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Contemporary Security Challenges in Southeast Asia

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Since the end of the Cold War, defense spending has declined dramatically around the globe--except in Asia. Aggravating the concern over rising Asian arms purchases are the relations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with its neighbors, particularly China. Those relations are undergoing dynamic and perhaps destabilizing changes. Despite China's potential threat to regional stability and the ASEAN countries' individual inability to defend against it, an underlying distrust among ASEAN members inhibits all but rudimentary regional security agreements. Additionally, the countries of Southeast Asia are concerned that escalating arms purchases could lead to a regional arms race.

The security environment for the countries of ASEAN has changed dramatically in the past two decades, yet their security focus has changed only in degree, generally moving from counterinsurgency to protection of political regimes. Despite their fears of external military powers, ASEAN governments often purchase weapons based on political considerations rather than military necessity. This article examines the development of the ASEAN nations' security policies to show how their experiences and their contemporary situations drive growing arms purchases yet leave member countries unprepared for post-Cold War security challenges.

Cold War Southeast Asia

With the exception of Thailand, the countries of Southeast Asia gained their independence after World War II. Initially, the countries of the region were economically and politically weak, and the legitimacy of their governments was very much in question. Southeast Asian states were beleaguered by ethnic divisions and communist insurgencies. During the period 1963-1966 this problem was aggravated by Indonesia's President Sukarno, who waged an irredentist war called *Konfrontasi* against Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore. The danger of internally weak countries engaging in international adventurism was prominently demonstrated as Sukarno was toppled from the presidency during a bloody power struggle between Indonesia's army and the communist party.

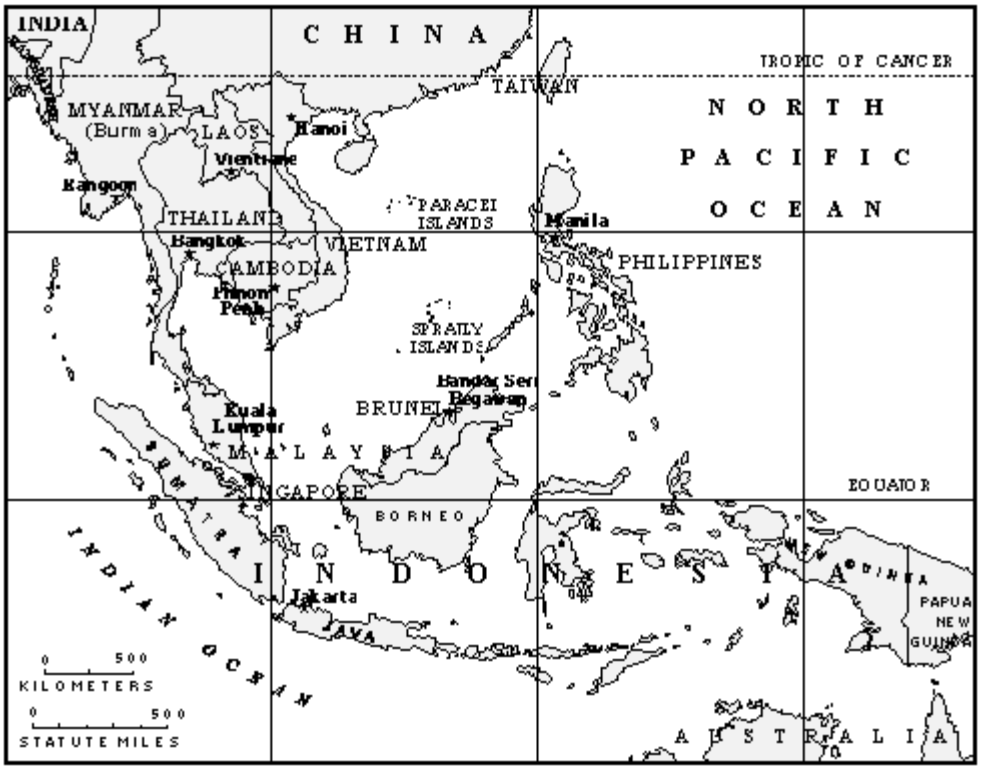

Figure 1. Southeast Asia.

Realizing the wasteful and self-defeating characteristics of regional strife, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, and Indonesia (led by General Suharto) met in 1967 to form ASEAN. Configured ostensibly to promote economic, social, and cultural cooperation, ASEAN's greatest achievement is institutionalizing a reconciliation process among member countries.[1] This process did not resolve all disagreements, but it gave the countries a forum in which to address, or ignore, the issues peacefully. Another ASEAN benefit to its members was and remains the aura of international credibility afforded the organization. Throughout the Cold War, ASEAN was the megaphone through which its members spoke to the superpowers. This new dimension in international security is explained by Michael Leifer:

> The more that regional and external states brought ASEAN within the compass of their calculations, the more its member governments responded by conducting themselves as if they were part of the diplomatic community. The attendant enhancement of regional credentials, reinforced by an evolving network of dialogue partnerships with industrialized Western states, worked to the political advantage of the Association. Although in no sense a security manager in the manner of a dominant regional power, its collective international voice began to count for something on regional issues.[2]

Strengthened by diplomatic credibility, ASEAN capitals were able to prevent superpower competition from threatening their external or internal security.

Restraining communist superpower meddling within the security environment of ASEAN countries and receiving direct but limited Western support yielded two advantages. First, ASEAN armed forces were freed from the burden of external defense. This permitted defense planners to concentrate their energies and limited resources on strategies to promote internal stability. Second, various communist and ethnic insurgencies in those countries were without outside patrons. Communist insurgencies in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand, and the Philippines mustered no effective support from either China or the former Soviet Union. Without external sources of supply, the scope of the conflicts was restricted to internal resources. The guerrillas could not obtain externally provided hardware to escalate the *military* side of the conflict beyond the abilities of the governments to resist unaided.

Although ASEAN diplomacy lifted heavy burdens from the military, it could not strengthen the weak Southeast Asian governments. Like all insurgents, the guerrillas in Southeast Asia benefited from the economic poverty and social

injustices found throughout the region. Consequently, rather than focus solely on the military struggle, the pursuit of internal stability emphasized the ability of member states to marshal national resources for economic and social development. This trend is exemplified by the Indonesian concept of "national resilience," which involves mobilizing the country's assets in the political, economic, and security fields.[3] The struggle to attain "national resilience" shaped the mission and organization of Southeast Asia's armed forces until the end of the Cold War.

As a result of the focus on internal stability, ASEAN militaries are organized quite differently from conventional, externally oriented forces. The first difference is in their goals, which encompass economic and social issues. Also, the army is generally the largest and dominant service, with the bulk of its units stationed in small garrisons scattered throughout the country. Large army units generally are found only close to a capital or in regions with significant insurgent populations. Another difference is the mission of national police forces, which play salient roles in internal security. Finally, defense spending comprises a small portion of the national budget. Although the security strategies of all the ASEAN countries contain these features, each nation chooses different means to attain "national resilience."

Military Posture

Since Indonesia was the originator of the concept, Indonesia's strategy for "national resilience" is the purest demonstration of the economic, social, and military mobilization it entails, and thus will be addressed here in some detail. The mission of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia, or ABRI) is to maintain social and political stability. ABRI accomplishes this mission through the doctrine of *dwifungsi* or "dual function." The premise of dual function is that the military has two roles in society: the defense of national interests and social-political development. This broad charter justifies assigning military officers to posts in all governmental departments as well as to seats in the legislature.[4] Thus, *dwifungsi* permits the military to strengthen government agencies by backing them with the authority of its national defense role and the power of armed might.

ABRI consists of four services: the army, navy, air force, and police. Among the services, the army is dominant. Two thirds of the army's 217,000 personnel are assigned to ten regional commands called Kodams, which are subdivided into successively smaller administrative units--paralleling the civilian structure--all the way down to village level, where a noncommissioned officer is assigned to every village in the country. These territorial forces are the embodiment of "national resilience." The advantage of this dispersion is that the power and authority of the state are brought to every Indonesian. The trade-off, however, is that the dispersion of forces in this manner renders these units militarily impotent. In fact, these territorial forces do not conduct operations or training in greater than battalion strength.[5] ABRI doctrine recognizes the tactical ineffectiveness of their territorial units. To retain some conventional military strength, the army created the Army Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad), which is its only organization capable of conducting conventional operations. It consists of two divisions with about 40,000 army personnel.[6]

Indonesia's National Police--with 180,000 personnel--is second only to the army in size. Its mission is public order, but the force also is active in social and economic development. Although most Indonesian National Police organizations conduct routine police functions, the National Police also possess a special unit known as the Mobile Brigade. This 12,000-man paramilitary unit is organized as an elite corps with the mission of domestic security and defense operations.[7]

The navy and air force are the most neglected of the services. Each branch contains only a few thousand personnel, with a mixture of rusting Soviet and Western equipment. The common mission of the navy and air force is to support the army, and until the end of the Cold War these services received only a meager portion of ABRI's limited budget.[8]

Although Indonesia's armed forces undoubtedly are the most powerful element in its society, ABRI accepts the foundation of the government's internal security strategy--that economic and political development are indispensable to internal stability. For the government to pay for economic development, the military endures defense budgets that are significantly lower than those of other countries of its size. Indonesia, the fourth most populous country in the world, ranked 25th in gross national product (GNP) in 1994, but was 116th in per capita military expenditures and 119th in military expenditures as a percentage of GNP. The success of this strategy has been remarkable. For 30 years, Indonesia has enjoyed domestic stability and an economic growth rate that averaged almost eight percent annually.[9]

The missions and activities of the armed forces of the other ASEAN members are strikingly similar. Like Indonesia's ABRI, the Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTAF) are deeply involved in the political and economic development of the country. In Thailand, the military has maintained itself in the center of national political life through a series of coups and military governments. Despite the apparent chaotic atmosphere of a country racked by violent government changes, the Thai military has been able to maintain order and stability.[10] Although military coups are by nature self-serving, the RTAF's deep integration into Thai society encourages coup leaders to consider political stability and economic development while in control of the government. During periods of military rule, Bangkok's defense budget never exceeded 4.3 percent of Thailand's GNP.[11]

Malaysia's security policy may be the most misunderstood in Southeast Asia. The separation between civilian and military affairs is usually characterized as "sharply drawn and strictly adhered to."[12] However, both the mission and organization of the armed forces are thoroughly political. Although the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) are a Malaysian state asset, their mission is not only to defend the country but also to protect the special status of the ethnic Malay majority from infringement by the minority non-Malay citizens.[13]

The most prominent internal threat is not communism but the ethnic divisions in Malaysia's society. Ethnic Malays are a bare majority (56 percent) of the racially diverse population. But Malaysia's constitution and laws protect the prominent status of Malays, their language, religion, culture, and symbolic leadership in society. Ethnic Malays constitute more than 75 percent of the armed forces and traditionally hold the most important command positions. The loyalty of this Malay-dominated institution to protecting Malay perquisites guaranteed by the constitution has never been in doubt. Therefore, the military as an institution is subordinate to civilian political leaders, but its organization and mission are inherently part of the domestic politics of the country.[14]

Until 1965, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) were unique in Southeast Asia. Although the Philippine military focused on internal security, it still developed along professional lines and generally avoided political entanglements. However, after the 1965 election of Ferdinand Marcos, the AFP fell into the familiar patterns of Southeast Asian security politics. Military involvement in all aspects of Philippine society accelerated after Marcos declared martial law in 1972. During the martial law period, the army became directly involved in the criminal justice system, expanded civil action operations, and took control of large portions of the economy.[15] The AFP did not enjoy the same success with these methods as its ASEAN partners. In fact, the communist guerrilla insurgency, which had virtually ceased to exist following the defeat of the Hukbalahap rebellion in 1953, reemerged during the Marcos era as the New People's Army (NPA). The NPA expanded throughout the martial law period despite (or because o<%18>f<%7>)<%1> <%0>AFP efforts. Not until President Ramos was elected in 1992 did the government demonstrate any appreciable success against the communist insurgency.

Singapore, a small island populated by ethnic Chinese and surrounded by much larger countries populated by Sinophobic ethnic Malays, in many ways is the exception that proves the rule. In contrast to its neighbors, Singapore developed an externally focused military from the outset of its independence. It attempted to join the Malaysian Federation in the early 1960s but was forcefully expelled in 1965 at the height of Indonesia's *Konfrontasi* campaign to absorb Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore. *Konfrontasi* concluded in 1965-66 with significant social unrest throughout Indonesia, which included repeated anti-Chinese violence in a number of urban areas. Malaysia followed with its own anti-Chinese rioting in 1969. Frightened by these events, Singapore set about turning its tiny post-colonial military into the most competent armed force in Southeast Asia.

Although Singapore's strategic situation appears to contrast sharply with its neighbors, the country is also plagued by internal security fears and ethnic divisions (75 percent Chinese, 15 percent Malay, and ten percent Indian and other). The government's solution to these issues, similar to the approaches of other Southeast Asian states, is a security policy based on a concept known as total defense, which has five components: psychological, social, economic, civil, and military.[16] The purpose of the policy is to involve all citizens in the nation-building process, akin to Indonesia's idea of national resilience. To support its total defense policy, Singapore has concluded that the most economical means for a small country to build an effective military and co-opt all its citizens into nation-building is through universal national service for all Singaporean men. As a result of its need to include all citizens in defense, Singapore's army is the largest of the three services. The air force and navy are sophisticated and balanced, but technical services simply cannot absorb large numbers of people as can a citizen army. However, the similarities in security policy discussed

here should not disguise the fact that Singapore's ground forces are considerably more competent tactically than those of its neighbors.

Singapore's use of its police force for internal security operations is often overlooked. The most recent Singapore country study published by the US Army only indirectly mentions the Internal Security Division (ISD) of the Singapore Police Force.[17] Yet Singapore's Internal Security Act (ISA), intended to prevent "any act which undermines the security of Singapore," grants vast authority to the government; the police have never been shy about using that power. The ISD's definition of what might be prejudicial to Singapore's security is broad enough to intimidate any potential political opposition and "to produce a marked avoidance of political issues among the general population."[18]

In sum, the defense policies of the ASEAN states remained remarkably constant throughout the Cold War. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia late in 1978 sparked a dramatic but temporary rise in defense spending, newer military equipment purchases, and general discussion of the need to develop external defense capabilities. However, internal security remained the supreme function of the armed forces. By 1981, the fear of further Vietnamese expansion declined and defense budgets descended with it.[19]

ASEAN's consistent security policies produced success at home and abroad. Communist insurgencies failed throughout most of Southeast Asia and are waning in the Philippines and Cambodia; those victories bestowed an aura of credibility on ASEAN governments unknown since precolonial days. Additionally, internal stability and the growing competence of government institutions facilitated spectacular economic growth, which further enhanced the credibility of the governments. Economically and politically, ASEAN has never been stronger. Now, however, ASEAN members face a new security environment that directly challenges the foundations of their Cold War success.

Post-Cold War Challenges

The bedrock of ASEAN external security during the Cold War was the US regional presence. The collapse of the Soviet Union reduced the apparent need for Washington to maintain a large military presence in Southeast Asia. Additionally, US and USSR competition for influence with ASEAN governments also disappeared. Washington now engages its Southeast Asian counterparts in negotiations concerning human rights and trade with little consideration of the security repercussions, which puts the ASEAN states in a dilemma. They are militarily unprepared to defend their territorial integrity or national interests, so they need and want a US presence. At the same time, the US policy emphasis on human rights is the single largest challenge to one-party authoritarian rule. With the decline of the insurgent threat in most Southeast Asian countries, the security focus is changing from internal security against guerrilla armies to an emphasis on the political security of authoritarian regimes. Many ASEAN political leaders firmly believe that their "strong state" system is responsible for peace, stability, and rapid economic growth in the region.[20] These same leaders fear that Washington might establish human rights reform as a condition for trade, investment, or military assistance.[21]

Another condition that has changed with the end of the Cold War is the challenge posed by China. Early in the Cold War, Southeast Asian military and political leaders feared Chinese covert aid to the large communist insurgencies in their countries, even though it was not possible at that time for China to challenge directly their sovereignty or national interests. But since the mid-1980s China has asserted itself strongly in the region; a 1992 law claimed the entire South China Sea as an inland sea and further declared China's right to evict foreign occupants from its maritime territory. This act extended China's sea frontiers about a thousand miles and made neighbors of each of the ASEAN countries, whether they wanted to be neighbors or not. China's acquisitiveness, growing military capability, and penchant for unilateral seizures of islands and reefs have provoked considerable consternation in ASEAN capitals.

The last, but not least, security threat to ASEAN is the members themselves. ASEAN was not formed to settle disputes but to agree to avoid military means to resolve them. This agreement was easily reached, since both military forces and the capability to project them were minimal in most member states. Rapid economic growth, which was the major benefit of and contributor to peace and stability in the region, had the unintended consequence of facilitating higher defense budgets. Although defense expenditures generally have not grown as a percentage of gross domestic product, the total resources available to the armed forces have increased enormously in line with overall economic growth.[22]

Consequently every new arms purchase by an ASEAN member raises the specter of a regional arms race, aggravates the stresses within ASEAN, and tends to inhibit substantive military cooperation.

From Internal Security to Regime Survival

The fear that human rights violations can result in trade or security penalties reflects the changing mission of the ASEAN security forces from counterinsurgency to regime protection. Individually, the ASEAN countries are pursuing two means to defend the prerogatives of their regimes. The first is to develop a philosophical formula for countering the human rights issue, popularly referred to as "Asian Values." The second is to strengthen the military, the principal government asset which directly contributes to security.

"Asian Values" is an artificial construct that presumes to offer an Asian alternative to Western liberal thinking; it is, in fact, a rationalization for single-party, authoritarian rule. This doctrine provides the justification for some Asian governments to block popular participation in politics and consequently preserves the authority of single-party regimes. All ASEAN governments have controlled the domestic press--including the Philippines during Marcos's tenure--but now the controls are extending to the foreign press and to foreigners in an attempt to stem the tide of Western ideas. Singapore is at the cutting edge in the use of Asian Values as an internal security tool. In 1986, Singapore amended its Newspaper and Printing Press Act to permit the government to restrict or ban any foreign journal it deems is "engaging in domestic politics."[23] The restrictions apply not only to foreign newspapers but also to American citizens. Consider the example of Professor Christopher Lingle, who wrote an academic response to a smug, anti-Western attack in the *International Herald Tribune* while he was living in Singapore.[24] As a result, Professor Lingle's office was raided by police, and he fled the country to avoid prosecution for contempt of court and a criminal libel suit brought by Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew. More recently, authorities have banned satellite dishes and circulation of several newspapers and are seeking ways to control traffic on the Internet, all in the interest of excluding Western thought and values.

The philosophy of Asian Values flows from Asian heritage; in practice, it is little different from the community-first rationalizations used by East European communist governments to restrict individual rights before 1989. Although the "Asia is different" reasoning may deflect or dilute some international criticism, the real problem is at home. The grip of one-party democracy in Asia is already weakening in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, while it is broken in the Philippines and Thailand. Thousands of Southeast Asian young people study abroad each year, particularly in the United States. Additionally, the economies are oriented on external trade, requiring businessmen, government leaders, bureaucrats, and military personnel to travel and live overseas. Even if Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew were able to isolate Singapore completely, the island country's need for external trade and higher education would tend to undermine his efforts. Signs of the growing distance between the government and the governed are already visible in the city-state, where the majority of Singapore citizens are alienated from their political institutions.[25]

The Indonesian military is taking the second and more direct precaution toward preserving the current regime by strengthening the capabilities of its army to control internal disturbances. This security focus is reflected in organizational changes in the army. Despite the ever-increasing size of the defense budget and China's confrontational attitude in the South China Sea, Kostrad--Indonesia's major tactical organization--is not improving its force projection capability. Rather, the Kodams--the territorial commands which control 70 percent of Indonesia's armed forces and are the principal instrument of internal control--have begun establishing brigade-level headquarters to increase command and control capability between each Kodam headquarters and its subordinate territorial battalions.[26]

No government in Southeast Asia is reducing its spending on the military. This persistent Asian anomaly coupled with the stout defense of Asian Values suggests a continuing political insecurity. The flaw in these methods was clearly demonstrated in Thailand and the Philippines, where political rationalizations and direct military intervention failed to protect unpopular political leaders. The tendency of Southeast Asian governments, as in Cold War Eastern Europe, to treat their increasingly middle-class and better educated citizens as ignorant children unable to make informed decisions about their political future will contribute to greater political instability.

Enter the Dragon

China, without a regional peer, poses the largest and most determined military threat to the countries of Southeast

Asia. When China's Parliament passed into law the act claiming the South China Sea, it was not an empty boast. Since its debacle in 1979 against Vietnam, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has invested heavily to acquire conventional military capabilities. The navy and air force benefited disproportionately more than the army; the efficacy of that policy was demonstrated in 1988 when the PLA navy sank three Vietnamese ships in the Spratly Islands, 400 kilometers from Vietnam but 1500 kilometers from China. The PLA navy and air force continue to expand and improve their force projection capability, including purchases of submarines and advanced military aircraft from Russia and elsewhere. Also, China has decided to build two aircraft carriers between 2005 and 2020, significantly increasing its future force projection capability.[27]

Before February 1995, China focused its ambitions in the South China Sea exclusively on Vietnam. However, with the occupation of Mischief Reef only 130 miles from the Philippines, Beijing signaled its intention to enforce its territorial claim throughout the contested area. Like deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming truck, the ASEAN countries seem frozen by their own fears and inertia in the face of China's initiatives. On the surface, ASEAN's diplomatic policy of engaging China in multilateral fora--such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and Indonesia's multilateral workshops on conflict management--appear sound. Malaysia often and loudly declares that China can be successfully engaged in cooperative dialogue. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir urged that "China should be viewed as a country with enormous opportunities rather than perceived as a threat."[28] Unfortunately, this policy is based on two shaky assumptions: that China considers the countries of Southeast Asia as sovereign nations equal to the Middle Kingdom, and that dialogue serves a purpose other than furthering Beijing's interests. China, which steadfastly refuses to negotiate the sovereignty issue on any terms but its own, also practices a policy of keeping the situation ambiguous, possibly until the PLA forces are capable of taking and holding what China believes is rightfully its own. ASEAN's traditional methods of resolving disputes--diplomatic measures, informal dialogue, and efforts to build a consensus--fit quite well into this view of Beijing's strategy.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was founded to address regional security issues. But ASEAN's need for consensus reduces all discussion and agreement to the lowest common denominator. Consequently, no ASEAN agreement will punish or in any way directly censure any of its members. ARF took no significant steps to address the Philippine grievance against China other than a meekly worded request that all parties refrain from the use of force. China, which is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, was not forced to change its actions in any way and still occupies Mischief Reef. It is hard to see how this forum could evolve into a regional alliance.

Arms "Rush"

China might not be so indifferent to Southeast Asian sovereignty if the ASEAN countries possessed a credible military deterrent. Obviously, China's military is large enough to overpower any individual or collective ASEAN armed force. However, Southeast Asian countries might be able to build a sufficiently credible defense to deter Chinese military action. Unfortunately, except for Singapore, the billions of dollars spent by ASEAN to purchase sophisticated weaponry has not translated into competent military organizations.

- Despite the rush to buy sophisticated weapons, regional governments are still obsessed with internal security or political survival and will not commit themselves to the military reforms necessary to focus their forces on defense against external threats.
- Southeast Asian governments are exploiting the vastly increased revenue available to them for arms acquisitions. However, civilian government leaders use political criteria to make equipment purchases. Big-ticket items, such as ships and airplanes, are the currency of international security prestige, but they do not necessarily represent an upgrade in military capability.
- This disorganized, inefficient, and uncoordinated charge to acquire modern military equipment is not an arms race to counter an external threat but an arms rush to possess the newest weapons.

From 1985 to 1993, Malaysia and Singapore spent roughly the same amount of money on their respective militaries (Singapore spent $12 billion; and Malaysia, $12.5 billion).[29] Yet in all respects, Singapore's military is far more capable than Malaysia's armed forces. Singapore's equipment, personnel, training, and overall readiness are considered the best in Southeast Asia. The MAF, on the other hand, still has shortfalls in operational efficiency, readiness, and sustainability. Furthermore, the educational standards of Malaysia's military personnel are inadequate to operate and

maintain modern, high-tech equipment.[30]

Malaysia and Indonesia instituted force modernization plans in 1979 that were subsumed by politics; the military's desires were overridden by political decisions for many major purchases.[31] According to a former Defense and Army Attaché at the American Embassy in Malaysia, these problems can be traced to two sources.

The first is a manpower problem, related directly to Malaysia's consistent and adamant policy that Malays form the bulk of their armed forces. The MAF remains an all-volunteer military, despite the fact that even among Malays, military service is no longer as attractive as employment in the civilian sector. The MAF has taken some measures to make a military career more attractive, but the obvious solution of increasing the recruit pool by accessing more non-Malays is ignored. The only disqualification of these non-Malay recruits is their race and consequent perceived political unreliability.

The second problem is the process of weapon acquisition. In most competent military organizations, weapon purchases are made based on the recommendations of the military services, predicated on an evaluation of the national defense mission and available resources. In Malaysia, however, weapon purchases are made after consultations between the finance minister and the prime minister. Although the opinions of the military are voiced through the minister of defense, they are frequently overridden by the political players. Consequently, expensive high-tech weapons are purchased according to political criteria instead of the needs of soldiers, sailors, and airmen expected to operate and maintain them.[32]

Consider, for example, Malaysia's aircraft purchases. To replace one aircraft, the A-4, Kuala Lumpur has purchased three: the MiG-29, the F/A-18, and the Hawk-200. As variety is added to any fleet of equipment, training and logistical problems expand. This situation is aggravated in Malaysia's case because these aircraft come from three different countries, with different standards of logistics, training, and language. Further exacerbating the problem is the low number of each aircraft purchased, which makes buying spare parts and services relatively more expensive and retention of an adequate number of qualified crews considerably more difficult. The consequence of these problems will be low availability of combat aircraft well into the future.

Indonesia mirrors Malaysia's problems. Although the military plays an active role in government and retains seats in Indonesia's legislature, it does not control weapon purchases. Procuring military hardware is the function of Dr. Jusuf Habibie, Jakarta's Minister of Research and Technology and longtime friend of President Suharto. Minister Habibie is deeply resented by ABRI officers because he buys weapons without regard for ABRI's defense planning or force structure. The most public abuse of his authority was the 39 former East German vessels Habibie purchased three years ago. The navy considered the vessels inappropriate for Indonesia's needs, and the ensuing argument sparked a struggle in the cabinet for control of weapon procurement, which eventually resulted in the closure of three Indonesian publications for reporting the altercation.[33] Habibie, meanwhile, remains in control of military equipment purchases.

ASEAN Discord

Mistrust and mutual suspicions magnify the problems described above. The diplomatic success of ASEAN does not extend to issue resolution. The member countries have agreed only that armed conflict interferes in their internal stability and economic progress. Consequently many ethnic and territorial disputes, some more than 30 years old, are still unresolved and block substantive multilateral defense agreements. Thailand's relationship with Vietnam and Singapore's distrust of Indonesia and Malaysia amply illustrate this situation.

The historic rivalry between Thailand and Vietnam will be most evident in ASEAN's policy toward China. Many analysts have seen Vietnam's accession to ASEAN as a move to form an anti-Chinese club, but Thailand historically has had a friendly relationship with China. Additionally, Bangkok is not among the ASEAN claimants to the South China Sea and continues to develop its security relationship with China through the purchase of military arms and equipment. If Bangkok uses its relationship with China to offset Vietnam's weight in ASEAN, its attitude toward Vietnam could be the most important factor in limiting Hanoi's full integration in ASEAN and in hindering the development of multilateral security relationships among its members.

In insular Southeast Asia the principal source of friction is the historical animosity between Malaysia and Singapore.

Singapore has been portrayed as "a Chinese nut in a Malay nutcracker,"[34] but this metaphor belies the actual situation. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) are specifically designed, equipped, and trained to conduct military operations on the Malay peninsula. Should widespread internal instability in Indonesia or Malaysia result in violence against ethnic Chinese, threaten Singapore directly or indirectly, or threaten the island state's extensive economic investment in those countries, the SAF is clearly capable of protecting Singapore's interests however it chooses to define them.[35] A Singaporean invasion of any ASEAN country would most likely result in the complete collapse of ASEAN. In fact, the possible repercussions are so devastating that one observer has called Singapore's strategy "a sort of regional `doomsday machine.'"[36]

Conclusion

Southeast Asian security policy today is guided by the inertia of the past 30 years. Single-party governments do not want to surrender the power and authority that have accrued as a consequence of their economic and security success. Any attempt to guide their populations in a transition from subjects to citizens will be fraught with danger. Leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, or Vietnam have to look no further than the 1986 "people power" revolution in the Philippines, or the harsh sentences meted out to South Korea's former authoritarian leaders, to see the potential for humiliation at the hands of politically aware citizens. The threat of China is not ignored--it is feared; but a decision to use any measure other than diplomacy toward that nation is beyond the capacity of the collective ASEAN membership.

Southeast Asia is experiencing a considerable increase in defense spending, but the fundamental rationale behind regional security policies has not changed. Unfortunately, the regional security environment *has* undergone considerable change. In response, the governments of each country have made cosmetic changes to their security policies, such as purchasing advanced military hardware, creating a philosophical construct that justifies authoritarian rule, and opening a dialogue with China to try to resolve the South China Sea situation. These individual measures may be necessary, but they are assuredly not sufficient to prevent an eventual unstable environment in the region.

The politically conservative yet militarily inappropriate arms rush has not brought greater security for any of the ASEAN countries. The most likely outcome of any collision between those countries and China would be a complete turnover in ASEAN member regimes. ASEAN's diplomatic efforts and determination to seek consensus over confrontation will give China sufficient time to acquire overwhelming firepower and force projection capability. Bereft of substantive alliances, multilateral defense agreements, or even a credible unilateral deterrent, ASEAN governments may eventually face a humiliating compromise of their legitimate national interests and infringement on their sovereignty. China will continue to test and push the ASEAN governments in the South China Sea.

At home, government platitudes about "Asian Values" will no longer reassure politically disenfranchised populations, which accepted authoritarian governments with the assurance of peace and stability. Although it is impossible to predict in what form or how peacefully regime transitions will take place, it is difficult to imagine any government surviving after failing to provide security from external foes.

On the positive side, Southeast Asia's arms rush is sustained by substantive economic and industrial growth. In contrast to the oil-based economies of Middle Eastern arms purchasers, the underlying structural development in Southeast Asia, which permitted the brisk economic growth, could also support sophisticated military organizations. Should ASEAN governments choose to move from a policy of regime security to one of national defense, they clearly have the capability to develop respectable means of military deterrence.

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