International Institutions and Asian Security Order

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Muthiah Alagappa's *Asian Security Order* is an ambitious book, both theoretically and empirically. Accordingly, the 600-page volume can be fruitfully analyzed from a number of angles. This review focuses on the contribution of international institutions to Asian security order. What roles have institutions played in creating, sustaining, and strengthening the Asian security order?

Drawing on the distinction between primary and secondary institutions that are the focus of English School theory and regime theory, respectively, I wish to make two main arguments.[1] First, the Asian security order that Alagappa describes is intimately bound up with a set of fundamental or primary institutions, most importantly a rigid Westphalian version of state sovereignty. Indeed, order—as defined by Alagappa—cannot exist without institutions. Second, the contributions to Asian security order of more specific, consciously constructed secondary institutions are not fully explored, and, on the basis of the evidence presented, those specifically Asian security institutions that are examined in some detail can be said to have made only a modest contribution at best.

Primary Institutions and Asian Security Order

In order to establish whether security order has existed in Asia and to determine what form any such order has taken, it is first necessary to define

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[1] Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

the term "order." One of the major contributions of the book is the attention that it devotes to this issue. In chapter one, Alagappa offers a thoughtful analysis of the concept that culminates in the presentation of an original typology of international orders.

The starting point for this analysis is a valuable critique of Hedley Bull's seminal discussion of order in his 1977 classic *The Anarchical Society*.[2] Alagappa observes that "at the international level [Bull] narrows the definition [of order] to the sustenance of the goals of a particular form of international social life, namely, the international society" (p. 36). As a result, Bull's definition is at best incomplete, since it excludes the forms of order that might exist in other international systems. Thus, Alagappa concludes, "it is essential to separate the definition of international order from the notion of international society" (p. 38).

Alagappa then offers a more general definition of international order "as a formal or informal arrangement that sustains rule-governed interaction among sovereign states in their pursuit of individual and collective goods" (p. 39). The arrangement "specifies the methods for sustaining order, the formal and informal rules of the game, how they will be enforced, and the state or organization that has managerial responsibility" (p. 52). On the basis of this definition, Alagappa constructs a tripartite typology of international orders, which he calls instrumental, normative-contractual, and solidarist. "These three types of order," he explains, "differ in terms of purpose, identity of the participating states, their social cohesion and interests, and the functions of rules" (p. 41). They also come about through different pathways and the use of different combinations of instruments.

In the concluding chapter, Alagappa draws on this definition to argue that security order does in fact exist in Asia. As evidence of this order, he cites the existence of a widely shared framework of principles and norms that increasingly influences the behavior and interaction of states in the region. The core norms of this framework—especially mutual respect for

[2]Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

political independence and territorial integrity and noninterference in internal affairs—are based on a Westphalian notion of state sovereignty, which most scholars would regard as a primary institution of the international system (pp. 572-74). As a result, Alagappa also notes, "the emerging security order in Asia has primarily the features of the instrumental type of order as well as certain features of the normative-contractual order" (p. 79; see also p. 584). This characterization has important implications for the actual and potential contributions of secondary regional institutions, since they are likely to play a more limited role in instrumental rather than normative-contractual and solidarist orders.

As illuminating as the discussion of order may be, it nevertheless is problematic. Above all, despite his efforts to transcend the limitations of Bull's analysis, Alagappa appears to repeat one of the latter's most fundamental errors. Bull sought to distinguish order from rules: "order in social life can exist in principle without rules ... it is best to treat rules as a widespread, and nearly ubiquitous, means of creating order in human society rather than as part of the definition of order itself."[3] Yet Bull went on to explore international order in a particular kind of international system—what he called "international society"—that is characterized by the presence and acceptance of a common set of rules.[4]

Likewise, at the core of Alagappa's definition are rules that are accepted by the key actors, in this case states (pp. 39-40). As a result, his framework neglects or implicitly rejects the possibility of order in the absence of clear, acknowledged, and accepted rules. The need for rules is also suggested in Alagappa's discussion of the eight pathways of order, which include hegemony and balance of power, where he notes that "[o]nly minimal rules of coexistence are likely in a balance-of-power system that arises spontaneously" (p. 54). Yet insofar as rules constitute institutions, including primary institutions like state sovereignty, order cannot exist without institutions.

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[3]Ibid.
[4]Ibid.

Not everyone would agree with this requirement, however. For example, a balance of power could presumably obtain (if perhaps only precariously) even among states that sought each other's elimination. By the same token, there is no logical need for rules in a coercive hegemony (p. 53). Thus Alagappa may overlook the possibility of order, however infrequent, in the absence of institutions.

Secondary Institutions and Asian Security Order

The chapter that deals most directly with the contributions of secondary institutions is that of Amitav Acharya on "Regional Institutions and Asian Security Order." Another chapter, by Rosemary Foot, examines "The UN System as a Pathway to Security in Asia," but concludes that "while the UN has contributed in various ways to providing a security order in this region, it has predominantly been an adjunct rather than a primary player" (p. 312).

Acharya never offers a definition of regional institutions, but his focus is clearly on institutions that have been sufficiently formalized so as to merit an official name (and usually an acronym). Particular attention is devoted to ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), although SEATO, SAARC, and NEAD also receive mention and are included in the tables. One feature these institutions have in common is a relatively low degree of formalization and legalization, especially in comparison with those found in Europe. Functionally, moreover, these Asian institutions "continue to avoid collective security and collective defense, the two traditional forms of security multilateralism" (p. 211); only the troubled SEATO has had even a weak collective defense component. Rather, at their most ambitious, the institutions have consisted primarily of modest cooperative security mechanisms such as confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy (see table 6.1, p. 220).

Acharya offers a convincing explanation for the highly limited nature of Asian security institutions. In short, prevailing regional norms contributed strongly to an avoidance of military pacts and multilateral defense mechanisms and a preference for informal and non-binding cooperation (p. 219)—or as Alagappa puts it in the concluding chapter, "Considerations

of national autonomy have inhibited the adoption of binding goals and rules" (p. 586). In other words, the severe nature of the dominant primary institutions in the region has constrained the development of secondary institutions.

What goes unexplained is the chapter's general neglect of the numerous bilateral security arrangements involving the United States. A possible rationale is that used by Alagappa to justify making Asia—rather than the Asia-Pacific—the unit of analysis: "Most of the concerns considered in the so-called Asia-Pacific security fora are in essence security concerns grounded in Asia and are of greatest concern to Asian states" (p. 25). The same, however, could also be said of the U.S. alliances.

Thus Acharya's chapter makes little effort to evaluate the absolute and relative contributions to Asian security order made by these more traditional security institutions. Instead, the task is presumably left to the chapters on hegemony and balance of power. Certainly, it would be useful to examine how effectively the United States could balance the rising power of China, constrain the development of Japanese power, or deter China and North Korea in the absence of more or less formal security ties to states in the region. Yet perhaps not surprisingly, because these chapters draw their inspiration from realist rather than institutionalist theories, their attention lies elsewhere and, in any case, they are not well-equipped analytically for such an examination.

Despite this oversight, it is still well worth asking how even the purely Asian institutions that are the focus of Acharya's chapter might have contributed to Asian security order. Here, given the limited nature of these institutions, he rightly emphasizes the transformative processes identified by constructivism, as opposed to the regulative and constraining effects highlighted by rationalist neoliberal theory.

Constructivists expect norms and institutions to produce not just behavioral shifts but also more fundamental identity changes. Through interaction and socialization, institutions can redefine interests and identities and lead to the development of collective identities (p. 228). Thus, Acharya avers, "The ASEAN Way is thus primarily about socialization, not 'constrainment'" (p. 229).

What evidence in fact is there that these institutions have brought about "interest redefinition and identity change, and the emergence of new social interests and collective identities" (p. 230)? Acharya concludes that Asian regional institutions "have played, and are now playing, more than just a marginal role in reshaping the attitude and behavior of regional actors" (p. 236). Likewise, Alagappa finds that "regional institutions have tempered the definition of national interest on certain issues ..." and that ASEAN "has prevented the outbreak of war among [member states] by creating a sense of community" (pp. 589-90). Elsewhere, however, the claims are much more modest and highly qualified. For example, at the beginning of his discussion of institutional effects, Acharya notes that "there is *some* evidence that Asian multilateralism of the 1990s ... *might* have already produced *small* but significant changes in the attitude of key players toward multilateralism..." (p. 230; emphasis added).

When it comes to specific examples, Acharya and Alagappa place particular emphasis on China, whose "engagement in these processes has induced a certain measure of change in its thinking about its position and role within the region" (p. 230). The effects on the United States are also singled out for attention. Overall, however, the evidence of transformative processes presented in the book is unsatisfying. Not only is such evidence limited to a handful of pages, but is even questionable on its own terms. In particular, one must ask whether the phenomena described constitute redefinitions of interest and identity, or whether they might be more accurately characterized as changes in states' views about how most effectively to pursue their existing interests. Acharya's chapter notes more than once how "useful" the major powers have found the ARF and ASEAN for, *inter alia*, influencing others and dealing with disputes. These comments echo Michael Mastanduno's instrumentalist observation in the chapter on hegemony that "for U.S. officials, multilateral initiatives afford a useful way to engage the participation of various Asian states in regional security affairs without undermining the hegemonic strategy" (p. 151).

This is not to suggest that such changes are unimportant, only that they fall short of the more fundamental transformations posited by constructivists. One certainly hopes that when all is said and done, scholars

will be able to substantiate much stronger claims than Acharya's timid assertion that "it is unlikely that the doctrine of cooperative security espoused by the ARF and 'engagement' policy espoused by ASEAN had no effect on American thinking..." (p. 234). To be sure, this is among the most challenging forms of empirical research, and scholars like Acharya and Iain Johnston are to be commended for the efforts they have made to measure and document ideational change.[5] However, much more evidence must be unearthed—or at least presented—before we can establish with much confidence whether, how, and to what degree regional institutions have brought about the expected transformative effects.

[5]See, for example, Alastair Iain Johnston, "Socialization in International Institutions: The ASEAN Way and International Relations Theory," in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).