

CHAPTER 1

Specters, Signposts, and the Search for Regional Order in East Asia

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Today, the idea that regional order exists in East Asia is potentially suspect in the light of a host of potentially disturbing developments. Among other things, the rise of Chinese power and influence in the region, the resurgence of a normalizing Japan ready to recoup its strategic prerogatives, and the unwelcome prospect of North Korea as an emerging nuclear weapons state raise serious questions over the stability and security of the region. Further, despite efforts in Southeast Asia toward growing a legal personality for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the more complex challenge of turning the Southeast Asian region into a security community, the evident abundance therein of potential drivers of insecurity – terrorism, economic downturn, pandemics, ecological pollution, natural disasters, and so forth – suggests that regional order may well prove elusive if not illusory. Finally, notwithstanding the relative density of regionalisms within East Asia, the apparent limitations of regional institutions – the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the ASEAN Plus Three, the East Asia Summit, the Six-Party Talks, and of course ASEAN – have raised concerns over whether the proliferation of institutions truly heralds the arrival of regional order in East Asia, or merely highlights its lack.

Nonetheless, not all extant perspectives on East Asian security view the region's complex threat environment in terms of the absence of regional order. Their stance is clearly in contrast to the rash of prognostications following the ending of the Cold War, warning of dire consequences for Asia due to its lack of a European styled regional security architecture to guard against excessive causes of instability and insecurity in the region.¹ If anything, these studies are prepared to allow that a relative measure of order exists in East Asia (or within a particular subsystem or complex), thanks to a plethora of possibilities – self-help, power balancing, alliances, hegemony, regional institutions,

¹ See, Richard K. Betts, "East Asia and the United States after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol.18, No.3 (1993/4), pp.34-77; Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, "Rethinking East Asian Security," *Survival*, Vol.36, No.2 (1994), pp.3-21; Paul Dibb, David D. Hale, and Peter Prince, "Asia's Insecurity," *Survival*, Vol.41, No.3 (1999), pp.5-20; and Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol.18, No.3 (1993/4), pp.5-33.

norms of peaceful change and cooperation, regional community, and so forth.² For the most part, these works would not disagree with the conclusion that “for years to come the Asia-Pacific [including, we might add, East Asia] will be a region that will exist somewhere between a balance of power and a community-based security order.”³

Specters and Signposts

That the question of whether regional order exists in East Asia evokes such a contrast in views clearly has to do with the ambiguous and complex character of the region itself. In an important sense, these mixed conclusions should not particularly surprise us since they are equally present in the acute observations of arguably the most prominent student of East Asian regional order, the late Michael Leifer. This chapter argues the continued relevance of Leifer’s contributions to contemporary understandings of East Asian order. This is neither to imply Leifer was always right in his ruminations on the subject, nor that the works of other more theoretically, conceptually, and methodologically sophisticated analysts who cover some of the same political terrain addressed by Leifer are any less germane to our knowledge of East Asia. That said, if efforts by ASEAN at establishing itself as a sort of institutional hub for East Asia-wide regionalisms – and the apparent commensurate willingness of major powers such as China, Japan, India, Russia, and the United States to concede such a role to ASEAN, if only by default – are in a key sense the (in Leifer’s words) “extension of ASEAN’s model of regional security,”⁴ then all the more reason for us to heed Leifer’s reflections on regional order and to inquire into the potential ramifications of such for the contemporary East Asian region.

To be sure, any invoking of Leifer could potentially invite premature conclusions about his ideas. For instance, non-realists often cast Leifer, or at least his works, within a particular ideological straightjacket, namely, realism; many analysts (including this writer) have at one time or another caricatured Leifer as a realist, whether of the traditional or neorealist variety.⁵ Further, Leifer’s writings have long been criticized as

² Muthiah Alagappa, “Managing Asian Security: Competition, Cooperation, and Evolutionary Change,” in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp.571-606; See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation: National Interests and Regional Order* (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 2004).

³ G. John Ikenberry and Jitsuo Tsuchiyama, “Between balance of power and community: the future of multilateral security co-operation in the Asia-Pacific,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol.2, No.1 (2002), pp.69-94, see p.69.

⁴ Michael Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Extending ASEAN’s Model of Regional Security*, Adelphi Paper 302 (London: IISS/Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵ Sorpong Peou, “Realism and constructivism in Southeast Asian security studies today: a review essay,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol.15, No.1 (2002), pp.119-38; See Seng Tan, “Untying Leifer’s discourse on order and power,” in Joseph Chinyong Liow and Ralf Emmers, eds., *Order and*

lacking in theoretical sophistication, conceptual precision, and analytical rigor, not least those dealing with regional order.⁶ Yet it is also for this reason that his ideas continue to speak to other ideas that enjoy intellectual currency today in the study of East Asian international affairs. No discussion of East Asian regional order can escape the “specter” of Leifer, as it were.

For our purposes, at least seven noteworthy lessons or “signposts” can be drawn from his reflections on regional order. At the outset, it behooves us to bear in mind that although Leifer employed regional order as a benchmark for the international politics of Southeast Asia, he nevertheless did so in a conceptually underdeveloped and methodologically vague fashion, at least according to current standards of American rationalist IR. It has been noted that “order” and “regional order,” as derivative concepts of ideas associated with the English School of international relations, found their way into the study of the international politics of Southeast Asia thanks largely to Leifer’s seminal contributions.⁷

Elusiveness of regional order

Regional order, as one commentator has it, “was the outcome that Michael Leifer wanted for Southeast Asia: it was also his yardstick of choice to assess the international relations of Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific. The recurrent theme in all of Leifer’s

Security in Southeast Asia: Essays in Memory of Michael Leifer (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp.61-77.

⁶ Joseph Chinyong Liow and Ralf Emmers, “Introduction,” in Liow and Emmers, eds., *Order and Security in Southeast Asia: Essays in Memory of Michael Leifer*, pp.1-9, see p.3. A fair part of the difficulty clearly has to do with the way in which Leifer’s intellectual prejudices seemed inclined toward the English School’s preference for pluralism. Adherents of that School – particularly its foremost thinkers such as Martin Wight and Hedley Bull who, along with Charles Manning, Michael Oakeshott, and Elie Kedourie, clearly influenced Leifer’s thinking on international relations and the politics of nascent nations – are arguably drawn to what Little has termed “a pluralistic methodology that aims to find ways of linking apparently disparate bodies of knowledge and understanding.” Richard Little, “The English school’s contribution to the study of international relations,” *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.6, No.3 (2000), pp.395-422, see p.397. To be sure, Leifer’s ideas are sufficiently realist given the emphasis “balance of power” enjoyed in his writings. At the same time, the pride of place accorded “regional order” in his body of work, along with the way in which he specifically defined regional order, places Leifer firmly in the English School tradition. Indeed, if one rummages hard enough, one invariably locates fragments of his thinking which sound suspiciously constructivist in approach – the same could be said of Hans Morgenthau’s work – as well as others that arguably hint at a postmodern sensibility. See essays by Acharya and Tan in Liow and Emmers, eds., *Order and Security in Southeast Asia: Essays in Memory of Michael Leifer*. My point is not to make Leifer out to be something he never was, consciously or otherwise, but to simply stress the (in today’s jargon) “analytically eclectic” orientation with which he seemed to operate, despite his ostensible realist conceptual leanings.

⁷ Yuen Foong Khong, “Michael Leifer and the prerequisites of regional order in Southeast Asia,” in Liow and Emmers, eds., *Order and Security in Southeast Asia: Essays in Memory of Michael Leifer*, pp.29-45, see p.30.

writings on Southeast Asia was how elusive, and at times how illusory, regional order was.”⁸ More often than not, Leifer seemed inclined to underscore what he felt was the Southeast Asian region’s evident inability to realize the express regional aspiration, not least ASEAN’s, to establish regional order. As Leifer noted of ASEAN’s Bangkok Declaration: “if that Declaration is read as a whole, including its preamble, it should be evident that inherent in the document is also an expression of greater ambition. That ambition is the establishment of a system of regional order.”⁹ Elsewhere, he observed that ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation “was the means adopted to try to create a wider structure of ordered interstate relations.”¹⁰ Thus understood, he saw regional order as “a structure of regional relationships that are *widely accepted*”¹¹ – not just by the countries of the region, but equally extra-regional powers with varying stakes in Southeast Asia.

In other words, despite Leifer’s purportedly materialist accounts of regional relations in the view of some,¹² it is nevertheless a social/intersubjective basis upon which his understanding of regional order was equally premised. This is not to deny the significance, much less existence, of pure power considerations in his interpretation; military balances clearly have their place in his assessments, as do things such as U.S. strategic preponderance (as we shall see below). But nowhere do we find in Leifer any attempt to treat material and ideational factors as separate considerations. What regional order entailed was “the existence of a stable structure of regional inter-governmental relationships informed by common assumptions about the bases of interstate conduct.”¹³ The relationship between “bases of interstate conduct” and the “common assumptions” about such was clarified in a similar argument Leifer made in the wider context of East Asia:

It is possible to argue that the general pattern of the regional balance in East Asia in terms of distribution of power embodies a measure of stability from a sense of prudence. But it is not the same as a viable regional order which requires more than just a rudimentary code of inter-state conduct. It requires

⁸ Khong, “Michael Leifer and the prerequisites of regional order in Southeast Asia,” p.33.

⁹ Michael Leifer, *ASEAN’s Search for Regional Order* (Singapore: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 1987), p.1.

¹⁰ Michael Leifer, *Conflict and Regional Order in South-East Asia*, Adelphi Paper 162 (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1980), p.34.

¹¹ Michael Leifer, “The balance of power and regional order,” in Michael Leifer, ed., *The Balance of Power in East Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.151, emphasis added.

¹² This is inferred via Peou’s (in “Realism and constructivism in Southeast Asian security studies today: a review essay”) tacit classification of Leifer’s writings as neorealist in orientation, which further assumes the readiness to grant material factors primacy over ideational factors. Liow and Emmers, “Introduction,” p.4.

¹³ Leifer, *ASEAN’s Search for Regional Order*, p.1.

also the existence of a set of shared assumptions about the interrelationships among resident and external states.¹⁴

In this sense, regional order could also be understood in terms meant for international society, in which states “have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.”¹⁵ Elsewhere we find Bull making this point about when an international society comes into existence:

A society of states...exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions...they should respect one another's claims to independence...they should honor agreements into which they enter...they should be subject to certain limitations in exercising force against one another.¹⁶

From this vantage, it is the dearth of shared assumptions, a prerequisite of regional order, among East Asian countries that, at least for Leifer, denotes the absence of regional order among them – a paucity caused partly by the lack of trust countries have for one another:

The regional enterprise was embarked upon in the full knowledge that certain underlying facts of political life could not be changed at will, including the sense of vulnerability of some member states. In other words, foreign policy would always be a problem among member states; some partners in reconciliation would remain potential enemies.¹⁷

Elsewhere, Leifer noted that regional security dynamics “are beset by a competitive edge which makes the notion of regional order an inappropriate point of reference.”¹⁸ As a result, “Regional order [in Southeast Asia] in a full sense has always been beyond the corporate capacity of ASEAN.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Leifer, “The balance of power and regional order,” pp.151-52.

¹⁵ Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, “Introduction,” in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.1.

¹⁶ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.13.

¹⁷ Leifer, *ASEAN's Search for Regional Order*, p.18.

¹⁸ Leifer, “The balance of power and regional order,” p.154.

¹⁹ Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.143.

Defined in this way, Leifer understandably concluded that regional order remains an elusive dream in both East and Southeast Asia, no matter the wealth of resources and force of will brought to bear in attempts at fulfilling it. In this respect, the contemporary debate on security order in Asia (discussed below) is, in a sense, a rejoinder to a question initially if not originally framed by Leifer.

Regional order “of a kind” nonetheless exists

By the same token, despite having argued the elusiveness of regional order for East and Southeast Asia, it is interesting that Leifer nevertheless sought to reserve a measure of conceptual ambiguity regarding regional order. Hence, in what might appear to some as a contradictory assessment, he was prepared to countenance the existence of some level of shared understanding among ASEAN member nations, sufficient to warrant the emergence of a semblance of regional order, but only in a highly qualified manner:

If regional order in the grand sense has been beyond the capacity of ASEAN, order of a kind has been realised on an intramural scale. The management of interstate tensions within ASEAN, underpinned by an established habit of cooperation, has given rise to a sense of security community... Regional order in the grand sense lies beyond the current capacity of ASEAN but its more limited version is of considerable importance, certainly in comparison with the condition of relationships among its members before August 1967.²⁰

This, by all accounts, is an important concession, one that potentially supports a gradualist or incremental understanding of regional order formation. At this point a qualifier is in order: although Leifer rarely if ever asked of the region “how much order” there was – he tended to ask “whether there is order”²¹ – his concession arguably opened the way, if only implicitly, to a preliminary consideration of the “how much order” line of inquiry, at least where the above cited study is concerned. More recent scholarly efforts also share the notion that the process of regional ordering could conceivably be phased, and if so, it is thereby appropriate to refer to different forms of regional security order from the simple to the complex, as well as different pathways to order and diverse pillars upon which order is reliant.²²

²⁰ Leifer, *ASEAN's Search for Regional Order*, p.13, 15.

²¹ Khong, “Michael Leifer and the prerequisites of regional order in Southeast Asia,” p.37.

²² See, for example, Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); William T. Tow, *Asia-Pacific Strategic Relations: Seeking Convergent Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Alagappa, “Managing Asian Security: Competition, Cooperation, and Evolutionary Change”; Tan and Acharya, *Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*.

For instance, against the plethora of pessimistic accounts of East Asian international relations in the post-Cold War period – notably, that the region, compared to Europe, would be “dangerous,”²³ a “cockpit of great power conflict,”²⁴ and destined for a perilous future fraught with instability and gratuitous power balancing²⁵ – the magisterial account by Muthiah Alagappa and his team of collaborators in *Asian Security Order* (published by Stanford University Press in 2003) argue unequivocally for the existence in contemporary Asia of regional order “of a kind,” to use Leifer’s wording, particularly an “instrumental” variety with some normative cum legalistic features:

Nevertheless the dominant security orientation of Asian states is defense and deterrence, not offense and aggression. Moreover, certain realist features, such as the struggle for power and influence, are tempered by normative constraints and by growing economic interdependence and cooperation. Reflecting this perspective, the largely instrumental security order in Asia has normative-contractual features as well. This combination is evident in the goals of order, in the principles that constitute the Asian normative framework, in the purposes and roles of regional institutions, and in the scope and domain of order.²⁶

If Alagappa and company are right in presupposing the unmistakable existence of an Asia-wide “normative framework,” then it would be interesting to surmise whether Leifer (if he were alive today) might share the same appraisal of East Asia, in the sense that the extension of ASEAN’s model of security – best embodied in the region-wide (including India, Australia, New Zealand, and now France) accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) as a prerequisite for membership in the East Asia Summit. Would he at least have allowed the existence of an embryonic regional order in East Asia, predicated upon regional accession to the TAC? A qualified “yes” would not be entirely out of the question.

²³ Thomas J. Christensen, “Spirals, Security, and Stability in East Asia,” *International Security*, Vol.24, No.4 (2000), pp.195-200, see p.196.

²⁴ Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” p.7.

²⁵ Buzan and Gerald Segal, “Rethinking East Asian Security.”

²⁶ Alagappa, “Managing Asian Security: Competition, Cooperation, and Evolutionary Change,” p.584.

The balance of power as a core institution of regional order

Apart from regional order, the balance of power would properly constitute the other idea upon which Leifer sought to assess regional relations. In this Leifer finds common cause with Kenneth Waltz, who famously proclaimed that if there were any singular theory of international politics, balance of power would have been it, as well as with Bull, for whom the balance of power constituted one of the key institutions upon which international order – and, for that matter, international society – was premised.²⁷ Given that the focus here is on regional order, and since Leifer's understanding of balance of power has been dissected and analyzed in other fora,²⁸ it would suffice for our purposes to note that the myriad ways in which Leifer understood and appropriated balance of power include all of the following: balancing as both a condition and a policy;²⁹ balancing as both aversive/competitive and associational/cooperative in character;³⁰ balancing as involving both hard/military as well as soft/political means;³¹ and, balancing as both a cause and effect of strategic moderation or restraint by the states involved in balancing dynamics.³² In other words, the diversity of meanings and paradoxes that comprise the highly malleable power balancing concept, which numerous studies have uncovered,³³ are equally liable to be found within Leifer's flexible treatment of the balance of power as a core constituent of regional order.

That East Asia has long been characterized by, among other things, the balance of power, is not in question. For example, as we shall see below, Leifer was of the opinion that the United States plays a crucial role as the guarantor of regional order primarily through its adoption of balancing strategies.³⁴ A recent debate over whether East Asian nations interact with China in balancing, bandwagoning, hedging, or enmeshment terms

²⁷ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

²⁸ See, for example, Jürgen Haacke, "Michael Leifer, the balance of power and international relations theory," in Liow and Emmers, eds., *Order and Security in Southeast Asia: Essays in Memory of Michael Leifer*, pp.46-60.

²⁹ Leifer, "The balance of power and regional order," pp.154-55.

³⁰ Leifer, "The balance of power and regional order," p.145; Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, p.13; Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia*, pp.5-6.

³¹ Leifer, "The balance of power and regional order."

³² Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, pp.57-58.

³³ Inis L. Claude, "The Balance of Power Revisited," *Review of International Studies*, Vol.15 (1989), pp.13-25; Ernst B. Haas, "The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept or Propaganda," in Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., ed., *Politics and the International System* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1969); Richard Little, "A 'Balance of Power'?" in Greg Fry and Jacinta O'Hagan, eds., *Contending Images of World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 2000); John Vasquez and Collin Elman, eds., *Realism and the Balance of Power: A New Debate* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003).

³⁴ Amitav Acharya and See Seng Tan, "Betwixt balance and community: America, ASEAN, and the security of Southeast Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol.6, No.1 (2006), pp.37-59; Chong Guan Kwa and See Seng Tan, "The Keystone of World Order," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.24, No.3 (2001), pp.95-103.

is clearly indicative of the continued salience of the balancing concept to the region.³⁵ Moreover, ASEAN and the regional institutions which it supports, particularly the ARF, are clearly multilateral fora wherein power balancing is facilitated, albeit not in any formally institutionalized fashion. Yet it is evident that member nations of these institutions regard the latter as an acceptable arena within which to engage one another in balancing dynamics and in ways that could arguably be construed as associational or cooperative in approach.³⁶ Indeed, much like Leifer, others elsewhere have also noted that power balancing and power moderation in East Asia is ultimately a two-way street.³⁷ Moreover, the inauguration of the East Asia Summit in December 2005 memorably escaped, quite narrowly, being defined principally in balance of power terms as smaller states sought to ensure that the new institution would not be politically dominated by China (as has been the case with the ASEAN Plus Three) – notably through the inclusion of India and Australia, both emerging competitors with China as regional power aspirants, into the fold.

U.S. preponderance as a strategic necessity of regional order

Leifer, as noted, regarded the role of the United States as crucial to the stability and security of East Asia. In his opinion, the operational security doctrine of ASEAN “has depended on a supporting pattern of power in which the United States has played the critical balancing role”³⁸ – a point of which Haacke has also taken note.³⁹ But much as some have taken him to task for purportedly overstating the importance of the U.S. contribution to regional order,⁴⁰ it would equally be erroneous to assume Leifer believed that American strategic preponderance were the only pillar of security, or at least the only pillar which mattered, in East Asia, despite the obvious significance he accorded the U.S. role.

Other analysts would likely share this view, including those who might take issue with his idea of America as balancer by reading U.S. dominance in East Asia in terms of

³⁵ See, in particular, Amitav Acharya, “Will Asia’s Past Be Its Future?” *International Security*, Vol.28, No.3, (2003/4) pp.149-64; Evelyn Goh, “The US–China Relationship and Asia-Pacific Security: Negotiating Change,” *Asian Security*, Vol.1, No.3 (2005), pp.216-44; David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security*, Vol.27, No.4 (2003), pp.57-85.

³⁶ Ralf Emmers, *Cooperative Security and the Balance of Power in ASEAN and the ARF* (London: Routledge, 2003).

³⁷ See Seng Tan with Ralph A. Cossa, “Rescuing Realism From the Realists: A Theoretical Note on East Asian Security,” in Sheldon W. Simon, ed., *The Many Faces of Asian Security* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), pp.15-34.

³⁸ Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, p.15.

³⁹ Haacke, “Michael Leifer, the balance of power and international relations theory,” p.51.

⁴⁰ Acharya and Tan, “Betwixt balance and community: America, ASEAN, and the security of Southeast Asia.”

hegemony, if only an incomplete one. According to Michael Mastanduno, the United States has pursued a strategy of “hegemony” that specifically privileges America in the role of principal guarantor of regional order in the Asia-Pacific (and of course East Asia).⁴¹ In this respect, Mastanduno identifies at least four ways in which, in his view, the United States has contributed to regional order, notably, by keeping potential rival powers, such as China and Japan, at bay, albeit through different means; by mitigating the security concerns of smaller states in the region and enhancing their territorial integrity through helping to preserve the regional status quo, by managing security crises that could escalate to local war and even regional conflict, and, by helping to prevent an undesirable form of nationalist economic competition which partly eventuated in the Second World War. Nevertheless, despite these reasons, Mastanduno argues that U.S. hegemony is nevertheless an incomplete hegemony, since Washington’s hitherto ability at forestalling any serious challenges to its dominance from potential rivals has not been matched by their ready acquiescence.⁴²

Leifer had his detractors who took issue with what they saw as his overstatement of America’s importance to regional order. For Acharya and Tan, there are good reasons why the U.S. contribution to security order in Southeast Asia, though significant, should not be unduly exaggerated.⁴³ First, the place of Southeast Asia in America’s overall grand strategy has not been particularly salient relative to other regions, including Northeast Asia. Second, while this lack of U.S. attention on the region has essentially been remedied by the 9/11 attacks, the U.S.-led approach in the war on terror, however has engendered regional reservations over the way Washington has conducted that war. Third, the U.S. strategic presence in Southeast Asia has not shielded Washington’s allies and partners in the region – Thailand, the Philippines, and of course South Vietnam – from low-intensity and internal conflicts. Indeed, in some instances, it may even have contributed to such issues. Fourth, whilst great powers tend usually to be the principal if not sole public goods providers in establishing and maintaining international order, the Southeast Asian experience has proved much more ambiguous, namely, one involving weaker regional states and institutions which function equally as providers of security for the region, and whose problematic and partial provisions have in fact benefited the United States.

Importantly, whether in balancing or hegemony terms, what is not in question here – certainly not for Acharya and Tan – is the strategic significance of the United States to regional order in East Asia. Perhaps the more crucial issue has to do with *how*

⁴¹ Michael Mastanduno, “Incomplete Hegemony: The United States and Security Order in Asia,” in Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order*, pp.141-70.

⁴² Mastanduno, “Incomplete Hegemony: The United States and Security Order in Asia,” pp.157-58.

⁴³ Acharya and Tan, “Betwixt balance and community: America, ASEAN, and the security of Southeast Asia.”

America seeks to maintain or enhance its hegemonic position, not least the adoption of revisionist-like approaches that could conceivably be conflict-provoking, thereby rendering regional order in East Asia even more tenuous and unstable.

A viable normative framework as a key element of regional order

That Leifer was not against the idea of norms as important to regional order has already been emphasized. Increasingly regarded by many as heir apparent to Leifer's mantle as arguably the most definitive voice in Southeast Asian IR today, Amitav Acharya has noted that "the real difference" between his expressly constructivist writings and those of Leifer's "is not so much whether regionalism matters, but what conditions does it matter."⁴⁴ It bears reminding that so far as Acharya is concerned, the conditions under which regionalism matters are explicitly normative: first, the "localization" of particular diplomatic conventions – state sovereignty, noninterference, decision by consensus (i.e., the "ASEAN way") – but not others; second, the emergence of a regional identity, both which have contributed to the rise of a nascent security community in Southeast Asia.⁴⁵ Importantly, it is these conditions – norms and identity – which, for Acharya and others,⁴⁶ effectively differentiate their claims about Southeast Asian and Asia-Pacific international relations from realist claims, not least (as is often mentioned) those by Leifer.

But as we have seen, Leifer clearly did not dismiss normative arguments willy-nilly. Indeed, so crucial the notion of a shared understanding among states regarding how regional relations ought to be ordered was to Leifer's conception of regional order that it was for this reason he found regional order – of the "grand scale" sort, that is – in East and Southeast Asia, as noted earlier, elusive. The identification of the missing element –

⁴⁴ Amitav Acharya, "Do norms and identity matter? Community and power in Southeast Asia's regional order," in Liow and Emmers, eds., *Order and Security in Southeast Asia: Essays in Memory of Michael Leifer*, p. 78.

⁴⁵ See the following by Amitav Acharya: "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization*, Vol.58 (2004), pp.239-75; *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); and *The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ Alice D. Ba, "China and ASEAN: Re-navigating Relations for a 21st Century Asia," *Asian Survey*, Vol.43, No.4 (2003): pp.622-47; Nikolas Busse, "Constructivism and Southeast Asian security," *The Pacific Review*, Vol.12, No.1 (1999), pp.39-60; Jurgen Haacke, "ASEAN's diplomatic and security culture: a constructivist assessment," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol.3 (2003), pp.57-87; Hiro Katsumata, "Reconstruction of Diplomatic Norms in Southeast Asia: The Case for Strict Adherence to the 'ASEAN Way,'" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.25, No.1, (2003), pp.104-21; Hiro Katsumata, "Why is ASEAN Diplomacy Changing?" *Asian Survey*, Vol.44, No.2 (2004), pp.237-54; Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner 2002).

shared values among East Asians – is not rendered only by Leifer. As Sheldon Simon has argued about East Asia:

No real *community* consisting of common values, interlocking histories, and the free movement of peoples and firms across national boundaries exists yet in the region. Hence the reticence about creating political institutions that would entail policymaking based on legal procedures. Successful institutions require common views of objectives as well as cost and benefit sharing.⁴⁷

Used specifically in the context of prospects for security institutionalization in post-Cold War Asia-Pacific, Simon's words in a sense help depict Leifer's Southeast Asia, which is similarly understood as deficient in terms of commonly held assumptions, values and interests among its resident states: "ASEAN has not been able to promote security to the extent of forging a region-wide structure of relations based on common values and interests."⁴⁸ Such a view also informs his thinking regarding the long-held Indonesian mantra of regional solutions to regional problems: "Implicit in the idea of regional solutions to regional problems is an assumption that not only are there 'natural' regions, but also that their resident states will share the same view of the nature of regional problems and how to address them."⁴⁹

Here we find Leifer setting a considerably higher standard for norm sharing and adherence – "common values and interests" – than the very analysts who focus specifically on norms, notably, constructivists such as Acharya. The question of whether Leifer might regard East Asia today as constituting a contingent regional order has already been discussed. That a viable normative framework is necessary for regional order is not at question here. Rather, whether just such a framework is already in place – yes for Acharya, no for Simon, and maybe depending on the context for Leifer (and Alagappa, Khong, and Solingen, etc.) – would appear to be the bone of contention regarding East Asia.

⁴⁷ Sheldon W. Simon, "Security, Economic Liberalism, and Democracy: Asian Elite Perceptions of Post Cold War Foreign Policy Values," *NBR Analysis* (Summer 1996), pp.5-32. A shriller criticism by Jones and Smith insists that the very principle of noninterference so prized by ASEAN effectively negates any expression of regional community and identity. David Martin Jones and Michael L.R. Smith, "ASEAN's Imitation Community," *Orbis* (Winter 2002), pp.93-109.

⁴⁸ Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia*, p.157.

⁴⁹ Michael Leifer, "Regional solutions to regional problems?" in Gerald Segal and D.S.G. Goodman, eds., *Toward Recovery in Pacific Asia* (London: Routledge 2000), p.115.

Regionalism matters to regional order but under specific conditions

Quite unfortunately, John Mearsheimer's spirited attack against international institutions has become for many the standard bearer for realism's ostensible dismissal of the salience of institutionalism – and, by implication, regionalism – in international relations.⁵⁰ The same surely could not be said of Leifer where his views on Southeast Asian regionalism were concerned. To be sure, on at least three occasions he readily issued cautions against what he felt were theoretically faddish efforts by analysts who (in his view) uncritically apply the latest paradigmatic frameworks to the study of regional affairs.⁵¹ Most recently, he memorably took issue with those who insisted that Asia-Pacific-wide regionalism via the ASEAN Regional Forum constituted a new paradigm for Asia-Pacific IR, equating their claims with the biblical analogy of “building bricks without straw.”⁵² All this notwithstanding, Leifer duly acknowledged the significance (as he saw it) of Southeast Asian regionalism without overstating its accomplishments. As Khong has reminded us, Leifer proved “scrupulously fair in his descriptions of ‘contending’ and ‘common’ assumptions among the ASEAN states,”⁵³ meaning, he did not refuse entertaining instances of commonality and cooperation among ASEAN members.

If anything, just as critics of Leifer may resist what they see as his overstatement of the U.S. role and power balancing dynamics vis-à-vis regional order, so can it be said that Leifer's balanced regard for regionalism serves as fair warning against any overstatement of the contributions of regional institutions, whether of the track-one or track-two variety, to regional order in East Asia. More recent efforts, including those who arguably regard regionalism far more enthusiastically than Leifer, seem to have taken Leifer's implicit caveat to heart. For example, Acharya and Tan do not conclude that the security of the region is better attributed to the existence of an inclusive and cooperative multilateral order centered upon ASEAN.⁵⁴ What they instead argue is absent the region's incipient yet increasing fluency with “soft” multilateral practices and processes, the security of Southeast Asia could have been far worse than it has been. With the proliferation in East Asian regionalisms (ASEAN Plus Three, the East Asia Summit, etc.) it is not inconceivable that regional order in East Asia could likely benefit from such a fluency with soft multilateralism – the olive garnishing, as it were, that

⁵⁰ John Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security*, Vol.19, No.3 (1994/5), pp.5-49.

⁵¹ Haacke, “Michael Leifer, the balance of power and international relations theory.”

⁵² Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*.

⁵³ Khong, “Michael Leifer and the prerequisites of regional order in Southeast Asia,” p.37.

⁵⁴ Acharya and Tan, “Betwixt balance and community: America, ASEAN, and the security of Southeast Asia.”

completes the “martini” of East Asian regional order, with U.S. preponderance, bilateral alliances, self-help and power balancing strategies as its gin and vermouth.⁵⁵

Conservation outweighs innovation in managing regional order

Finally, it behooves us to remember that Leifer, commenting on the question of Southeast Asian regional order, observed that “the pressing problem of regional order for ASEAN is one of conservation, not innovation.”⁵⁶ That Leifer likely felt this was also the key challenge facing regional order formation in the Asia-Pacific is equally evident from his contention that no idealistic dream of regional renovation need apply; and no making of bricks without straw should ever be attempted in ongoing efforts at building regional order.⁵⁷ The aim, simply put, is to maintain the status quo. Importantly, Leifer was clearly not against innovation per se; indeed, his many reflections on ASEAN’s regional reconciliation elaborated on the diplomatic innovation and imagination with which the Association’s members, most of them newly independent states wary of one another – and, in the case of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, having recently undergone the difficult experience of Confrontation – finessed the novel challenge of regional institution building which confronted them.⁵⁸ Rather, his concern had to do with innovation “on a grand scale,” to use his language vis-à-vis regional order. Leifer recognized the importance of regional cooperation and regional institutionalism for Southeast Asia, having studied the matter even before ASEAN’s inception.⁵⁹ That said, he took extreme care against overstating the case for regionalism and making unwarranted claims about what regionalism can accomplish relative to the particular context of Southeast Asia (or that of whichever region), and always sensibly distinguished between national and regional aspirations on one hand, and regional realities on the ground on the other.

As such, maintenance of the regional status quo cannot be simply understood as “doing nothing.” Leifer’s point is also that conservation is hard work, particularly for a region whose resident communities continue to regard one another with distrust and suspicion, with numerous unresolved bilateral issues including longstanding territorial disputes and emerging transnational problems.⁶⁰ This is equally the case for regional order in East Asia. The overabundance of drivers of insecurity in the East Asian region

⁵⁵ I borrow this metaphor from Ron Huisken’s description of Asia-Pacific multilateralism.

⁵⁶ Leifer, *ASEAN’s Search for Regional Order*, p.21.

⁵⁷ Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*.

⁵⁸ Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia*.

⁵⁹ Liow and Emmers, “Introduction.”

⁶⁰ See, for example, Mely Caballero-Anthony, Ralf Emmers, and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Non-Traditional Security in Asia: Dilemmas in Securitisation* (London: Ashgate, 2006); Andrew Tan, *Intra-ASEAN Tensions* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000).

makes regional order formation and maintenance a highly complex and complicated challenge. Any attempt to innovate through building new regional institutions and multilateral security architectures – the newly inaugurated East Asia Summit is a good example – must necessarily take into account conflicting national priorities that could and would hinder the realization of collective regional goals, as the experience of the ARF, already into its second decade but still mired in confidence building despite boasting impressive action plans, has shown, or the equally abysmal example of the APEC.

Conclusion

All things considered, the prospect of regional order in East Asia is arguably guardedly optimistic, so long as unwarranted regionalist claims divorced from regional realities are avoided. The East Asian region is in transition today, especially its Southeast Asia subsystem, as ASEAN seeks to develop a security community in Southeast Asia. Whether the ASEAN Plus Three, along with the East Asia Summit, can facilitate build upon the potential synergies arising from the ASEAN Security Community process remains unclear. If anything, Leifer's reflections on regional order underscore the importance of vigilance against undue exaggeration of regional order and community as inexorably arising from the growing economic cum security regionalisms in East Asia. But they clearly leave open the possibility for regional order, caveats notwithstanding.