CHAPTER 02

Brunei Darussalam as ASEAN's 2021 Chair

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INTRODUCTION

Amidst the turmoil of a global pandemic and expected completion of the Code of Conduct (CoC) for the South China Sea (SCS), Brunei Darussalam inherited the ASEAN chair in a particularly challenging year that only grew more so with the February coup d'état in Myanmar. This chapter contributes to the valuable but overlooked study of the ASEAN chair by applying Tallberg's work on the effect of chairs on institutional efficiency and distribution and Young's typology of leadership to ASEAN's unique institutional features. The first ten months of Brunei's 2021 term are evaluated according to its approaches to the SCS, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the coup in Myanmar. These issues are analysed concerning how Brunei exercised entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership to marshal legitimate and efficient institutional outcomes that complied with ASEAN's norms, as well as how Brunei balanced distributive considerations to maintain intra-ASEAN trust.

Brunei was able to exclude the SCS from the ASEAN 2021 agenda thanks to overcrowding caused by COVID-19, reflecting efforts to secure preferential distribution in line with its economic interests. However, Chinese actions that aggravated other ASEAN claimants and an in-person summit with China forced Brunei to place the SCS back on the agenda, forgoing biased distribution favouring efficiency and maintaining intra-ASEAN trust.

In the first half of 2021, Brunei demonstrated intellectual leadership in its approach to the COVID-19 pandemic by employing a strict lockdown model with early success. Despite this, the Sultanate stagnated by defaulting to a lockdown when faced with an outbreak of the virus in August, while other ASEAN members pioneered the more economically productive endemic model. Brunei exercised significant entrepreneurial leadership in driving ASEAN's response to the Myanmar coup. To maintain ASEAN centrality, it established and represented a unified ASEAN disapproval (but not outright condemnation) of the coup to the international community—mainly via chair's statements. However, these efforts ran into resistance as Myanmar's military regime prevaricated on the five-point consensus, and intra-ASEAN fissures hindered the body's response. The chapter concludes by offering broad insights on the ASEAN chair as well as lessons for Cambodia in 2022.

THE FUNCTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHAIRS: EFFICIENCY AND DISTRIBUTION

The role of institutional chairs is generally overlooked in International Relations literature. The small body of work that exists in this area focuses on chairs in the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the United Nations (UN). Tallberg (2010) provides the most authoritative work on chairs' institutionalised, formal leadership as a functional response to the collection action failures that impede institutional bargaining.

According to Tallberg (2010, 245–246), chairs are afforded two types of special power resources to surmount these collection action failures: a) privileged information gained from bilateral encounters that allow the chair to broker agreements; and b) procedural control over negotiations, including agenda-setting and summarising the outcomes of meetings. Chairs can leverage these resources to overcome agenda-setting, negotiation, and representation failures with two effects: efficiency and distribution.

Institutional efficiency denotes the degree to which institutional outcomes maximise absolute gains (Tallberg 2010, 249). Institutional efficiency is improved when chairs help overcome negotiation stalemates that result from parties being unable to either agree upon an agenda or identify an "underlying zone of agreement" (Ibid, 244). Both Monheim (2016) and Park (2016) attribute the successful results of the 2010 UN Cancun climate summit to Mexico's strong chair—including its agenda management, transparent and inclusive negotiation management, and capability of its bureaucracy and leaders—juxtaposed with Denmark's weaker chair of the 2009 Copenhagen conference. On the other hand, distribution concerns how gains are divided among parties (Tallberg 2010, 249). When chairs are considered "strategic and opportunistic actors with an independent set of preferences," influential ones are more likely to secure "agreements with distributional implications structured in their favor" within the parameters of a zone of agreement (Ibid, 246).

This literature draws attention to some of the universal aspects of chairs, namely their ability to overcome collective action problems common to all institutions and exploit their favourable position for self-interested distribution (Ibid, 245). However, ASEAN's institutional environment differs from its Western counterparts, and it is important not to decontextualise the ASEAN Chair from the body's distinct brand of regionalism (Ba 2014). For instance, a focus on chairs in integration-centred studies of EU regionalism risks overlooking the important ideational and normative context of sovereignty in non-Western regionalism (Acharya 2016, 114). A notable exception is Suzuki (2020), who looks explicitly at the informal agenda-setting and brokerage functions of the ASEAN chair in marshalling the bloc's idiosyncratic decision-making. In this sense, the ASEAN chair must be viewed as reflecting both its formal and informal institutional environment.

THE ASEAN CHAIR: LEADERSHIP, LEGITIMACY, TRUST, AND RECIPROCITY

Tallberg's framework (2010, 247) highlights three variables in the institutional environment that impact a chair's influence: a) the broadness of mandate and level of control the chair is afforded over negotiations; b) whether decisions are made by majority or unanimity, which either facilitates or complicates the reaching of an agreement among diverse actors; and c) whether the chair rotates or is elected, as the former creates "dynamics of diffuse reciprocity that work to the advantage of negotiation chairs…as all eventually get their privileged opportunity to direct the negotiations." The framework advanced in this chapter integrates ASEAN's normative and social contexts with these factors by linking the legitimacy of and trust in the ASEAN chair first to Young's entrepreneurial and intellectual forms of leadership in reaching efficient outcomes, and second to the moderation of self-interested distribution within the context of sustained interaction and the shadow of the future.

The ASEAN Charter empowers the chair with a broad mandate to "promote and enhance the interests and wellbeing of ASEAN…through policy initiatives, coordination, consensus and cooperation; foster ASEAN centrality[1]; ensure an effective and timely response to urgent issues or [crises] affecting ASEAN; represent ASEAN in strengthening and promoting closer relations with external partners; and any other tasks and functions as may be mandated" (ASEAN 2007, 28). This mandate also involves the important function of chairing ASEAN's meetings and bodies for a year and serving as a mediator for disputes between ASEAN members if requested (Ibid, 23, 27). Although not directly articulated in the Charter, the chair also serves as the body's spokesperson via the chair's statements and takes responsibility for agenda-setting. This broad mandate provides the ASEAN chair with significant procedural control and many opportunities to affect bargaining, especially considering ASEAN's intentionally small secretariat and 'thin' institutionalisation (Johnson 1999).

Decision-making within ASEAN must be undertaken by consensus, which places a burden on the chair to broker unanimous agreements that accommodate a wide range of state preferences. Consensus, alongside peaceful dispute settlement and informal, non-confrontational deliberations, reflects ASEAN's central norm of non-interference, which is rooted in the principles of sovereignty, neutrality, and regional stability (Acharya 1997, 328–329; Stubbs 2008, 458–459). Drawing on Young's typology of leadership[2], these norms can be viewed as protecting ASEAN members from domination by one another via structural leadership, which involves the use of material power to apply pressure on negotiating parties via coercion or reward.

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[1] 'ASEAN centrality' is the principle that ASEAN should take the main role in addressing issues in the region.

[2] While Stubbs (2014) has applied Young's three types of leadership to explain how ASEAN as a whole has led East Asian institution building and Rattanasevee (2014) to Indonesia's role in ASEAN, this typology has not been used to explain leadership of ASEAN by its chair.

Instead, the ASEAN chair needs to exercise entrepreneurial leadership by influencing "how issues are presented" and forging "mutually acceptable deals", as well as intellectual leadership by leveraging "the power of ideas to shape how participants…understand the issues at stake and to orient their thinking about options available" (Young 1991, 288). The ASEAN chair exercises these forms of leadership by identifying and pursuing areas of acceptable cooperation in the face of starkly divergent preferences and using new ideas to that end (Suzuki 2020).

Legitimacy is essential to the exercise of both entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership, enabling the chair to "mediate between competing interests of the member governments" and "create or exploit new opportunities to push forward their ideas or policy options" (Metcalfe 1998, 420; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011, 656). It is a subjective, relational belief that the rules embedded in an institution should be respected and reflect "the approval and assent of the negotiating parties" to the chair's roles and functions (Hurd 1991, 381; Park 2016, 785; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011, 659). Therefore, the chair's roles and functions are inextricable from the institution's formal and informal norms, and its legitimacy reflects the extent to which it fulfils these. In the case of ASEAN, the chair's legitimacy hinges on its ability to marshal unanimous agreements via informal, non-confrontational negotiations. This unofficial function is perhaps more important than its official ones (Tang 2016).

The annual rotation of the ASEAN chair within the body's small membership facilitates diffuse reciprocity, projecting a shadow of the future associated with 'cooperation' and 'defection' in an iterated prisoner's dilemma (Axelrod 1984). A chair must decide whether to 'defect' by exploiting its position for its interest and, by doing so, risk being on the receiving end of the same behaviour by other chairs when the position is rotated to them in the future. This dynamic discourages the ASEAN chair from skewing distribution, surrogating for ASEAN's lack of punitive sanctions for chairs that defect in "wander[ing] from proper behavior" (March and Olsen 1998, 938).

The tension between the maximisation of national interest and the relational aspect of expected reciprocity in regular, continuous interactions is captured by Walker and Biedenkopf (2020, 441–442) in their discussion of trust in institutional chairs. When negotiating parties trust a chair, they "are more willing to accept vulnerability by ceding control over parts of the process and allowing the chair to intervene as a mediator" (Ibid, 442). Built over time through sustained social interactions, trust is a key but overlooked leadership resource that contributes to a chair's influence but can be lost quickly. Trust in a chair rests on its perceived ability, integrity, and benevolence.

In the context of the iterated prisoner's dilemma and distribution, integrity is particularly relevant, encompassing "the expectation that…the chair should merely facilitate the will of the parties rather than trying to impose her preferences" (Ibid, 442). Benevolence, which is "an intersubjective concept" that reflects the quality and duration of the chair's relationships with negotiating parties, is also important in this respect (Walker and Biedenkopf 2020, 443). Trust overlaps with and is essential to legitimacy. The latter is negatively impacted when a chair exercises leadership in a way that biases distribution in either its favour or that of another negotiating party (Metcalfe 1998, 420; Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2011, 659).

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. The next section examines how Brunei balanced distribution and efficiency in its handling of the SCS. In the second, its brief intellectual leadership in tackling COVID-19 using the strict lockdown model is discussed. While other ASEAN members then spearheaded an endemic approach to reopening their economies, Brunei's intellectual leadership dissipated as it defaulted to a lockdown—despite having relatively high vaccination coverage—to deal with an outbreak after fifteen months of no community transmission. The section thereafter analyses how Brunei exercised entrepreneurial leadership in its approach to the Myanmar coup by establishing and representing a common ASEAN position to the international community. However, internal divisions and the intransigence of the junta have encumbered Brunei's efforts. The chapter concludes with two general insights into the ASEAN chair as an institutional function as well as three specific lessons for Cambodia, which will chair ASEAN in 2022.

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Even beyond its immediate claimants, the SCS is a contentious issue for ASEAN chairs with regard to distribution. As the issue has become interwoven with economic relations with China. Despite not being a claimant itself, Cambodia gained notoriety over its 2012 ASEAN chairmanship in what became known as the 'Phnom Penh Fiasco'. For the first time in its history, ASEAN was unable to issue a joint communique due to an impasse over the inclusion of the SCS (BBC, 2012). In contrast, Vietnam explicitly prioritised the issue as ASEAN's 2020 chair, with its prime minister referring to China's "irresponsible actions" in the SCS in his opening address to the 36th ASEAN Summit in June 2020 (Shim 2020). Vietnam later issued a chair's statement that reaffirmed the importance of international law in resolving the SCS, in particular the United Nations Conventions on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) (ASEAN, 2020). Although the issue's contentiousness has not subsided since 2012 by any means—evidenced, for example, by the Philippines' 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration case against China—agreement on a single draft negotiating text of the long-awaited CoC in 2018 has advanced negotiations towards a final agreement, even if the draft text still manifests major unreconciled differences between ASEAN claimants and China (Thayer 2018).

Despite its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) overlapping with China's nine-dash line and a tacit claim to the contested Louisa Reef (NBR 2021), Brunei avoids public discussion on the SCS where possible, especially compared to ASEAN's more vociferous claimants, the Philippines and Vietnam. One month after the June 2020 ASEAN Summit, the sultanate announced that "specific issues [related to the SCS] should be addressed bilaterally by the countries directly concerned" (Brunei Darussalam MFA 2020). Brunei's preference for bilateralism is consistent and was operationalised in its 2009 resolution of contested maritime claims with Malaysia (Brunei Darussalam and China 2013; NBR 2021). Thus, contra perspectives that paint the 2020 statement as a "critical development in the tiny sultanate's views on the region and a rising China" marked no departure from the orthodoxy (Espeña and Uy 2020).

There are two interrelated reasons for Brunei's approach to the SCS. First, Brunei has by far the smallest claims in the SCS and "has not taken action to assert its territorial claim over Louisa Reef in recent years" (NBR 2021). With a limited stake in the security aspects of its claims, Brunei prioritises hydrocarbon reserves in its EEZ that are essential for its oil-dependent economy (NBR 2021; Jennings 2017). Second, the growing importance of economic relations with China is interwoven into Brunei's strategic calculus on its claims. China has become an essential economic partner for Brunei. It is the sultanate's largest source of imports, and a trade deficit with China steadily grew to USD 243 million in 2019 (Storey 2018, 3; ADB 2020, 7). Brunei's economy contracted between 2013 and 2016 with fluctuating oil prices but rebounded with three years of growth that was self-admittedly "closely linked to foreign investment, mainly by Chinese businesses" (Xinhua, 2020a). The most substantive investment is a USD 3.45 billion joint venture with China's Zhejiang Hengyi Group to build an oil refinery and petrochemical plant, which could bring another USD 13.65 billion investment, pending Brunei governmental approval (Xinhua, 2020b).

The tangible value of Chinese investments jeopardised by advocating for an ASEAN-centric multilateral solution to its maritime claims outweighs that from the increased likelihood of consolidating and thus solely enjoying the benefit of resource extraction from this contested area. This is compounded by the fact that China has continuously proposed joint development of the resources in their contested claims, rendering the worst-case scenario of unresolved claims far more favourable than the worst-case scenario of attempted consolidation and losing them altogether (Storey 2018).

Consistent with its economic interests and preference for bilateralism on the issue, Brunei would rather de-emphasise the SCS as ASEAN chair, especially to mitigate the risk of being at the centre of flaring tensions and inevitably upsetting at least one party by mediating. Brunei thus announced that it was unlikely to pursue the finalisation of the CoC as ASEAN's 2021 chair, tabled in principle until physical negotiations could be resumed (Bandial 2021a).

Although the SCS is a highly salient and controversial issue (which correlates with reduced agency for a chair in multilateral negotiation), Brunei was able to advance its interests by deemphasising the SCS in the short term (Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2015). This was primarily due to the immediacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains firmly foregrounded in the public policy considerations of ASEAN members. The pandemic permitted Brunei to displace the SCS from the ASEAN agenda using the chair's special procedural agenda-setting resources, delegated to avert "overcrowded or unstable agendas" that contribute to collective action failures (Tallberg 2010, 244).

However, recent events have prevented Brunei from continuing to exclude the SCS from the 2021 ASEAN agenda. First, tensions continue to mount as China's controversial new coast guard law permits it to fire upon foreign vessels, increasing the stakes of miscalculation and the likelihood of escalation from accidental incidents (Darmawan 2021). The particularly thorny dispute between the Philippines and China boiled over explosively in May when Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin tweeted an expletive-filled demand for the withdrawal of Chinese vessels from contested waters (Al Jazeera, 2021a). In the same month, the less vocal Malaysia protested an apparent airspace incursion from the People's Liberation Army Air Force aircraft near Sarawak (BBC, 2021). Second, an in-person Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in early June forced Brunei to face the finalisation of the CoC. The meeting produced a joint statement between China and ASEAN that—although delayed by alleged disagreement over language—pledged self-restraint from actions that could "complicate or escalate" tensions and committed to resuming CoC negotiations (ASEAN and China 2021; Law and Soeriaatmadija 2021).

Virtual negotiations resumed after a year's hiatus in July 2021, albeit informally as "exchanged views", but it seems that the CoC will not be finalised by the 2021 completion target set by Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang in 2018 (Zhou 2021; Septiari 2021). Moreover, growing polarisation between aggrieved claimants and avoidant non-claimants diminishes the scope for an ASEAN-wide zone of agreement, thereby increasing the difficulty for Brunei to exercise entrepreneurial leadership on an issue that has been and continues to be prone to stalemates (Zhou 2021). Although Brunei avoided mediating the CoC at the beginning of its term, rising tensions and the issue's controversial status forced it back onto the ASEAN agenda. To have obstinately excluded it would have jeopardised institutional efficiency and distributary reciprocity, eroding the legitimacy of the ASEAN chair's entrepreneurial leadership by undermining the trust undergirding ASEAN's unique brand of institutional bargaining.

COVID-19

Public policy related to the COVID-19 pandemic has been a controversial and divisive issue globally and within ASEAN, reflecting the difficult decision over whether to implement lockdown measures that can save lives but produce negative economic effects requiring costly stimulus packages (Baldwin 2020). Prior to vaccine rollouts, COVID-19 policies in ASEAN fell into two general strategies: strict lockdowns that contained community spread and minimised deaths but were accompanied by an economic recession, or little-to-no lockdown measures that prevented recession but resulted in a higher death toll. Brunei was an early adopter of the former strategy alongside Vietnam, Singapore, and Laos.

While each country's COVID-19 policies are domestically determined, Brunei exercised regional intellectual leadership of the COVID-19 lockdown model in the first half of 2021. Like Vietnam, which chaired ASEAN in 2020, Brunei won admiration for its successful early handling of the virus, adopting strict travel restrictions that prevented local transmissions for fifteen months while other states experienced devastating second and third waves driven by the more contagious delta variant (Bakar 2021). Alongside Myanmar, Vietnam and Brunei were the only ASEAN countries to experience positive economic growth in 2020, reporting GDP growth of 2.7 and 2.9 per cent, respectively (Nguyen 2021; Brunei Darussalam DEPS 2021). In February 2021, Brunei had the highest level of domestic approval for its handling of the virus among all ASEAN countries (Pham 2020; The Star, 2021).

Brunei's early success in handling the virus and positive economic performance equipped it with the energy and authority to lead ASEAN that other members might not have, preoccupied with containing growing cases and mitigating economic crises. As Vietnam oversaw the bulk of ASEAN's emergency response to COVID-19 in 2020, Brunei's primary goal as chair focused on the secondary effects of the virus and preserving regional stability to allow "ASEAN member states to focus on battling the pandemic" (Hayat, 2021). This manifested in an emphasis on ASEAN's post-pandemic economic recovery and resilience under Brunei's chair. For example, in May, ASEAN's Accelerated COVID-19 Economic Support Programme held a workshop on "Turning Adversity into Opportunity: ASEAN's Participation in Global Value Chains in a-Post COVID World" (ASEAN 2021b).

However, as lockdown fatigue, vaccine rollouts, and the aggressive spread of the delta variant coalesced to force a COVID-19 policy reckoning around the world, Brunei fell behind in orienting ASEAN members toward new approaches to handling the virus. From October 2021, Singapore and Malaysia led the shift to a more sustainable 'endemic' model by reopening their economies and managing an inevitable jump in cases with high vaccination rates (Mogul 2021; Zainuddin 2021).

Desperate to escape the crippling economic costs of repeated lockdowns, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia planned to follow the same endemic approach as their vaccination programmes slowly progressed. Despite having a vaccination rate higher than all these three countries, Brunei defaulted to a lockdown to deal with an outbreak that began in early August after fifteen months of no local transmissions, with cases continuing to escalate after the stricter measures were introduced (Han 2021; Bandial and Bakar 2021; Bakar and Bandial 2021). Once an intellectual leader of the lockdown model, Brunei did not join Singapore and Malaysia in pioneering the endemic approach needed for ASEAN to move toward economic recovery and a new normal.

THE MYANMAR COUP D'ÉTAT

After almost a decade of civilian rule in Myanmar, a coup on 1 February 2021 removed the elected civilian government and restored Tatmadaw rule under General Min Aung Hlaing. ASEAN's response to the crisis has been a central test of its authority amidst ongoing debates about its ability to secure 'progress' as opposed to 'process' and deliver results on Myanmar after two decades of 'constructive engagement' (Jones and Smith 2007; Jones 2010, 495). Moreover, ASEAN's handling of Myanmar has historically endangered its important international trade relationships, for example when the EU cancelled ASEM economic meetings in 2004 and US politicians threatened secondary sanctions on ASEAN members in response to inaction on Myanmar (Jones, 2008, 281-282).

Brunei took a central role in driving ASEAN's response to the crisis, which has thus far delivered mixed progress. Nonetheless, Brunei's approach highlights the need for chairs to not only solve endogenous negotiation failures between its members but also exogenous representation failures. Institutional representation is crucial in an international environment where "multilateral negotiations seldom take place in a vacuum but tend to be nested within broader political processes", and it is necessary for a chair to "represent the collective" of its members (Tallberg 2010, 245). Moreover, the EU, US, and various international bodies have cast harsh criticism on ASEAN's handling of Myanmar in the past and undermined ASEAN centrality by unilaterally imposing sanctions on Myanmar (Jones 2008). As ASEAN chair, Brunei thus focused on establishing ASEAN as the primary vehicle for resolving the crisis and communicating this to the international community to dispel the common critique that ASEAN norms breed paralysis. To this end, Brunei employed the chair's special procedural power to exercise entrepreneurial leadership toward institutional efficiency, buttressing an external representation of intra-ASEAN coherence vis-a-vis Myanmar. The sultanate leveraged both privileged information resources from bilateral encounters and procedural control over negotiations (in this case the chair's statement), but to differing degrees dictated by the unique institutional context of the ASEAN chairpersonship. In doing so, Brunei tested the limits of—but stopped short of violating—ASEAN's norms of non-interference and decision-making by consensus.

On the day of the coup, Brunei released a strongly worded chair's statement expressing disapproval of the political situation by emphasising democracy, respect for human rights, and "the return to normalcy in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar", but without directly denouncing the military government (Hayat 2021; ASEAN 2021a). The use of this lexicon represented the exercise of entrepreneurial leadership. It advanced a broad position potentially amenable to all ASEAN members by remaining non-confrontational toward the junta but treating the crisis as a problematic issue that could not be simply accepted. Treating the coup as an unavoidable regime change would have spelt severe criticism for ASEAN and unilateral actions from the international community, undermining ASEAN centrality.[3] In this respect, Brunei effectively leveraged the chair's statement as a special tool of communication to express this sentiment without the need to achieve formal consensus beforehand, which would have delayed the statement and likely watered it down considerably. Doing so communicated the appearance of a united position of disapproval within ASEAN and temporarily placated an international community that strongly denounced the coup.

Circumscribed by the divergent positions held by ASEAN members, the 2 March 2021 Informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting produced a subdued chair's statement on Myanmar. Nonetheless, Brunei "released an unprecedented statement" in tandem via its foreign ministry to reiterate the points pertaining to human rights, democracy, and the interests of Myanmar's people in its previous chair's statement (Hayat 2021; Brunei Darussalam MFA 2021a). By using its foreign ministry, Brunei circumnavigated the constraints imposed by ASEAN's norms, technically abiding by ASEAN's rules while advancing its position regarding its official capacity as chair. The subsequent ASEAN special summit on Myanmar, held in Jakarta on 24 April 2021, reaffirmed ASEAN's authority to address the crisis: The UN Security Council endorsed the resulting five-point consensus, and the meeting served as the setting for a delayed meeting between Min Aung Hlaing and UN Special Envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener (Desker 2021). One of these five points was the appointment of a special envoy of the ASEAN chair to Myanmar to mediate negotiations and visit the country to meet with all the parties concerned. Brunei once again used its special procedural resources as chair to broker the five-point consensus by placing a sensitive sixth point regarding the release of political prisoners in the chair's statement to prevent the conflict that could have endangered the meeting's outcome. This allowed the body to reach an efficient consensus without completely sacrificing this contentious point, signalling ASEAN's concern with political prisoners to the international community.

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[3] Young (1991, 298) distinguishes intellectual leadership as a "deliberative or reflective process" that takes place before "fast-paced negotiations" because of the time needed to articulate these ideas and "new ideas generally have to triumph over the entrenched mindsets or worldviews held by policymakers". In the case of Brunei and the 2021 Myanmar coup, ideas about human rights and democracy as related to addressing recurring political issues in Myanmar were articulated long before 2021. Brunei has not been an intellectual leader of this approach to Myanmar compared to perhaps Singapore and even more so the US, the EU, and human rights organisations. However, Brunei was able to exercise entrepreneurial leadership by quickly drawing on these antecedent ideas to frame the issue to ASEAN members and represent a particular position to the international community.

Following this initial flurry of activity, the momentum on Myanmar and Brunei's efforts to exercise entrepreneurial leadership in locating a common zone of cooperation between ASEAN members slowed for two reasons. First, deep divisions exist within ASEAN on how to approach the coup. The Mekong countries—comprising Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—are inclined to accept the new government under ASEAN's principle of non-interference. However, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines are less inclined to accept the new regime and believe that the junta must enter into dialogue with the ousted government and cease violence against civilians. Thus, when a UN resolution was drafted to denounce the coup, ASEAN united in submitting a letter requesting that language calling for an arms embargo on the junta be removed (Ghosh 2021). Yet, when the resolution—with watered-down language regarding arms sales—went to vote in the UN General Assembly, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, and a representative of Myanmar's ousted civilian government voted in favour while Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand abstained, publicly exposing the deep rift within ASEAN (Reuters, 2021d). Second, the Tatmadaw proved obstinate in enacting the five-point consensus, calling the points "suggestions" within days of the special summit and a month later stating that they were "not ready" to proceed with its implementation (Reuters, 2021c; Jaipragas 2021).

Predictably, Western stakeholders grew impatient with the pace of ASEAN's approach to the crisis. In March, the EU imposed sanctions on individuals in the Tatmadaw, and the US stepped up sanctions previously imposed in February (Reuters, 2021b). Without an approved special envoy a month after the 24 April summit observers suggested that ASEAN's momentum had stalled. Brunei's appointed ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi and the country's Second Foreign Affairs Minister Erywan Yusof conducted an unofficial visit to Myanmar in early June, submitting a list of potential special envoy nominees for the junta's consideration (RFA, 2021). Subsequently, Brunei published a statement about the visit on the ASEAN website that referred to the assumed titles of the military government leaders while also mentioning the envoy's call for the release of all political prisoners (The Jakarta Post, 2021; Park 2021). The statement likely perturbed both ends of the ASEAN spectrum of opinion on Myanmar—simultaneously seeming to legitimise the assumed governmental role of the junta and push for the contentious release of political prisoners—and was promptly taken down from the website (Law and Soeriaatmadja 2021). Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia publicly expressed discontent with ASEAN's lack of progress, endangering the image of intra-ASEAN cohesion (Reuters, 2021a).

Brunei regained its footing and reconciled internal disagreement on whose nominee should assume the role of the special envoy, brokering an agreement to appoint Erywan Yusof for the position at the 54th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 2 August, despite Indonesia's discontent (Allard 2021). This time, ASEAN documents were carefully worded so as not to inadvertently legitimise the junta, which Indonesia bluntly highlighted in a separate statement. Nevertheless, the junta remained dilatory on the five-point consensus. Refused a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, Yusof postponed his visit to Myanmar, reiterating that he would not proceed until he was granted access to "all parties concerned" (Bandial 2021c).

With the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia wanting to bar Min Aung Hlaing from attending the ASEAN Summit in late October to retain the body's credibility, Yusof labelled the junta's inaction as "tantamount to backtracking" on the five-point consensus. International pressure also grew, with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres delaying a virtual meeting with ASEAN ministers at the last minute to avoid legitimising the military regime, allegedly until a decision is made on Myanmar's representative to the UN (Nichols 2021). The issue of the summit was brought for discussion at an ASEAN meeting on 15 October, where it was decided that the junta would not be invited (Bandial 2021d). Noting "insufficient progress in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus by Myanmar as well as concerns over Myanmar's commitment," a chair's statement released by Brunei after the meeting outlined that "there was no consensus reached for a political representative from Myanmar to attend" and that "a non-political representative from Myanmar" would be invited instead (Brunei Darussalam MFA 2021b). Once again, Brunei exercised entrepreneurial leadership through the chair's statement to reframe the decision and intra-ASEAN divisions as a lack of consensus over the junta's invitation rather than over the junta's ban. This made the decision seem less controversial for the ASEAN members who likely advocated for the junta to be invited, while still attracting the praise of the US, EU, and other Western stakeholders for acting (US Department of State 2021). Nonetheless, a resolution to the crisis seems out of reach, as the junta's cooperative veneer gives way to a steadfast intransigence.

Brunei's handling of the Myanmar political crisis suggests that the chair's statement is a more valuable institutional resource than asymmetric information gained from bilateral meetings and backchanneling. While Brunei met privately with the junta in February and worked collaboratively with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to convene the informal foreign ministers' meeting and special summit, Indonesia took the lead in shuttle diplomacy that "has kept the door open to talks with the junta" (Bandial 2021b; Tan 2021). Bilateral encounters are not a unique or privileged source of information for the ASEAN chair, diminishing the significance of this power resource. Rather, they are an informal institutional feature of ASEAN, whose members consider bilateralism "a more appropriate, flexible and practical approach to the conduct of regional inter-state relations" and thus generally "adopt a policy of 'thinking multilaterally but acting bilaterally'" (Acharya 1997, 333). Comparatively, the chair's statements proved effective in representing a united ASEAN throughout the crisis to retain ASEAN centrality and raise the release of political prisoners alongside the five-point consensus.

CONCLUSION

This chapter illustrates how, as ASEAN chair, Brunei has exercised entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership on three key issues confronting the body in 2021. This case study highlights two broad insights into the mechanisms that enable and constrain the ASEAN chair. First, the dynamics of the iterated prisoner's dilemma manifest in the rotation of the ASEAN chair, which moderates biased distribution to maximise institutional efficiency and maintain intra-ASEAN trust. Brunei's handling of the SCS demonstrates this. Second, special procedural control in the form of chair's statements and agenda-setting power are more useful resources for the ASEAN chair than asymmetric information resources obtained through bilateral interactions with negotiating parties. ASEAN's longstanding proclivity for bilateralism democratises access to information on preferences, and the chair is not specially privileged in this regard. Brunei utilised the chair's statements to exercise entrepreneurial leadership on Myanmar and agenda-setting control to temporarily side-line the CoC for the SCS but was less able to use bilateral interactions and backchanneling to address the Myanmar crisis. This highlights how the utility of power resources available for chairs varies according to both the formal and informal institutional environment.

Brunei's 2021 chair is useful for Cambodia's 2022 tenure, with lessons to be gleaned from each of the three issues discussed in this chapter. First, rising tensions in the SCS will coalesce with the lapsed 2021 deadline on the finalisation of the CoC to make for another SCS-centric chair for Phnom Penh. Cambodia will be keen to transcend the stigma of the 2012 Phnom Penh Fiasco. Still, it will come under scrutiny for its handling of this issue, particularly how it will balance efficiency and distribution. To avoid a repeat of 2012, there must be acceptance that a lowest common denominator of agreement is preferable to no agreement, which would threaten Cambodia's legitimacy as ASEAN chair and the trust that enables ASEAN cooperation. Cambodia can take cues from Brunei on balancing preferential distribution with the dictates of efficiency to reach some form of agreement. There is a point at which the chair must check the pursuit of its national interests to maintain the trust and reciprocity that forms the (sometimes rocky) foundation of ASEAN cooperation. As the shadow of the future within ASEAN is constructed on the positive expectations of unbiased distribution and reciprocity rather than punitive mechanisms, there is a short-term allure to preferential distribution, but this would undermine the legitimacy and entrepreneurial leadership of the ASEAN chair in the longer run.

Second, Cambodia has been successful in containing the community spread of COVID-19, experiencing a less severe spike from the delta variant and thus far achieving ASEAN's second-highest vaccination rate (CSIS 2021). Poised to reopen as early success stories like Brunei have recently stumbled, Phnom Penh can aspire to the intellectual leadership of the endemic approach in 2022 while strengthening ASEAN's post-pandemic recovery (Khmer Times, 2021).

Finally, Brunei's approach to tackling the Myanmar crisis has proven that positive momentum in efficiency and representation is not easily maintained. If the situation remains unresolved, Cambodia will be tasked with mediating intra-ASEAN impasses, appealing to the Myanmar military government, and appeasing an international community impatient with the worsening crisis and ASEAN's response. Cambodia can also consider the valuable lesson of leveraging the chair's statement and its foreign ministry to advance its agenda.

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