was to go to Myanmar.

Democratic Identity

ASEAN political and security cooperation aims at ensuring that ‘countries in the region live at peace with one another and with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment’ (ASEAN 2005). At the summit in 1997, the heads of state and government envisioned ‘our nations being governed with the consent and greater participation of the people’ (ASEAN 1997), but most member states have a poor record with regard to democracy. On average, the situation improved slightly between 1995 and 2006, though only Indonesia made a complete and successful transition from ‘not free’ to ‘free’ (see Table 9.2).

Among the ten member states, we find only three countries that respect political rights relatively well – Thailand (until September 2006), the Philippines, and Indonesia. Malaysia and Singapore have improved but still show shortcomings, whereas the remaining five countries have a very bad rating. Colonialism has left almost all Southeast-Asian countries with powerful state apparatuses, state intervention in the market and strong social and political control (Case 2004, 77). Only since the end of the 1990s has a concern for democracy been evident among the newly democratizing countries (the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and – until recently – Thailand) which want to emphasize democratization and a greater respect for human rights (Stubbs 2004, 226). Yet, the weakness of domestic democracy in all member states helps to explain why any intervention is done ‘the ASEAN way’. The Indo-Chinese countries in particular fear being subjected to similar pressure if they accept interference in the domestic affairs of Myanmar.

Double pressure from non-state actors

In 2000, the ASEAN Peoples’ Assembly (APA) was established, a transnational civil society organization, and initiatives have been taken to allow for greater civil society participation in ASEAN (Caballero-Anthony 2005, 232–47). APA has been drawing up a human rights and democracy scorecard to assess the state of democracy in Southeast Asia. There is no ‘pincer mechanism’ in ASEAN, however, as ASEAN has no parliamentary assembly and its institutional structure offers no formal access to non-state actors. Fifty-eight non-state actors are accredited by ASEAN (ASEAN homepage); however, these are predominantly business associations and representatives of professional groups and sports associations which do not promote democracy. Non-state actors which criticize regimes for violations of democratic values are not admitted to ASEAN structures and are predominantly based in the US. The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus, uniting members of parliament from several ASEAN and neighbouring countries and from China and Europe, tries to put issues of good governance on the agenda. They have urged ASEAN governments to put more pressure on Myanmar (BBC News 2005).

Experts play a prominent role in ASEAN through a process known as Track-Two diplomacy. These are unofficial meetings of think tanks, academics, members of the ‘unofficial’ policy community and government officials acting in their private capacities. ASEAN-ISIS (Institutes of Strategic International Studies in nine member states), which has been registered with the ASEAN secretariat since 1988, is the

most important academic network. It has published policy papers, for instance on the establishment of human rights mechanisms, and it participates in ‘closed door’ dialogues with Burmese exiles, experts and officials from Myanmar and ASEAN government representatives (Caballero-Anthony 2005, 157–72).

The interests of the regional hegemon

Indonesia is considered the regional hegemon, based on its relative size (in terms of both population and GDP) and on its role as a ‘proud member of international society’ and leader of the non-aligned world (Haacke 2003, 66). Its geopolitical interest is, broadly formulated, to find regional solutions to regional problems without interference from major powers such as US, Japan or China. Its attitude towards Myanmar has changed considerably, from supporting its membership in the 1990s to insisting on progress being made on democratization after 1998. Domestic change accounts for this change in attitude. Until 1998, Suharto supported Myanmar’s membership, in spite of widespread criticism of the military junta, because he was afraid that otherwise China would extend its sphere of its influence. After his departure, Indonesia went through a political transformation, and now plays the role of the moral leader, supporting democratization, proposing an ASEAN Human Rights Commission and stating that ‘no country can claim that gross human rights violations are its own internal affairs’ (Areethamsirikul 2007, 14). At the same time, however, it is not in Indonesia’s interest to criticize Thailand, the second major power in ASEAN and with its central position on the Indo-Chinese continent. After the coup in Thailand, Indonesia simply expressed its hope that ‘Thailand would resolve the crisis and return to the principles of democracy’ (Areethamsirikul 2007, 20).

Regional identity and external pressure

The EU and the US have put considerable pressure on ASEAN to take action against the government of Myanmar. This pressure seems to have been effective. The timing of the two ASEAN interventions in 2003 and 2005 is telling in this respect. In 2003, the ASEAN Regional Forum, including the US, was due to meet after the ASEAN Summit and an Asia-Europe meeting was to take place in Bali. American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, urged Myanmar to release Suu Kyi. Some mild criticism of Myanmar was felt to be necessary by ASEAN members, so that they would be in a better position to meet Powell subsequently (*The Jakarta Post* 2003). When the EU insisted on the inclusion of the Myanmar issue on the agenda of the Asia-Europe meeting, ASEAN preferred to deal with the issue on its own initiative (Beng 2003b). In 2005, the EU and the US said ‘that they might boycott meetings with ASEAN if the meetings take place under the junta’s chairmanship’ (*The International Herald Tribune* 2005; Morris 2005). The question is then whether ASEAN is sensitive to pressure because of a ‘shared identity’ or because of the potential economic consequences.

In its dealings with the US and the EU, ASEAN accentuates its own, very different identity. ‘Western style intervention’ is associated with sanctions such as

those experienced by Vietnam until 1994, and ASEAN does not want to subject its members to the same kind of treatment (Beng 2003b):

We told them [the US] that Asean does things in a quiet way – that is the meaning of constructive engagement. We've spoken to Myanmar leaders and we always express to them "that we look to you as a friend, member of Asean"... we take the approach of a concerned friend rather than the approach of someone who's ready to condemn them (Hashim 2005).

The 'Asean way' of dealing with difficult issues is characterized by three sets of norms: consensus, informality and non-use of force. It refers to a style of decision making that focuses on building consensus (*Muafakat*) through a process of extensive consultations (*Musyawah*, an old Javanese practice) (Acharya 1998, 211–12; Caballero-Anthony 2005, 72–76). If consensus is not reached, the issue is shelved. In addition, Southeast Asian diplomacy is based on informal, non-official and bilateral relationships; there is an aversion to EU-style institutionalism and multilateralism (Bellamy 2004, 170). As the spokesman of the Thai Foreign Ministry said, 'It has always been Asean's stand that domestic issues were not to be discussed during the 10-nation meetings... This is in keeping with Asian tradition. We don't discuss domestic matters... such matters are *always not* on the agenda' (Rajoo 2005b).

ASEAN not only insists upon doing things differently, it also cherishes its regional identity and displays its determination to find 'Asian solutions to Asian problems' (Caballero-Anthony 2005, 62). Negotiations take place 'not as between opponents but as between friends and brothers' (Acharya 1998, 212). The idea of a 'family' is often accentuated, as in 'Cambodia wants to be part of the Family' (ASEAN 1998). The theme of the November 2004 summit in Vientiane was 'Advancing a Secure and Dynamic ASEAN Family' (ASEAN 2004).

The decision to admit Myanmar as a member, defying the criticism of the US and EU at the time, is testament to the stubborn defence of Asian autonomy against foreign interference. To avoid looking like a servant of foreign interests and alienating Myanmar, ASEAN did not proudly proclaim its victory concerning Myanmar renouncing the chair (Rajoo 2005b; Beng 2003a). On the contrary, ASEAN foreign ministers insisted that it had been Myanmar's own decision to renounce its turn as chair of ASEAN, and that Myanmar would take over the chairmanship once it felt ready to do so. Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid explained that: 'We are not interfering in their affairs but we can give our views as part of the Asean process' (Morris 2005; Rajoo 2005a). In this way, ASEAN was able to uphold the principle of non-interference and the idea of 'the Asean way' and 'Asean autonomy', while at the same time avoiding the risk of precedence.

For those reasons, 'intervention' in Myanmar cannot be explained by a shared identity between ASEAN, the US and the EU. Vulnerability to the material consequences of international pressure offers a better explanation. ASEAN's prestige as an area of 'peace, progress and prosperity' where investments are secure is highly important for all its member states as they depend substantially on international trade for trade revenue and economic growth. Between 1995 and 2004, about 60 percent

of Foreign Direct Investment in ASEAN came from the US, the EU and Japan, 20 percent of which was in the form of development assistance (Areethamsirikul 2007, 25–7). ASEAN is, therefore, sensitive to threats by donors to cut development assistance and aware of the risk that continuing protection of Myanmar could damage ASEAN's standing among foreign investors. No such international pressure exists concerning Thailand.

Conclusion: Regional Interventions, When and Why

To answer the question of under which conditions a RIO intervenes to promote or preserve democracy, four propositions were advanced:

1. its member states are democratic and it perceives democratic values as part of its identity;
2. non-state actors which promote democracy have access to the regional decision-making process;
3. intervention serves the interest of the regional hegemon;
4. external pressure is strong and the identity of the RIO matches the identity of the external actor.

As regards the first proposition, by calculating the ratings on political rights and civil liberties of their respective member states, we found that the SADC performs slightly better than ASEAN and that 'promotion and preservation of democracy' is mentioned more explicitly and more frequently in SADC documents than in ASEAN documents. Yet, in neither RIO is democratic identity strong or homogeneous. This would explain non-intervention; it cannot explain, however, why there *have* been some interventions at all.

Concerning the second proposition, the SADC and ASEAN are purely intergovernmental organizations, where decisions are taken by consensus in a Council of Ministers and in Summits of Heads of State and Government. In both RIOs, there has been pressure from non-state actors in favour of democratization of the organization which has not met with any success. A SADC Parliamentary Forum has been created, but it has no formal status within the SADC and has no influence on the decision making process; in fact, its election observer reports have not even been recognized by SADC. ASEAN, meanwhile, has accredited only non-state actors without political aims. They have not been offered formal access to decision making. Academics are able to put forward policy proposals concerning human rights issues, though until now they have not met with success. Pressure in favour of intervention is, therefore, not strong enough to put member state governments 'in pincers'.

The third proposition concerns the role of the major powers in these regions: South Africa and Indonesia, respectively. Their interests seem to help to explain why the SADC intervened in Lesotho and ASEAN intervened in Myanmar. It also explains why no intervention has so far taken place in Thailand, being a major regional power itself. Still, this explanation is not fully satisfying: why does South

Africa not support an intervention in neighbouring Zimbabwe, in view of the fact that Mugabe's policies hurt South African economic interests?

The fourth proposition takes the international level into account. There is strong external pressure on ASEAN concerning Myanmar, but not concerning Thailand. In spite of its strong regional identity and its accentuation of the 'Asean way' of dealing with problems which differs from Western-style interventions, ASEAN has given in to pressure concerning Myanmar because of the high costs of non-intervention. The ASEAN region's dependence on foreign capital means that its reputation as a stable, well-governed region is a crucial economic asset. Non-intervention, which would undermine this reputation, therefore became too costly. External pressure on the SADC, however, has not resulted in intervention, and in fact any intervention which took place against a background of Western pressure would be ideologically problematic as it would betray African anti-colonialist identity and damage Mbeki's credibility as the architect of the African renaissance.

To summarize, interventions by RIOs can be explained by taking into account the interests of regional major powers and the costs of external pressure. A RIO acts if intervention serves the geopolitical, domestic political or material interests of regional major powers, or if external pressure increases the cost of non-intervention. In RIOs with a stronger democratic identity than that of the SADC and ASEAN, we may expect the promotion and preservation of democracy to occupy a more prominent place, and to become part of the hegemonic interest.

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