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# Habits of peace: Long-term regional cooperation in Southeast Asia

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## Abstract

The nation-states that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are widely described to be peaceful in their relations with each other, so much so that scholars have referred to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' "long peace." While it is true that war eludes the region, interstate militarized disputes remain a persistent feature. How can we account for the absence of war between Association of Southeast Asian Nations members in light of persistent militarized disputes? To address this question, this article builds on the emerging International Relations literature on habits and practice in interstate relations. I develop a framework centred on the habitual dispositions of communities of practitioners that focuses on the unreflexive cognitive and behavioural qualities of regional relations. These "habits of peace" circumscribe thinking and behaviour among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' state practitioners. Specifically, they have led to a toleration of limited violence among Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states. After tracing the existence of these habitual qualities of relations, I demonstrate their effects on regional crisis response, which makes possible community building and maintenance alongside considerable levels of interstate violence. I explore this through an in-depth analysis of the regional response to the 2011 Preah Vihear crisis between Cambodia and Thailand.

## Keywords

Association of Southeast Asian Nations, constructivism, crisis response, diplomacy, habits, long peace, norms, practice

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## Introduction

On 15 October 2008, the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) came into effect. The 10 member states — Cambodia, Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam — bound themselves to shared principles and norms of pacific regional relations, and six months later devised a blueprint for an ambitious regional community to further deepen their integration. However, surrounding the progress of this regional project, militarized conflict remained. In 2008 and 2011, violent clashes along the Thai–Cambodian border displaced as many as 100,000 people and saw the use of tanks, heavy artillery and cluster munitions between these ASEAN member states (International Crisis Group, 2011). Similarly, in 2005, long-running tensions between Indonesia and Malaysia gave rise to a confrontation of nine warships off the Sipadan and Ligitan islands, with Indonesian military officials claiming their intent to “crush Malaysia” (Guerin, 2005). How can we account for the absence of war between ASEAN members in light of persistent militarized disputes?

If peace is defined merely as the absence of war, and the region as defined through formal membership to ASEAN, then Southeast Asia has been exceptionally peaceful since ASEAN’s founding in 1967. There have been no wars among regional states when these states have been ASEAN members, and thus some scholars view the region as demonstrating a “long peace” (e.g. Kacowicz, 1998; Kivimaki, 2001). This may suggest that the organizational form of ASEAN has played an important role in the establishment and maintenance of peace in the region (Ba, 2009). This puzzle and the potential response are in some ways misleading, however, as there remains a pervasive level of violent and militarized interstate disputes, even among ASEAN members. The region lacks the deeply institutionalized organizational structures, democratic regimes and economic interdependence that liberal-institutionalist theories associate with long peace. Similarly, there appears no regional hegemon or hard balancing behaviours often associated with long peace. Further, the “we-ness” inherent in ideational explanations of lasting peace is not entirely apparent in the region either (Adler and Barnett, 1998). As a senior Malaysian diplomat suggested, “maybe we don’t have the community identity and the ‘we-ness’ [as in Europe], but we know that ASEAN is for us and we know that it moves us forward.”<sup>1</sup> To address this puzzle, I build on Vincent Pouliot’s (2008: 259) suggestion that “peace exists in and through practice when security officials’ practical sense makes diplomacy the self-evident way to solving interstate disputes.” I argue that this is the case in Southeast Asia. Here, regional relations are circumscribed by particular and practical habits of cooperation that generate a tolerance of limited violence between states. I argue that a focus on *habitual dispositions* helps us understand community building alongside sustained levels of interstate violence and long-term patterns of conflict and cooperation more broadly.

This article is structured over four parts. First, I survey recent social-constructivist literature and outline the concept of habitual dispositions. Here, I pay particular attention to the relationship between practice and norms. From this discussion, I briefly posit the origins of habitual dispositions and the methodological challenges of recognizing them. In the second section, I outline the conflictual long peace of the region. In the third, I make use of interviews with 40 practitioners and scholars in the region, alongside documentary analysis, to describe the habits of Southeast Asian regional diplomacy and

underscore the relationship between these practical qualities of regional relations and codified regional norms. In the final section, I explore the role of this habitual disposition in regional crisis response with a focus on the 2011 Preah Vihear conflict. Not only was this the most severe regional conflict in recent decades, but it also risked escalation to full-scale war between ASEAN member states. I suggest that the habitual disposition of Southeast Asian diplomacy was of a deflationary and perhaps prolonging impact. I conclude with a statement concerning the future of this research program.

## Practices, norms and habitual dispositions

In practice, most social action occurs rather unthinkingly. As Emile Durkheim suggests, “by its very nature, human action, whether individual or collective oscillates between two poles, that of consciousness or reflection on the one side, and that of habit on the other side, with the latter pole being stronger” (quoted in Camic, 1986: 1052). Relatively thoughtless behaviour and sets of understandings structure much of social action for individuals and states. However, International Relations (IR) theory often assumes and starts with an exploration of the conscious reflection of agents prior to action (March and Olson, 1989). Be it in reference to material structures and incentives or intersubjectively held assumptions of “we-ness” in a community, IR theory suffers from a pervasive “representational bias” (Pouliot, 2008). By starting with how and why actors reflect upon themselves and the world, we in IR tend to belie the reality that much of what social actors do and think is shaped prior to reflection. With this in mind, my goal is to uncover the foundations of the very “imaginability and thinkability of interests and choice” in order to understand regional peace (Hopf, 2002: 283).

This focus builds on the recent turn to both practice (e.g. Adler and Pouliot, 2011) and habit (Hopf, 2010) in IR. Habits are both cognitive and behavioural. They are sets of deeply held knowledge that generate relatively unthinking responses to situations. Practice suggests a similar cognitive and behavioural quality of relations. Pouliot (2008, 2010) and others offer a similar focus by highlighting the importance of unreflexive and dispositional knowledge that generates “socially meaningful patterns of action,” or practices (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 6). In treatments of both habit and practice, practical knowledge is unconsciously self-evident to actors and, as such, makes possible certain behaviour while precluding others (see also Hayes, 2013: 25–27, 31–39). This inarticulate “practical sense” or “socially constituted ‘sense of the game’” acts as a lens through which actors confront the world and circumscribes thought and action (Pouliot, 2008: 275; see also Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

This common focus on the unreflexive aspects of social relations has drawn scholars away from constructivist work on norms, and practice theorists tend to articulate and distance themselves from what Ole Jacob Sending (2002) terms a “motivationally externalist” reading of the logic of appropriateness (see Collins, 2013: 16–19; Pouliot, 2008: 262). In this view, norms consciously guide reasoned behaviour. Many such international norms leave “behavioral traces,” recorded in treaties, agreements and other formal or less-than-formal means as they are established and internalized (Bernstein, 2001: 30). This allows norms to be both verbal and intentional. It is this representational quality that distances a focus on norms from practice and habit in these accounts. As Ted Hopf (2002:

12) summarizes nicely, “Significant features distinguish habitual action from normative compliance. Generally, norms have the form ‘in circumstance X, you should do Y’, whereas habits have a general form more like ‘in circumstance X, action Y follows.’” The same can be said of practice. In this way, these authors suggest, habits and practices are more robust, more resilient and more consequential for stability in social relations than are consciously referenced norms of appropriate behaviour. However, and as often escapes this turn to distinct logics, norms and practices are often interrelated.

International norms tend to be abstract, in that they are open to interpretation, contestation, and thus variation in performance (Acharya, 2004; Weiner, 2009). Identifying existing norms alone may highlight collectively held “notions of what appropriate behaviour ought to be” but it tells us little about the behaviour of actors (Bernstein, 2001: 29). For example, as Amitav Acharya (2014: 62) notes, “there is considerable room for doubt whether it [the set of norms of the ‘ASEAN way’] has been upheld in practice.” This is precisely the point of interest here.

In competent practices, the particular and intersubjective meaning and unproblematic behaviour that stems from abstract norms are apparent. Actors tend to engage in practices that both “work” and, often relatedly, imbue behaviours with a sense of legitimacy (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 22; Little, 2011: 186). Among different communities of practitioners, these patterns of understandings can differ sharply and norms may be internalized and practised differently. Habituated practices embody, act out and often reify particular and patterned interpretations of norms and afford them particular and patterned behavioural expressions (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 6; Weiner, 2009). The relationship between codified norms and the practices that stem from — and often complicate or contest — them may be glimpsed through a turn to habit and practice. As I will demonstrate, from an external standpoint, there appear important differences between norms codified in the founding ASEAN Declaration of 1967 and the Charter signed 40 years later, and the habituated practices that are enacted and encountered daily as self-evident by regional practitioners. Yet, from the intra-ASEAN perspective, there is a clear fit. Reference to the same set of norms often means fundamentally different things to different communities who have filled norms with distinct behavioural predispositions.

With this in mind, and building on the literature surveyed earlier, my concept of *habitual dispositions* rests on four key assertions. First, they exist prior to reflection, as predispositions towards certain behaviours in a given context (see Hopf, 2010: 542–543; Kahneman, 2003). While they are temporally and spatially contingent — emerging in and through practice — once established, habitual dispositions shape perception and practice. Second, analytically, these dispositional qualities can be conceptualized in terms of knowledge and practice — or as both content and process.<sup>2</sup> Third, they emerge in and are shared by groups of actors, or bounded communities of practice (Adler and Pouliot, 2011). Lastly, the effect of habitual dispositions is to circumscribe social action. Habitual dispositions imbue complex social interaction with a sense of normalcy, patterning social relations as a result (Camic, 1986; Crossley, 2013). Through this means, habitual dispositions are themselves a source of stability in social relations (Adler, 2008; Mitzen, 2006). Before applying this focus to the case of Southeast Asia’s long and conflictual peace, two issues warrant attention: “Where do habits come from?” and “How can we see them in action?”

## Origins of habit

While sociologists have debated variation in habitual behaviour and explored habits across a wide range of social relations (e.g. Camic, 1986), little attention has been paid to their origins. While relatively stable, habits are not innate. They are acquired through social interaction, and closed institutional or organizational settings are likely sites for their emergence (Adler, 1997: 345; Crossley, 2013: 155; Hopf, 2010: 547, 550; Johnston, 2001; Neumann, 2007; Pouliot, 2011). The acquisition of habits may be active through reflexive teaching and learning, or through unconscious adoption and mimicry (Hopf, 2010: 541–542; Pouliot, 2010: 31–32; Verplaken, 2010: 70; Williams, 2007: 25–26). Like all practices, habits begin as “stories” (Neumann, 2002; Pouliot, 2012). These narratives provide “authoritative definitions of truth and morality” and, in turn, guide behaviour (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 21). Of particular importance are the actions of powerful and authoritative actors (Alder-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014; Pouliot, 2008: 282). These actors are able to impose meaning within a particular community of actors through practice, where acting *as if* certain behaviours are natural may be self-fulfilling (Finnemore, 1996: 30; Pouliot, 2008: 283). This basic claim is consistent with constructivist literature on norm emergence and internalization, and hints at the underexplored interdependence between practices and norms (e.g. Checkel, 2005; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Hoffmann, 2005). In this formulation, teaching and learning may be implicit or explicit, and, in time, there is an “appropriative moment” when a once-reflected-upon practice shifts to the unconscious background (Mitzen, 2006: 36). These new practices and habits do not emerge in a vacuum. They are nested within existing and overlapping practices, norms and, in our case, regional narratives that unite a community (see Neumann, 2002: 635–636; Pouliot, 2012: 214–215). As such, “new” ways of understanding the world and novel practices must be resonant with local perceptions of both appropriateness and efficacy — to be assumed to work in practice (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 22; Axelrod, 1986: 1097; Crossley, 2013: 152). Habits, then, emerge from precedent and iteration, but are impacted by authoritative actors and perceptions of efficacy. As competent performances, these practical aspects of relations are necessarily shaped by existent and collectively shared expectations. In this way, they may often relate to particular understandings of largely abstract and codified norms, filling them with concrete meaning and orientating them towards action. Once pushed into the cognitive background, these habitual and dispositional qualities serve to circumscribe thought and behaviour and define “normal” relations.

While a full analysis of the emergence and development of Southeast Asian diplomatic habits is beyond the scope of this article, probing their origins suggests that they follow this logic. The distinctive Southeast Asian habitual disposition, as explored later, has its origins in the culturally specific practices of member states that have been transmitted within the bounds of a particular institutional context by authoritative actors, something made possible by their perceived efficacy. As will be demonstrated, these habits rest on collectively held and culturally distinct foundations within a community. For example, the consensus model centred on traditional Malay village practices of “*musjawarah*” (consultation) and “*mufakat*” (consensus) are often cited by scholars in this regard (e.g. Acharya, 1998: 211–212; Almote, 1997/1998: 81; Ba, 2013: 145–146; Beeson, 2009: 21; Collins, 2013: 35–36),

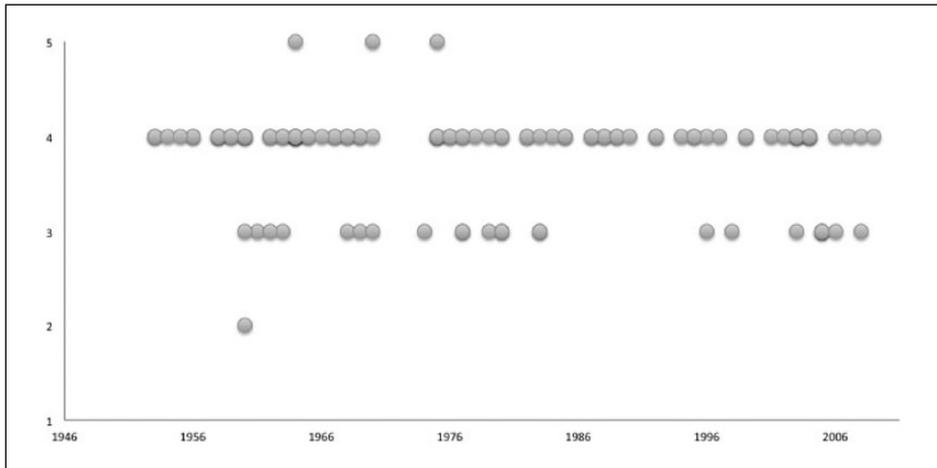
and some suggest that they are part of a larger and common Southeast Asian culture (Kivimaki, 2001: 16). Similarly, others have examined the common experiences with colonialism and the threat of Chinese domination, and the dynamic effect that externally introduced norms and practices of interstate interaction have had within the region (Acharya, 2004; Ba, 2013; Haacke, 2003; Womack, 2008). While the origins of the habitual elements likely rest in common experience, it is their practice by leading regional states that has reified them as given qualities of regional relations. Further, while there is variation in habituation and practice, their practice by leading regional actors informs community relations more widely. Indonesia is of particular importance, as I explore later, having been the “*primus inter pares*” in terms of political security integration within the region (Collins, 2014: 277; see also Rattanaseeve, 2014; Smith, 1999; Thompson, 2015). Further, ASEAN as an organizational setting is often recognized for its particularly insular level of decision-making, the very setting in which practices are likely to see habituation (Ba, 2006: 168–169, 174–175; Katsumata, 2006: 185–186; Kivimaki, 2001: 14). Here, the “peculiar, small world that multilateral diplomats inhabit” is just that, and the transmission of habitual practices is likely (Pouliot, 2011: 546). However, recognizing the operation of habits in this context is challenging.

### Recognizing habits

Habitual behaviour is not only repetitive — a necessary but not sufficient definitional condition — but also characterized by a lack of reflection (Verplaken, 2010: 71–72). The unthinking quality of habitual action stems from background knowledge — what actors think *from* rather than about (Hopf, 2010: 541; Pouliot, 2008: 260). However, repeated actions produced through reflection do not look any different from relatively automatic action. Observing this distinction requires an interpretivist lens to sense practitioners’ foundational and contextualized thinking (Pouliot, 2014: 243–250; see also Fujii, forthcoming; Schatz, 2009). Interviews with practitioners can uncover what actors do and do not reflect on, through what people say and do not say in interviews. Through interviews, the “normal way diplomacy works” — as one American diplomat in Jakarta put it — and the unthinking knowledge and relatively automatic behaviours that stem from it can be recovered. Habits are socially embedded within particular contexts and communities, and often rely upon particular and less-than-conscious understanding of recorded norms. Contrasting what is unproblematically assumed as given and natural by one community of practitioners (e.g. ASEAN member state diplomats and staff) with a group of practitioners who engage with this community as external others (e.g. ASEAN Dialogue Partners) brings into relief the distinctive and habitual aspects of community practices, and the particular and practical expression of abstract codified norms. Finally, asking practitioners about the underlying logic of their assumptions, problematizing givens and offering hypothetical scenarios for comment serves to destabilize foundational assumptions, illuminating further taken-for-granted knowledge and habituated practices.

### The conflictual peace of Southeast Asia

Figure 1 makes use of the Correlates of War Project’s Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data set (Version 4.1) to illustrate the reality of a conflictual long peace in



**Figure 1.** MIDs of Southeast Asian states by intensity level, 1946–2010.

Southeast Asia (Palmer et al., 2015). There were 105 MIDs between Southeast Asian states from 1946 to 2010, the end date for when such data are available. The region is defined as the current 10 member states of ASEAN. These conflicts are noted, admittedly crudely, by reference to the aggregated level of hostility, ordered from 1 to 5: 5 ( $n = 3$ ) denotes war, 4 ( $n = 78$ ) the use of force, 3 ( $n = 23$ ) the display of the use of force and 2 ( $n = 1$ ) the threat of the use of force (level 1, which is not represented, notes disputes with no militarized action).

Figure 1 makes it clear that a focus on “war” alone belies the prevalence of violent interstate conflict, which is a near-constant reality of regional relations even between ASEAN members. Of the 105 MIDs during this period, 26 are between ASEAN members, 18 of which are level 4, and eight are level 3. While the fatalities in these disputes were certainly limited, given this use of force, it is misleading to assume that “there has been no conflict between ASEAN members during its existence” (Beeson, 2009: 17). Further, while some scholars have been keen to see a sharp and pacific shift in regional relations after the founding of ASEAN in 1967 (Acharya, 2014: 46; Ba, 2009: 48; Kivimaki, 2001: 19), there is less clear evidence when examining MIDs. A “major shift in the regional security environment” is not easily observable, and many divisive territorial claims linger still (Acharya, 2014: 4). These include territorial disputes between: Malaysia and Singapore over Pedra Branca; Indonesia and Malaysia over the Sipadan and Ligitan Islands; Indonesia and the Philippines over the Miatan Islands; Malaysia and both Indonesia and the Philippines over Sabah; and Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines over the Spratly Islands (Kivimaki, 2001: 10–11; Wain, 2012: 54–55). While war may be an aberration, pervasive disputes remain.

This is all the more puzzling as the relative and long peace of the region exists absent the hallmarks of both the liberal peace — democracy, economic interdependence and formalized organizational structures (e.g. ONeal and Russett, 1999) — and peace derived from material constraints — a balance of power or its concentration in a regional hegemon (e.g. Levy, 1998: 145–146). For many observers, this suggests the importance

of the normative constraints of the “ASEAN way” (Acharya, 1998, 2014; Ba, 2009; Harris, 2000; Katsumata, 2006). What such accounts lack, however, is explicit focus on the practices and habits of regional relations. This is not merely a suggestion to explore the consciously referenced norms of appropriateness inherent in these accounts. This is a call to look beyond and prior to these reflections and to the reality that most of what diplomatic practitioners do is shaped prior to reflection.

The remainder of this article advances two empirical claims. First, there is a common set of habituated diplomatic practices that underpin relations among regional states. This is a basic and limited claim, but one that moves beyond and deeper than appreciations of the ASEAN way of appropriate behaviour. Second, the *particular* habitual disposition of the region produces a *particular* kind of diplomacy and peace through naturalized and stable diplomatic relations. These attributes of relations undergird not only the basic and long peace, but also the conflictual reality of this peace. The habitual disposition of Southeast Asia is one that tolerates a limited level of violence among members.

## Habits of regional relations in Southeast Asia

With a more narrow focus on habituated practices, seven qualities of regional relations appear salient. There are three interrelated processual attributes of Southeast Asian habits, including the practice of consensus, informal dialogue and a privileging of process over substance. Similarly, the content or substance of these habits are threefold, including thinking from non-interference, equality among member states and face-saving. There is a seventh habitual element, the proclivity towards informal pacific dispute settlement, which blurs this analytic divide. Many of these attributes exist as codified norms within and beyond the region. However, they are understood and practised in particular ways among regional practitioners and with particular consequence. Taken together, these deeply ingrained qualities of regional diplomacy make up the Southeast Asian habitual disposition.

### *Habituated process*

The “norm” of consensus decision-making is referenced as fundamental in both the 2003 Bali Concord II and the 2007 Charter, as well as engrained in more mundane aspects of ASEAN, including the Connectivity Coordinating Committee (2011) and the yet-to-be-utilized Protocol on Enhanced Dispute Settlement Mechanism (EDSM) (2004). More importantly, however, consensus decision-making is a process assumed natural and normal in and through ASEAN daily practice. As one Thai diplomat described it, consensus is “the only game in town.” A senior Malaysian diplomat echoed this, as well as the underlying sense of community that makes it possible, when he suggested that it was simply “how we play our game.” This statement parallels the suggestion that practical sense is best understood as a socially constituted “sense of the game.” However, ASEAN’s is a particular practice of consensus.

As one European diplomat with years of experience in the region noted, consensus in ASEAN is not “procedural consensus in a strict sense.” Rather, it is a prior and inherent consensus-seeking practice, a distinct and intrinsic understanding of what the norm of

consensus means in and through practice. Consensus is sought before formal deliberation and is done intuitively in reference to expectations. It is a lived and practised sensibility within this community of practitioners. While many practitioners explicitly cite the norm of “*musyawarah dan mufakat*” — the notion that *consultation* produces *consensus* through discussion — there is much that does not reach the negotiation table as a result of the practice of this prior consensus (see also Acharya, 2014: 44; Beeson, 2009: 21). In short, ASEAN practitioners know and practise consensus in particular and habitual ways. As another European Union (EU) official explained, among ASEAN states, they “do not search for compromise. There is either general agreement from the drafting of the agenda — from the beginning — or they just drop it [an issue].” The ASEAN habit of consensus is distinct from the European, despite a shared norm. In ASEAN, this naturalized practice generates a reluctance to pursue issues of apparent national importance when deemed outside of possible consensus *prior* to discussion and debate. A senior Indonesian diplomat recalled this practice in daily action. She noted that upon entering a meeting, she “will map the room and [know] this and this country will be supportive of our idea, and this and this will not.” An illustration of this reality in the summer of 2014 was the pressure within some member states to produce a common ASEAN statement regarding the Russian annexation of Crimea. The annexation coincided with a swell of interest at the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) in making good on the 2011 Bali Concord III’s ambition to collectively “promote the role of the ASEAN Community in the global community of nations.” As one ASEC official recalled, some member states wished to see “a statement from ASEAN, not to criticize, but to state a position.” However, as he remarked, “I knew, sitting in the back there listening to this discussion, that it is not going to fly. After a few years in the Secretariat, you know.” There was no clear consensus at the onset and the conversation was over before it started. This intimate knowledge of what is possible and not given prior consensus among member states was a reoccurring if inarticulate reality for many practitioners. As a senior ASEC official explained, “Within a meeting, we can already feel it, whether it is sellable or not sellable.... This is how we work.” While deviations from this habituated process do exist, they are seen by member states as such — as deviations from what is normal and efficacious. As another ASEC official suggested, this practice of prior consensus “has allowed ASEAN to work for the last 47 years.” The effect is to circumscribe the issues that are debated and discussed, and, as will be explored, may often make possible a toleration of violence within the region. For many non-ASEAN practitioners who confront this reality, this is neither normal nor efficacious. As an American official noted of the consensus-seeking practice, “they [ASEAN states] are going to have to get more comfortable getting on the phone and talking with one another and saying look: ‘can we work this out’ in the *normal way that diplomacy works*” (emphasis added).

Further, and relatedly, there is an inherent focus on the importance of “process” over result that has been habituated among practitioners and expressed through a preference for procedural informality. In a common refrain, Dewi Fortuna Anwar, a prominent advisor to the Indonesian Vice-President, brought these backgrounded practices to the fore when she suggested that in ASEAN, “you don’t set the goals. The journey is the important thing.” Many ASEAN interviewees were quick to defend the slow and incomplete realization of the ASEAN Community of 2015, suggesting that this was a “process”

rather than an end, and something very much distinct from the European experience. By this, all meant that despite the thresholds and specifics of economic (and to some extent political) integration noted in the 2009 Roadmap for an ASEAN Community, there was a general sense that its completion meant less than the undertaking. As former Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda, whose tenure spans the development of the Community framework, remarked: “when people criticize that ASEAN will not be able to implement the community standards by 2015 ... it is not the case. This is a process. It’s not that [by] January 2016, it must be one hundred percent.” This was echoed by an ASEC staff member who suggested that the Community is “not an event; it’s a process,” while another suggested that I should expect, in his words, “no [big] bang” on 1 January 2016. For Dialogue Partners, this assumption of informality and the focus on process over outcome is frustrating, for it undercuts the utility of the carefully negotiated thresholds, many of which they helped to devise and monitor. These differing understandings of regional development illustrate the particular assumptions of process that are an integral part of the ASEAN habitual disposition.

The views of non-member state practitioners working with ASEAN, again, serve to illuminate these habituated qualities of relations. As one EU official noted bluntly: “Process is a term used to mask ignorance.” In the view of another, ASEAN is simply “reactive,” “not driven by an agenda” and “has no vision.” For many non-member state diplomats, the inherent focus on process and informal dialogue is not only ineffective, but places the region in jeopardy. As a European official suggested, Chinese claims to the South China Sea should have compelled a collective reorientation to address the growing threat to ASEAN states. Yet, this has not been the case.<sup>3</sup> In her view, there is a “conceptual incapacity in ASEAN to understand what is at stake [in the South China Sea]... If three or four European states had such an issue, we would come together.” For the EU official, “normal diplomacy” would produce a stronger and collective position. However, ASEAN diplomacy, resting on habituated practices of consensus, informality and process over substance, delimits vision and action. These habitual practices temper how states perceive risks and circumscribe responses to crises — be it external or intra-regional.

### *Habituated content*

Non-interference is a norm within and beyond the region (Jackson, 2005). It is codified as a foundational principle of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), signed at the First ASEAN Summit in 1976. It recurs explicitly, if briefly, in the Bali Concord II (2003) and again with the relative formalization of the organization through the Charter, and with implicit reference in the 2009 Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (A.2.16). For many, this suggests a foundational norm and one that defines the appropriate behaviour of regional member states (e.g. Acharya, 2014; Ba, 2009). Yet, as with an understanding of consensus, how non-interference has been habituated in practice is, from an external standpoint, divorced from its evocation on paper. ASEAN practitioners think *from* a foundational assumption of non-interference and they do so in a particular way.

Minister Hassan begins to make this clear with his suggestion that ASEAN states, in practice, know that non-interference is not “sacrosanct.” Rather, it is a baseline of respect for territorial sovereignty, and, in particular, the deployment of uniformed military personnel within each other’s territory for humanitarian or any other purpose. This principle bends when the common interests of ASEAN — however loosely defined — are deemed to be at stake by powerful member states. As the minister explained, ASEAN is:

a family of ten countries. As siblings, we have the right to know what is happening in the family of our sisters and brothers. ... If we discuss and raise an issue, say a violation of human rights in one ASEAN member, its not because we wish to interfere.

This understanding of non-interference is distinct from that of external practitioners. For example, one EU official critiqued this assumption of non-interference as merely a “smokescreen.” In his view, non-interference in ASEAN is:

something they [member states] shore up in order to do the opposite ... like saying “I love you” every day, over and over, only to stab you in the back! And then say, “I didn’t do that! How could I? I love you!”

While perhaps hyperbolic, this view underscores the distinctiveness of this quality of ASEAN relations in practice. No member assumes a hard and fast rule. Rather, it is an inclination towards maintaining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of member states, but in so doing also preserving ASEAN as the organization through which to achieve this and other regional aims (see also Collins, 2013: 36–37). This understanding alludes to the second habituated aspect of content, an assumption of equality among member states. This quality informs the consensus-seeking practices and produces a dispositional impulse towards keeping regional issues within the region. ASEAN’s response to Cyclone Nargis, which devastated Myanmar in May 2008, serves to illustrate these dynamics.

The worst natural disaster in Myanmar’s history required international attention and aid. The closed regime under the military junta refused initial offers of aid. For powerful ASEAN states, chiefly Indonesia and Singapore, it was clear that if ASEAN did not facilitate the opening of Myanmar to international aid, it risked losing international credibility. A senior Indonesian diplomat explained: “ASEAN was implicated. ASEAN was blamed.” As he recalls of the 19 May 2008 meeting of foreign ministers immediately following the 2 May cyclone, it was clear to the room that Myanmar needed to support ASEAN’s interests even if it meant compromising its own. There was a shared sense that “Yes, the lack of democracy and human rights [in Myanmar] certainly may inflame ASEAN, but you know, here on the very day of this emergency situation, [Myanmar’s] rejection of any international offer [means] ASEAN [is] also implicated.” Prior consensus had previously rendered some issues mute — a lack of democracy despite the Charter’s insistence and abhorrent human rights violations. However, a tension now arose as, collectively, ASEAN’s credibility was on the line. Indonesia and Singapore, in particular, recognized the need to respond to international pressure, even if it meant intervention in domestic affairs.

Prior to the meeting of ministers, Minister Hassan met with Singaporean Foreign Minister George Yeo in private.<sup>4</sup> The two agreed that Indonesia would present three potential solutions to Myanmar, knowing this to be comfortable to the rest of the membership. In line with proclivities towards face-saving and the pressures of non-interference, during the meeting, seven member states spoke before Indonesia, offering only condolences. Then, Hassan offered three options: Myanmar could follow the precedent of Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami in Aceh and allow international aid unencumbered; it could allow ASEAN as a mediator to international aid; or it could do nothing. Hassan cautioned against the first — unfettered access by the international community could be destabilizing to the junta — and instructed Nyan Win, Foreign Minister of Myanmar, to reflect carefully on the third and what it may mean for its relations with ASEAN. After some reflection, Hassan was given the personal agreement that option two was the favoured path, and after a short recess and a call to the capital, Naypyidaw, the agreement was set and Myanmar received international aid from all quarters. Upon reflection of this event, a senior Indonesian diplomat remarked that it may not have been “too ASEAN to avoid friction and problems [and] to ensure harmonious relations. But, this was a problem ... [and] we needed to deal with it rationally.” A senior Malaysian diplomat echoed this assumption by suggesting that during such moments of crisis, “common sense plays a big role in our decision-makers.” The rationality or common sense that existed in that meeting of foreign ministers underscores the complicated practice of non-interference, and the relationship between norms and practice. For these practitioners, this was not inconsistent with the norm of non-interference. It was natural, unproblematic and practical to reconcile these perhaps immediately irreconcilable pressures — to uphold national sovereignty by allowing the needs of the supra-regional ASEAN to overstep it. From an external viewpoint, the ASEAN practice of non-interference appears incongruous with the norm invoked in official rhetoric and agreements. This perceived counter-intuitiveness is echoed by the frustrations of our EU official, and yet is lost on ASEAN practitioners. In short, the codified norm has been habituated and practised in a particular and competent way.

Third, there is a taken-for-granted practice of face-saving, and one that stems from the equality and familial dynamic explored earlier (see also Beeson, 2009). There is an inherent apprehension to allow any member state to appear a lesser partner or to expose a member state to the critiques of actors external to the region.<sup>5</sup> Practitioners assume this unthinkingly. As Anwar suggested:

Shaming and naming is not acceptable. Telling people what to do and expecting them to do it not acceptable. It just does not work here. ... If you want to be more effective, you go and you do it in a way that does not cause people to lose face.

Behaviours that may appear normatively and even legally deviant from an external standpoint are not critiqued within ASEAN, and states are often sheltered from external critique.

When I spoke with interviewees in the summer of 2014, the recent coup in Thailand was fresh on the ASEAN mind. Officials faced two immediate concerns. First was an impulse to save face for Thailand and ensure that there was no overt critique of the coup,

despite it appearing to contravene legal norms and rules spelled out in the Charter (Article 2.2.h). In tension with this impulse was concern, once again, for ASEAN credibility. From an external viewpoint, this was a fine line between exclusivity in aims. As one Permanent Representative described it:

After the coup, the Thais did not want ASEAN to convene a special meeting just to talk about Thailand. But ... Thailand is a very important member of ASEAN — the second-largest economy — and given the developments in Thailand, I think ASEAN’s credibility would be at stake if we did not even talk about it. I think Thailand knows that. They recognize that.

Regarding any possible admonishment, she stated unequivocally: “We would never do that.” This was clear to her, in practice. From an external standpoint, this is not clear legally or normatively, given the Charter, where a core and explicit principle is that member states shall act with “adherence to the rule of law, good governance, the principles of democracy and constitutional government” (Article 2.2.h; see also Article 1.6). In practice, the proclivity towards face-saving overrode concerns of the possible legal implications of the coup — namely, that a breach of the Charter should be raised publicly at the ASEAN Summit (Article 5.2-3 and Article 20). A high-ranking ASEC political-security official, the very person who could best recognize a breach of ASEAN norms and principles, echoed this reality:

I would never be in a position to criticize the Thailand military. ... Of course, there is a provision in the Charter. It’s got something about the overthrow of the government and all that sort of stuff ... but does anybody [at this point, he gets up, walks over to his desk and picks up a copy of the Charter and waves it in the air, tapping its cover] Does the leader brandish the book and say “You! You! You have violated the Charter!”? No. Nobody does it. We don’t do it in ASEAN! We talk, and say, “let’s try and do something about it.” But, we still come to the table.

This is precisely the habitual and dispositional character of regional diplomacy at work. Despite the blatant challenge to a core *principle* of the ASEAN Charter, the *practice* is to engage in informal talk among members, to save face and to maintain stability in relations within the community. That the very official who would be able to criticize the Thai military government for not adhering to a core principle of the Charter knows that he “would never be in a position” to do so demonstrates this keenly.

Finally, and as seen in the earlier discussion, there is a proclivity towards pacific dispute settlement of intra-regional disputes. This follows widely established norms within and beyond the region, and, in particular, as enshrined as a guiding principle within the Charter (Article 2.2.d). However, regional practitioners’ practical and habitual understanding and behaviour in this regard is particular. The central legal mechanism for conflict resolution within ASEAN rests with the High Council, a grouping of ministerial-level representatives empowered by the TAC and upheld by the Charter. Yet, to date, this formal means of dispute mediation has never been utilized (Acharya, 2014: 49). Similarly, the 2004 EDSM for economic disputes, also enshrined in the Charter, has not yet been employed (Koesnaldi et al., 2014). Eschewing formal and legal channels, ASEAN practitioners assume the possibility of conflict resolution only through informal dialogue, something that manifests in the practice of this abstract codified norm (see also Acharya,

1998: 211). ASEAN practitioners “know” that this is the only game in town, and, when forced to reflect on it, “know” that it is productive of regional stability.

However, what is both given and effective for ASEAN practitioners is a puzzlingly suboptimal choice for external actors. For one American diplomat in Jakarta, ASEAN diplomacy is simply “insane.” Similarly, an Australian official suggested that ASEAN has a “particular habit of cooperation, and it is a strange one.” From this external vantage point, ASEAN officials understand and practise diplomacy and the principled and codified norms upon which it rests in a distinct way. A senior ASEC official recalled an experience in the Secretariat that makes this distinction clear:

I remember an EU consultant once threatened us [ASEC staff]: “if you don’t do it like this, you’ll never achieve what you want to do, because you have to have this [as she bangs on the table] in place and have these outputs by this time, otherwise it won’t work!” You know what happened to him? We kicked him out! ... We knew he was right, and that he was leading us in a [good] direction, we just didn’t like the way he said it. So, we kicked him out.

This keenly illustrates Iver B. Neumann’s (2002: 637) suggestion: “practice speaks: this is how we have always done things around here.”

To summarize, seven qualities inform how ASEAN practitioners “do things around here”: prior consensus, informal dialogue, privileging process over substance, non-interference, equality among ASEAN states, an impulse towards face-saving and pacific dispute settlement through talk rather than formal legal channels. While many of these qualities may appear to align with the codified norms of the region and beyond, it is the regional understandings that shape behaviour and particular practices that are most consequential for regional relations. Together, these habitual and dispositional qualities form the foundation that Southeast Asian diplomatic practitioners think and act from.

## **Habits and crisis response**

Despite the rifts and divisions of the region, there is a multifaceted and consequential habitual disposition that shapes regional security cooperation. Habits act as the primary lens through which ASEAN practitioners view regional relations and regional crises more specifically, and they provide the particular content and expression of otherwise abstract norms. While habits of European diplomacy may have produced a classical security community, in Southeast Asia, this dynamic has produced something rather different. Here, the regional disposition serves to structure and pattern relations in a particular way, with long-term peace yet periodic and violent conflict short of war that is assumed as almost business as usual. Understanding how this dispositional set of traits serves to restrict the escalation of conflict and lead to this patterned state of affairs is challenging. One glimpse of this relationship stems from practitioners themselves. What they know as normal and efficacious is a signifier in this regard.

ASEAN practitioners share a belief in the pacific reality of their region, and they credit their diplomatic practice as key to this assumed success. While practitioners find their habits difficult to recognize, when pushed to reflect on their daily practices and when their sense of normal relations is presented as problematic, many are defensive. Aware of

critiques of ASEAN and its forums as “talk shops” (Burton, 2007; Katsumata, 2006) or productive of “process not progress” (Jones and Smith, 2007), many respond that talk is *the* foundation of regional cooperation. As Minister Hassan suggested, “I would argue that it was because of dialogue, because of talk, that here we enjoy peace and security — and continued peace and security.” “Is it better to talk, or to shoot each other?” was a common sentiment, as another ASEAN official asked rhetorically. For these practitioners, talk is action, and the habits of regional relations circumscribe conflict management. A recurring example from my interviews serves to bring this dynamic to light.

The long-running tension between Malaysia and Indonesia that characterized the period of *Confrontasi* in the 1960s in some ways remains. This was palpable in a number of interviews with practitioners on both sides. A senior Malaysian diplomat, for example, remarked of the “mistrust” that he and his government still have over issues such as the Sipadan and Ligitan Islands, despite the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, as well as migrant workers (Guerin, 2005). Similarly, an Indonesian official suggested that there remains a “sensitivity between Indonesia and Malaysia” that makes policy-makers “uneasy to continue building relations between Indonesia and Malaysia.” In particular, there were concerns on both sides that while mistrust and unease remained at the government level, deeper antagonisms remained among their publics and militaries. However, conflicts do not escalate between the two states. As Anwar reflected:

Tempers flare between the navies of Malaysia and Indonesia over our maritime boundaries. But, at the higher level we say, “you know, we’ve got the TAC and we cannot resolve disputes through conflict or war.” So, when, in Indonesia or Malaysia, the President is under pressure from Parliament or from the media who say, you know, “oh, we should fight for it!” both governments will say: “we created ASEAN. We have this code of conduct in order to prevent open conflict from happening.” ... There is no enforcement mechanism, but [ASEAN via the TAC] creates a framework in which governments can restrain themselves when facing one another, [and] also a basis of argument when dealing with their citizens.

As explored earlier, while practitioners “know” that they have codified norms and principles in the TAC, and elsewhere, the understanding and practice of these norms is particular. Further, that many “flares” such as the 2005 naval standoff off the coast of Borneo have not been resolved, and that increases in military spending after this event appeared directed at increasing security along this border, suggests that while conflicts may be muted through ASEAN practices, they may not be resolved (Guerin, 2005; Kivimaki, 2008; McBeth, 2012).

In speaking with regional officials at the ambassadorial level, there was a shared sense that while such low-level conflict remained a possibility, it had little effect at the broader level. Thus, Anwar was able to brush aside the Indonesian-Malaysian disputes as inconsequential and, as I explore later, large-scale violence between Thailand and Cambodia could occur as the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community was being devised and as the Charter entered into force. For ASEAN practitioners, there is a business-as-usual aspect to conflict within the region. While this attitude is widely shared among ASEAN practitioners, they were often unable to articulate why or how their brand of diplomacy generates peace or manages conflict — itself suggestive of how habitually ingrained these qualities of regional relations and conflict management are.

Near the conclusion of my interviews, I often asked why regional conflicts do not escalate, despite a lack of recourse to formal channels to mediate or resolve them. No interviewee could offer a clear response.<sup>6</sup> The majority found it difficult to grapple with the question, mentally unpacking the taken-for-granted assumption that the particular means of regional relations, as they know it, tempered if not resolved crises. As one ASEC official remarked of the potential oddity of ASEAN practices, “It’s really not a matter of unique or not unique. It’s which one works for ASEAN. ... It is a necessity that works most effectively.” While normal and effective for ASEAN practitioners, this habitual disposition is strange and inefficacious to others. As one EU official remarked, “Strangely, this group holds together. That is the real miracle.” In this view, ASEAN “is not unsuccessful, it is just not what we expect it to be.” This is precisely the point: ASEAN may appear bizarre and ineffective, slow and informal, but it simply works for ASEAN member states in ways unfathomable to those external to it. Moreover, productive and “working” diplomacy in the region does not mean an absence of conflict. Rather, the habitual qualities of the region lead to a toleration of violence by regional practitioners. A deepening of regional relations is possible and attainable, despite continued regional conflict. To explore this suggestion further, I turn to a case of habits in action.

### *Habits and a “small war”*

In 2008 and again in 2011, a period that spans the development and implementation of the 2009 Roadmap for an ASEAN Community and the Charter’s entry into force, numerous large-scale military clashes occurred along the Thai–Cambodian border between these two ASEAN members. These killed at least 21 and displaced more than 100,000 (Chachavalpongpun, 2013: 72; Sothirak, 2013; Wain, 2012). For some observers, this was indeed a “small war” (International Crisis Group, 2011).

Tensions along the border and over the disputed 11th-century temple complex had been stoked by increased Thai nationalism and a rise in political violence from 2006 to 2010, and led to a tense three-year standoff between thousands of soldiers. The relatively low fatalities indicate the remoteness of the violence, not the intensity. In February 2011, fighting escalated to its greatest heights and Cambodian troops used the temple complex, a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site, as a base from which to fire (International Crisis Group, 2011: 17–18). Beyond mere skirmishes under brinkmanship tensions, three days of fighting included the use of tanks and multi-launcher rockets in attacks “planned well in advance” (International Crisis Group, 2011: 18). Artillery shells and rockets damaged villages, the temple complex itself and an ASEAN buffer school built to facilitate regional integration, killing nine and displacing more than 33,000. Thailand was accused of using cluster munitions (Chachavalpongpun, 2013: 73; International Crisis Group, 2011: 17–19; Fredrickson, 2011). Two months later, two weeks of clashes in April and May saw another 55,000 displaced and claims that more than 50,000 Thai artillery shells had been fired as far as 20 kilometres into Cambodian territory (International Crisis Group, 2011: 22). For some observers, this is sufficient to deny talk of an ASEAN “security community” by definition (Collins, 2014: 284). As one suggests, “Years of institutionalized interaction and enmeshment in a multilayered and multitracked web of cooperation

failed to produce 'restraining effects' on members tempted to use force to settle differences, long an article of ASEAN faith" (Wain, 2012: 39). Yet, that the conflict did not escalate further is itself testament to the deflationary effect of regional diplomacy.

During the surge of violence in 2008, ASEAN failed to engage directly. Citing the norm of non-interference, there was a general apprehension to involve the organization (International Crisis Group, 2011: 14). Indonesia, in particular, a non-permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council at the time, sought to ensure that this dispute remained regionally contained. As a member of the Indonesian delegation at the Council remarked, the Indonesians as well as the Vietnamese, who were also on the Council, were "alarmed by the move" by Cambodia to approach the Security Council, via France, for assistance. The general feeling among ASEAN practitioners was that the swell of violence was a regional concern. In the words of an Indonesian official, such a conflict should lead to "talk amongst us" rather than bringing in "outsider partners." The US delegation supported the Indonesian-led move by ASEAN, and the matter was not added to the Security Council agenda. ASEAN was left to pursue an intra-regional resolution. When the conflict escalated in February 2011, member states acted to, again, halt the internationalization of the conflict and then to engage in a mediating diplomatic role. Interestingly, when the Council agreed on 14 February 2011 to hear the issue after waiting on Indonesian informal mediation, it decided to do so in a private meeting, inviting the Thai, Cambodian and Indonesian foreign ministers to engage in dialogue off the public record, and pre-empt the possibility of a legally binding resolution to emerge (International Crisis Group, 2011: 19–20). If ASEAN states were to engage another multilateral body, it would be, as one senior ASEC official noted, with the assumption that "we'll deal with it, and we'll do it our own way. But we don't want to be stuck with too much on the legal side." It was decided that an informal meeting would occur a week later in Jakarta among ASEAN foreign ministers, marking the first time the ministers had met to discuss an intra-ASEAN conflict and keeping the conflict within the region.

During this period, regional habits informed what was and was not done. Two potential options were off the table at the onset. Never was there a suggestion to use force to bring about a regional solution, nor was there a move to make use of the formal mechanisms provided for in the Charter and TAC. Member states attended an explicitly "informal" meeting of foreign ministers in Jakarta on 22 February (International Crisis Group, 2011: 21). For many regional practitioners, this was a return to normalcy, and an efficacious one. As one official noted, returning the crisis to the region ensured that member states would "deal with it [ourselves] without having to embarrass anyone," and thus face-saving would be possible. While Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan (*Jakarta Post*, 2011) lauded this as the first time ASEAN had made formal use of "those [dispute resolution] mechanisms already in the charter," in practice, this is not entirely clear. Given the proclivities of practitioners, no formalized ASEAN High Council was convened. Rather, ASEAN diplomats set the modest aims of continued assurances, utilizing informal dialogue. A senior ASEC official noted that the common assumption was that a formal mechanism "has never worked. It has never worked because no one has really wanted to try it." The prior consensus meant that, procedurally, informal dialogue would be the only means to respond to this crisis. Noting the preference to engage in informality, she continued, "within ASEAN you would never have that. Believe me, you'd never. Every time there is a dispute ... you'll never go [with a formal solution]."

Through this February meeting and a series of follow-up discussions, member states agreed that bilateral dialogue should be maintained between the two states, and that Indonesia would play a facilitatory role (International Crisis Group, 2011: 14). As an ASEC official remarked, Indonesia had the “ability to act and be accepted as acting on behalf of ASEAN” throughout the crisis. The conflict would remain firmly within the region, and within the bounds of what was assumed both normal and efficacious for regional practitioners. ASEAN would “do it our own way” and “not be stuck with too much on the legal side.”

For some external observers, this reality suggested that “hope placed in ASEAN’s dispute settlement mechanisms [was] proven to be disappointing” (Chachavalpongpun, 2013: 82). Given the habits of the region, however, faith in formal dispute settlement mechanisms was misplaced. As Gede Ngurah Swajaya, then Indonesian Permanent Representative to ASEAN, recalled of the 22 February impromptu ASEAN meeting of foreign ministers in Jakarta:

They [attendees] stopped the exchange of fire and pushed them [Cambodian and Thai officials] to sit at the negotiating table. ... We’re not going to stick to the words and letters there in the agreement [the TAC]. So long as the objective is reached, the cessation of fire, and [we see] the coming back [of parties] to the negotiation table, then the objectives have already been achieved, right?

This view is mirrored by that of another official who took part in the talks: “At the meeting, we were able to solve the problem [of the border dispute]. We were able to obtain assurances from both sides that any disputes would be resolved peacefully.” Part of the solution stemmed from the Indonesian offer to provide observers to allay Cambodian fears and ensure the continuance of informal dialogue. As an Indonesian official recalled:

we declared to both sides that, if needed, Indonesia was willing to deploy a monitoring group along the border. The Foreign Ministry had selected a number of persons just in case we needed to deploy. But, with the political assurances from both sides — and it seems that both sides abided by the commitments — we became very much confident [that they would not be needed].

In these assessments, and for ASEAN practitioners more widely, the solution *was* the process of dialogue. This was the habitual disposition at work. This was not the view of external observers, however. The International Crisis Group reacted pessimistically to the informalities, noting that “the ceasefires in place are mostly verbal and unsigned” and therefore “this conflict is not over” (International Crisis Group, 2011: i–ii).

During the following months of informal discussions, tensions along the border again flared. The “objective reached” through informal dialogue was not sustained. In the two weeks leading up to and during the 3 May ASEAN Summit, large-scale clashes occurred yet again, displacing tens of thousands and killing 11 (International Crisis Group, 2011: 23–24). The Summit became the focal point for renewed ASEAN dialogue on the issue and an impromptu extra day of discussions was held between the Thai, Cambodian and Indonesian ministers. Once again, the recourse was to informal dialogue and to keep the

conflict contained within the region. These discussions produced yet more informal assurances on observations and the promise of continued dialogue. Ultimately, however, the ASEAN efforts championed by Indonesia came to little perceptible outcome. While ASEAN habits may have restrained the conflict, they did little to end it. Rather, ASEAN habits generated a practical tolerance of continued violence throughout the conflict. Despite the view of ASEAN practitioners that they “solved” the crisis, it was only with Cambodia’s break with regional habits and its successful internationalization of the crisis by turning to the ICJ that the crisis was resolved in a formal sense. After the April violence, Cambodia skirted the ASEAN process, breaking with what many observers saw as not only natural, but also effective. As one ASEAN official suggested, there remained a shared belief that “We can do within ASEAN. So why don’t we just do within ASEAN?” This was not the view of the Cambodians by this stage. By applying to have the ICJ reinterpret the original 1962 judgement, and thus pursue international legitimacy for its claims outside the ASEAN informal processes, Cambodia again broke with habituated regional practice.

After three years of conflict and slow, ineffectual regional solutions, in July 2011, the ICJ rejected the Thai claims to the temple complex, provided Cambodia access and compelled both parties to accept Indonesian monitoring over much of the disputed territory (International Crisis Group, 2011: 25–26). Troops were removed the following July in line with the demilitarization of the area (Fredrickson, 2012).

This episode illustrates the Southeast Asian habitual disposition at work, as well as its inherent limitations. Attention to regional habits does not suggest that practitioners reacted unthinkingly to the crisis. Rather, practitioners’ thinking and behaviour were shaped by the habitual and dispositional qualities of regional relations. As a result, the response was circumscribed in particular ways. In responding to the violent clashes among ASEAN members, Indonesia took a leading role. Its officials’ thinking and actions were guided by the habits of regional relations, in large part, assumed as both natural and efficacious by other ASEAN practitioners, in line with particular understanding of abstract norms. There was an inherent and basic consensus among members that not only allowed Indonesia, as Chair, to take a leading role, but also maintained intra-regional mediation and the prospects of monitors. Throughout the crisis, member states demonstrated an automatic recourse to informal dialogue, abhorring the use of existing formal mechanisms of dispute settlement. Further, in large part this process of continued dialogue was assumed the end, rather than the means — however inefficacious this appeared to external observers. Substantively, the regional reaction was informed by the practice of non-interference and a certain level of acceptance of the violence. There was no thought of a military solution, nor were there attempts to seek out blame for the crisis. Similarly, from the onset, practitioners sought to contain the crisis as a strictly intra-regional one, and within the region, there would be no naming and shaming.

For practitioners, there remains a belief that dialogue worked. As the officials quoted earlier suggest, keeping parties at the table may have served to de-escalate the crisis. Speaking in 2014, this was echoed by a number of Thai officials who, even after their loss at the ICJ, all shared the suggestion that Indonesia served as a useful “facilitator” during the crisis and that the talk enabled “trust building.” For external observers, on the other hand, ASEAN’s engagement was slow, ineffectual and ultimately limited in its

effect. As one European diplomat remarked half-jokingly, “the ‘ASEAN way’ works unless you have a temple on the border.”

Indeed, ASEAN practices did not resolve the crisis, and given the continued violence leading up the 2011 Summit, it may have prolonged it further. In this way, the habits of Southeast Asian relations serve to maintain a sustained, but thin, level of conflict management. A basic and deflationary role is apparent, but so too is the potential that this habitual disposition will lead to a prolonged crisis. The realities and limits of ASEAN cooperation are clear. This recourse to slow, ineffectual informal dialogue may thus inform the larger patterns of the conflictual peace of the region.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have suggested that the habitual and dispositional qualities of social relations not only underpin what social actors think *from*, but also delineate and pattern much of social action. In Southeast Asia, a seven-part habitual disposition informs regional relations and shaped the regional response to the 2011 Preah Vihear crisis. However, while the ASEAN habitual disposition exists and serves to limit conflict, this does not suggest that the procedures and substantive content deeply ingrained therein are efficient or optimal.

Beyond these conclusions, this article extends the existing practice literature in two ways. Methodologically, building on the subjective methodology of Pouliot (2008), I have demonstrated one means to recover practice and explore its consequence by contrasting the thinking and behaviour of one community of practitioners with another existing alongside it and tracing the role of the habitual and practical qualities of community relations within a particular case of crisis response. While ASEAN practices may be “strange” or “insane” to external observers, for ASEAN regional practitioners, they work competently and restrict the need to think about alternative forms of practice. Further, I underscored the interdependence between norms and practice, something that has escaped existing accounts. It is clear that the practices and habits of Southeast Asian diplomatic relations are not divorced from codified norms, but often represent tactile and inarticulate understandings and competent performances of norms in action.

Three interests follow immediately from this work. First, the origins of habits within this region are in need of a fuller empirical investigation and the long history of the long peace should be explored in greater detail. As I have suggested here, attention needs to be paid to the relationship between norms and practices in this regard. This presents methodological challenges as a reliance on documentary evidence is a complicated means to unearth this relationship. Second, as this investigation has underlined, there is variation in the practice of ASEAN member states. Exploring the relationship between established habits and the expansion of ASEAN membership is an avenue of investigation ripe for inquiry. Finally, this focus on the habitual and dispositional characteristics of regional relations can and should extend beyond this case. Habits offer means to understand long-term cooperative relations absent or prior to the development of a shared community identity. The long and conflictual peace of Latin America and the limited long peace of West Africa are potential cases in this regard (Kacowicz, 1998). In each, the origins, development and consequence of potentially distinct habits of peace and security

cooperation can be systematically explored alongside the existence of codified regional norms. Similarly, focusing this lens on patterns of interstate enmity may shed light on those darker patterns of relations in need of greater exploration (see Checkel, 2014).

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### Notes

1. Interviewees are generally anonymous and referred to using alternating male and female pronouns. All interviews were conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia in June and July of 2014. All were conducted in English.
2. A similar analytic distinction is made within psychology literature (e.g. Verplaken, 2010: 74, 77). In IR, Mariano Bertucci (2014) makes the same distinction in his study of foreign policy stability.
3. In November 2015, ASEAN defence ministers mirrored the July 2012 failure of foreign ministers to release a joint communiqué to conclude their annual meeting. On the more recent development, see Torbati and Leong (2015).
4. This account comes from an interview with ex-Indonesian Permanent Representative Gede Ngurah Swajaya.
5. That the episode of Myanmar's acquiescence to Indonesia's three-part suggestion was something many practitioners did not wish to speak about is, itself, telling of this reality.
6. Pouliot (2010: 116) notes a similar finding from his 2006 interviews with practitioners at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)–Russia Council.

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