

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:  
A GROWING CHALLENGE TO REGIONAL  
PEACE, SECURITY AND U.S. INTERESTS**

by

Mr. Walter H. Kreamer, Jr.  
DLAMP Civilian

Colonel Debra R. Little  
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Walter H. Kreamer, Jr.

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The ten countries that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have become a region of choice for radical Islamic groups with connections to Al-Qaeda. The loss of Afghanistan and Iraq as safe-havens for terrorists, a region that contains twenty percent of the world's Muslims, and Southeast Asia's reputation as a "soft touch" in the global war on terror are several of the many attractions for these groups. Recent increases in violence by these groups throughout the region threaten the region's political stability, economic growth, and security. The collective will of the ASEAN community has been ineffective in addressing the root causes of regional and transnational terrorism. This paper will address U.S. interests and objectives in the region; how these objectives can be met; and what instruments of power should be used without intervening in the domestic affairs of these countries that might result in regional opportunities for China.



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## TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A GROWING CHALLENGE TO REGIONAL PEACE, SECURITY AND U.S. INTERESTS

The ten countries of Southeast Asia that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are increasingly becoming the region of choice for radical Islamic groups with connections to Al-Qaeda. The loss of Afghanistan and Iraq as safe-havens for terrorists, a region that contains twenty percent of the world's Muslims, and Southeast Asia's reputation as a "soft touch" in the global web of terror are several of many attractions for these groups. Recent increases in violence by regional and local terrorists with links to Al-Qaeda in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand have the potential to threaten the region's political stability, economic growth and the security environment. ASEAN regional willingness to address issues dealing with transnational terrorism has shown promise only in the last year. This Strategy Research Project (SRP) will address the following: (a) What are the objectives of the United States in this region, (b) How can these objectives best be met, and (c) What instruments of national power can the United States use most effectively to ensure stability in the region?

### THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING TERRORISM

*One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.*

—Cliché, Author Unknown

Currently there is no commonly accepted definition of the term "terrorism." The lack of such a definition creates serious problems in coordinating and combating global terrorism. Schmidt and Jongman, in their book *Political Terrorism* cited 109 different definitions which they obtained in a survey of leading academics.<sup>1</sup> The United States Government in its *U.S. National Security Strategy* (NSS) defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence against innocents."<sup>2</sup> The Department of Defense defines terrorism as the "calculated use of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or intimidate government or societies in pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological."<sup>3</sup> *The U.S. National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents."<sup>4</sup>

Arabs in the Middle East take a different view of terrorism. For instance, In April 1998 the foreign and interior ministers of the Arab League stated in a document titled *Arab Strategy in the Struggle Against Terrorism* that "belligerent activities aimed at 'liberation and self determination' are not in the category of terrorism, whereas hostile activities against regimes or families of rulers will not be considered political attacks but rather criminal assaults."<sup>5</sup> Muslims in

Southeast Asia have also been unable to agree on a definition of terrorism. At the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) held in Kuala Lumpur in April 2002, Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir proposed "that any deliberate attack on civilians, including those by Palestinian suicide bombers, should be classified as acts of terror." The delegates did not agree. The final OIC Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Terrorism declared inter alia:<sup>6</sup>

- We reject any attempt to link Islam and Muslims to terrorism as terrorism has no association with any religion, civilization or nationality;
- We unequivocally condemn acts of international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including state terrorism, irrespective of motives, perpetrators, and victims as terrorism poses a serious threat to international peace and security and is a grave violation of human rights;
- We reiterate the principled position under international law and the Charter of the United Nations of the legitimacy of resistance to foreign aggression and the struggle of peoples under colonial or alien domination and foreign occupation for national liberation and self-determination. In this context, we underline the urgency for an internationally agreed definition of terrorism, which differentiates such legitimate struggles from acts of terrorism.

During the cold war, the former President of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, made the following statement in April 1981, during a visit of the Libyan ruler, Muamar Qadhafi: "Imperialists have no regard either for the will of the people or the laws of history. Liberation struggles cause their indignation. They describe them as 'terrorism'."<sup>7</sup>

Boaz Ganor, Executive Director, International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism proposes the following definition: **Terrorism is the intentional use of, or threat to use violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims**<sup>8</sup> This definition has three important elements. It excludes non-violent activities; the activities are always political; and the targets are civilians. This last element is important because "terrorism exploits the relative vulnerability of the civilian "underbelly"—the tremendous anxiety, and the intense media reaction evoked by attacks against civilian targets. The definition emphasizes that terrorism is not the result of an accidental injury inflicted on a civilian or a group of civilians who stumbled into an area of violent political activity but stresses that this is an act purposely directed against civilians."<sup>9</sup> This definition also distinguishes terrorism from guerrilla warfare, which is defined as "a violent struggle using (or threatening to use) violence against military targets, security forces, and the political leadership, in order to attain political aims."<sup>10</sup> By agreeing to a common definition of terrorism and incorporating it into international law, the international community will have a powerful tool to combat the global war on terrorism through unity of action in a diverse, multicultural world.

However, it is unlikely that an international consensus can be reached as long as groups such as the OIC insist on excluding national liberation movements and groups supporting resistance to foreign occupation (good terrorists) while Western nations condemn the intentional targeting of all civilians (all terrorists are bad terrorists).

### **THE GROWTH OF TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

Southeast Asia encompasses Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Indochina (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam), Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines and Indonesia. They have a combined population of approximately 500 million, of which Muslims comprise an estimated 230 million.<sup>11</sup> Muslim populations are approximately five percent in the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia; 65 percent in Malaysia and 90 percent in Indonesia with its population of 180 million Muslims. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country.<sup>12</sup>

Historically Islam was brought to Southeast Asia by way of traders from the Middle East and South Asia who were more interested in profits than teaching the Quran. As a result of having to coexist with Hinduism and Buddhism, and Southeast Asian version of Islam emerged that was "basically tolerant, peaceful and smiling."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there have always been Muslim militants in the region who advocate the establishment of Islamic governments based on *sharia*, a Quran-based legal system.

Until the bombing of the Sari Nightclub in Bali, Indonesia on 12 October 2002, the prevailing view of the governments of Southeast Asia was that these militant groups were small, local in nature, and were not part of an international or regional terrorist network. They were perceived to be primarily long term communist or indigenous Muslim movements seeking independence in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and southern Thailand. Unfortunately, the ASEAN community, as a whole, paid little attention to them. As Al-Qaeda's ability to directly carry out terrorist operations diminishes, it is these indigenous groups that will, as a result of their association with Al-Qaeda, carry out Al-Qaeda's intentions.

Within Southeast Asia, the Bali bombing and the subsequent bombing of the U.S. owned Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia on 5 August 2003 served as wake-up calls. These bombings focused the attention of the United States, the ASEAN regional community, and China (perhaps from a long term opportunistic viewpoint) on Islamic terrorism with links to Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia, and attendant regional security concerns.

The U.S. led global war on terror and the loss of sanctuaries in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan have led Al-Qaeda operatives to seek refuge in Southeast Asia and its host of regional terrorist groups for a number of reasons, the most notable of which are:

- Many leaders of Asia's radical Islamic groups were recruited and trained for anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan.
- Many Southeast Asians have studied in *madrassas* or Islamic schools where a strict interpretation of Islam is taught. [These mushroomed in numbers and stature during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis and today influence Muslim children throughout Southeast Asia by promulgating anti-western rhetoric]. Local extremist groups receive inspiration, assistance and funding from prestigious and well-financed international movements, especially in the Philippines and Indonesia.
- Borders are porous and immigration controls and systems of administration weak and subject to corruption.
- Long standing economic and trade links between Southeast Asia and Middle Eastern and South Asian countries facilitate funds transfers to radical groups in the region.
- Criminal activity and drug trafficking is widespread in the region and can assist resources movement by radical groups.
- Southeast Asia has large supplies of weapons, both indigenously produced and imported.<sup>14</sup>

Active terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda are found in the young democracies of the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand. Rohan Gunaratna, a British based terrorism specialist, estimated in early 2002 that about one fifth of Al Qaeda's organizational strength is found in Asia. He argues that:

Their leaders are handpicked, mostly educated in the Middle East, speak Arabic unlike the vast majority of Asian Muslims, and were already of a radical bent. Al-Qaeda's Asian core is handpicked from several hundred jihadi volunteers who fought in Afghanistan, including, inter alia, Central Asians, Chinese, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indonesians, Malaysians, Singaporeans and Filipinos.<sup>15</sup>

A common link among the leaders of Southeast Asian groups is that they are graduates of Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and they share common experiences. "Approximately 20,000 people from 47 countries passed through these camps from the mid-1990s until the U.S. led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. The camps served as sites to train and indoctrinate fighters which are key to building future networks when they returned to their native countries."<sup>16</sup>

Al-Qaeda has suffered severe setbacks in the last year and much of its senior leadership have either been killed or captured. It is also facing increased financial difficulties because of increasing international sanctions on its financial assets. As a result, Al-Qaeda's remaining leadership "have franchised their organization's brand of synchronized, devastating violence to homegrown terrorist groups across the world, posing a formidable new challenge to counter

terrorism forces."<sup>17</sup> The graduates of the training camps are moving throughout the world, bringing with them radical ideology and revitalizing local terrorist groups to carry out the jihad against the United States and its allies. Paul Pillar, a CIA analyst, finds that one of Al-Qaeda's greatest contributions to the GWOT was "putting the anti-American perspective at the forefront. It has been so successful that it has thoroughly affected even these groups that are more regionally focused....Anti-Americanism sells, particularly in the Middle East."<sup>18</sup>

According to Magnus Ranstorp, Director of the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland, "Al-Qaeda is as much an ideology as a structure."<sup>19</sup> Michael Pillsbury, a Pentagon terrorism consultant, agrees. He stated at a conference last year at St. Andrews College "that regionally focused terrorism groups with their own particular agendas join with Al-Qaeda to learn their operational techniques or benefit from their contacts, but are not subordinate to Al-Qaeda....They like to get advice and equipment from Al-Qaeda but still have their own political agenda."<sup>20</sup> Margaret Johannsen, a political scientist who studies terrorism at Hamburg University, believes this is an ominous development. "If they [Al-Qaeda] can make an instrument of local groups, it will make up for the losses Al-Qaeda has suffered. They won't need international financing; they won't need a base as in Afghanistan. [Al-Qaeda becomes] an idea, a banner, and that is very dangerous."<sup>21</sup>

### **THE TERRIBLE THREE**

For the purposes of this paper, discussion of terrorist groups will be limited to those that have been listed as such by the United Nations and the U.S. Government. The United Nations and the U.S. Department of State have identified a total of seven terrorist organizations. Three organizations are considered terrorist groups by both: Al-Qaeda, Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah. The other four groups are considered terrorist organizations by the U.S. Department of State: Alex Boncayo Brigade, Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army; Cambodian Freedom Fighters; and Kampulan Mujahidin Malaysia. With the exception of the Kampulan Mujahidin Malaysia, these terrorist groups have no association with Islam. It is important for the United States and its coalition partners to emphasize, as did the OIC, that it is inappropriate to 'attempt to link Islam and Muslims to terrorism as terrorism has no association with any religion, civilization or nationality'. Muslims must be shown that the United States does not link terrorism to Islam.

It is interesting to note, as Professor Thayer, Australian Defense Force Academy points out in his paper to the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, that:

a number of Southeast Asia's prominent politically active groups that have been associated with armed violence are not included on either the UN or US lists.

These include: Moro Islamic Liberation Front; Pattani United Liberation Organization; Aceh Freedom Movement; and the Mujahidin Council of Indonesia and its affiliates, Laskar Jihad and Laskar Jundullah. Nor are a number of regional armed insurgent and separatist groups, active in Myanmar And Laos, listed as terrorist organizations.<sup>22</sup>

Terrorist groups with links to Al-Qaeda are active in at least five countries: Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, and some have links with other groups in Southeast Asia. All of them have incorporated Al-Qaeda's ideology of global jihad against the United States and other enemies of Islam" into their own domestic agendas.<sup>23</sup> These groups are:

#### AL-QAEDA

Al-Qaeda is a network or umbrella. It was initially established to recruit young Muslims to join the Mujahideen in Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. Osama Bin Laden is its inspirational leader and provides financial support for a network of like-minded organizations around the globe. Its "aims are to establish Islamist states throughout the world, overthrow 'un-Islamic regimes', expel U.S. soldiers and Western influences from the Gulf through to South and Southeast Asia, and to capture Jerusalem as a Muslim city."<sup>24</sup> Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda support three types of groups:

First, groups fighting regimes led by Muslim rulers which they believe are compromising Islamic ideals and interests (as in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia). Second, groups that are fighting regimes perceived as oppressing and repressing their Muslim populace (as in Kosovo, India and Indonesia). Third, groups fighting regimes to establish their own Islamic state (as in Palestine, Chechnya, Dagestan and Mindanao [Philippines]). Bin Laden has also directed his efforts and resources towards Fighting the U.S., a country he sees as a direct threat to Islam, closely followed by Europe, Israel, Russia and India.<sup>25</sup>

#### ABU SAYYAF GROUP

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is the smallest and the most radical of the Islamic separatist groups operating in the southern Philippines. The ASG originated from a split with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1991. Some of the members, including its leader, Abduragak Abubakar Janjalani worked or studied in the Middle East and answered the call to join the Mujahideen to fight the Soviets while fighting and training in Afghanistan. Janjalani kept close ties with other Islamic radical leaders until his death at the hands of the Philippine police in 1998. His brother, Khadafi Janjalani is currently the leader of the group.

In 2002 their core fighters numbered approximately 200. However, in August 2003 "more than 2,000 individuals motivated by the prospect of receiving ransom payments for foreign hostages allegedly joined the group."<sup>26</sup> The ASG finances its operations mainly through ransom

from kidnappings, piracy and extortion from companies and wealthy businessmen to promote an independent Islamic state in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, predominately Muslim areas. The Abu Sayyaf may also receive funding from Al-Qaeda.

Other Abu Sayyaf activities include bombings and assassinations. The ASG consistently targets foreigners and civilians for kidnapping and murder. Two foreign women were killed in a grenade attack in 1991. In 1993 the group bombed a cathedral in Davao City, killing seven people. In 1994 they kidnapped three Spanish nuns and a Spanish priest. Their most vicious attack was carried out on the Christian town of Ipil in Mindanao in 1995 in which 53 civilians and soldiers died, and the town center was destroyed. In 2000 they kidnapped more than 30 foreigners, including a U.S. citizen. In 2002 the group expanded its operations to Malaysia when it abducted foreigners from two different resorts.<sup>27</sup>

#### JEMAAH ISLAMIYA

Jemaah Islamiya (JI) is a Malaysian based terrorist network with links to Al-Qaeda. Its stated goal is to create an idealized Islamic state comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the southern Philippines, and southern Thailand. JI currently has cells in each of these countries. Although Singapore estimates that its members number about 5,000, terrorist experts believe that the JI has several hundred involved in its actual operations.<sup>28</sup> Its activities have included dozens of bombings in Indonesia and the Philippines, a thwarted plot to attack the U.S. and Israeli Embassies and British and Australian diplomatic buildings in Singapore, the Bali bombings on 12 October 2002, and the JW Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta on 5 August 2003. JI was violently active until recent arrests devastated its ranks. The JI has been partially decapitated and is down, but by no means out. Hambali, its leader and the mastermind who plotted the Bali bombing and the only Southeast Asian in the military council of Al-Qaeda, was recently arrested in Thailand. Fathur Rohman Al-Ghozi, a key member of JI, was arrested in the Philippines but escaped from jail in Manila in July 2003 and is still on the run. Dr. Azahari Husin, a Malaysian and the organization's bomb expert is still on the loose. Nevertheless, JI still retains a considerable ability for political violence against soft targets, such as nightclubs, bars hotels and other tourist gathering places.

Jemaah Islamiya sustainability can be explained, in part, by its independence from Al-Qaeda. JI has "always been divorced from the military and strategic objectives of Al-Qaeda, both before and after the attacks of September 11, 2001...it is not obligated to fulfill any of Al-Qaeda's objectives".<sup>29</sup> It is not dependent on Al-Qaeda for its financing since it is fully capable of raising needed funds for its operations. JI does learn operational techniques, and receives

advice and equipment from Al-Qaeda, but still retain its own political agenda. JI remains committed to the creation of an Islamic state in Southeast Asia.

Jemaah Islamiya was formally added to the U.S. State Department Foreign Terrorist List (FTO) by Secretary of State Colin Powell on 23 October 2002 following the terrorist bombing in Bali, Indonesia. The Bali bombing killed almost 200 and wounded 300 others from 29 countries. "The FTO designation permits the United States to block any of the organization's assets held in U.S. financial institutions; criminalizes the knowing provision of material support or resources to the organization; and allows members of the terrorist group to be excluded from the United States.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the FTO designation, Secretary Powell also announced the designation of JI under Executive Order 13224. "Designation under EO 13224 also blocks the property and interests in property of the organization in the U.S. or held by U.S. persons, and authorizes the U.S. to subsequently designate and block the assets of individuals and entities that are owned or controlled by, act for or on behalf of, provide support or services to, or are otherwise associated with the organization."<sup>31</sup>

Secretary Powell announced in his remarks that the United States "will join with Australia, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Timor Leste (East Timor), and other partners around the world to ask the relevant United Nations sanctions committee to include JI on its consolidated list of individuals and entities the assets of which member states are required to freeze in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1390."<sup>32</sup> This was the first time that the U.S. has designated a terrorist group as an FTO, designated it under Executive Order 13224, and requested the U.N. to include it on their list of terrorists. "The U.N. Security Council Resolutions require all Member States to take certain actions against the organization, including freezing the organization's assets and denying it access to funds and other financial assets or economic resources, preventing the supply or sale of weapons to the organization, and preventing members of the organization from entering or traveling through their territories."<sup>33</sup>

This joint request by the United States and ASEAN is important because it presents a united front of Southeast Asian countries, for the first time, in their declaration that Southeast Asia will not tolerate terrorism on their territory and that they are committed to working with the international community to put a stop to terrorism in the region. This action does not allow any member, such as Indonesia, to remain soft on terrorist groups, and was made possible by the horrific results of the bombings in Bali and Jakarta that have been linked to JI. Finally, by having a United Nations sanctions committee declare the JI is a terrorist group, the fact that there is no internationally accepted definition of terrorism is not germane.

## DETERMINING CENTERS OF GRAVITY OF TERRORIST GROUPS

What the theorist has to say here is this: one must keep the dominant characteristic of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed...If the enemy is thrown off balance, he must not be given time to recover. Blow after blow must be aimed in the same direction: the victor, in other words, must strike with all his strength and not just against a fraction of the enemy's. [Only]...by constantly seeking out the center of his power, by daring all to win all, will one really defeat the enemy.<sup>34</sup>

—Carl von Clausewitz  
*On War*, 1832

In order to successfully pursue the Global War on Terrorism in Southeast Asia it is helpful to be able to identify the terrorist's strategic center of gravity (COG) - the sources of its strength, power and resistance.

Carl von Clausewitz developed the Center of Gravity theory in his book On War. He defines COG as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends."<sup>35</sup> Clausewitz recognized only a single center of gravity. He "viewed the center of gravity in terms of applying military power primarily against other militaries. The proportionate utilization and integration of the other elements of national power did not materialize. Similarly today, much of the problem with center of gravity analysis is that it is usually performed by the military using military methodology with a focus on military objectives. This tends to focus planners on the operational at the risk of forgetting to focus on the real strategic center of gravity in the national political sense."<sup>36</sup>

Joint Publication 5-00.1 states that centers of gravity are "those characteristics, capabilities or sources of power from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight."<sup>37</sup> This definition accepts the possibilities of more than one COG, but again treats the enemy as a military force.

Joe Strange, an instructor at the Marine Corps War College, published a monograph titled Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities in which "he provides simple definitions of center of gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities and introduces the concepts of Critical Capabilities, and Critical Requirements."<sup>38</sup> Dr. Strange's concepts help differentiate between "the true center of gravity and important abilities, conditions, resources and/or means that contribute to the center of gravity."<sup>39</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel A. Echevarria II, argues in a U.S. Army War College publication that the COG is "a matter of balance and not a source of either strength or weakness, and that the

COG is a focal point, found only where sufficient connectivity exists among parts of the enemy to form an overarching system. The center of gravity possesses a centripetal force that holds the system/structure together and requires viewing the enemy holistically, as a system.<sup>40</sup>

Viewed as a system, the Al-Qaeda network and associated organizations has the following potential centers of gravity: (1) financial resources, (2) a command, control and communications network, (3) global mobility, (4) sanctuary/safe havens, (5) core leadership, and (6) radical Islamic ideology.<sup>41</sup> By using the theories of Echevarria and Strange, radical Islamic ideology appears to be the true center of gravity because it provides the centripetal force necessary to hold the system together. The other elements, while important, are merely the critical capabilities that help hold the system together. Focusing on ways of countering radical Islamic ideology by all the nations of Southeast Asia is key to success in the regional struggle for peace and security in the region.

### **THE KEY PLAYERS – ASEAN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES**

The war on terrorism has breathed new life into the ASEAN. As late as 3 August 2001, Ms. Ellen Bork in the *Asian Wall Street Journal* argued that ASEAN has outlived its use as the premier forum to address Southeast Asian issues. Instead, she

proposed that Asia's democracies should establish a regional political and military alliance committed to strengthening the democracy and security of its members and expanding it in the region. Such an organization would be the logical outgrowth of Asia's democratic development over the last half-century, and an answer to the anachronistic regional institutions that now fail to guarantee the region's security and freedom.<sup>42</sup>

President Bush also made this proposal during his campaign for the White House in the fall of 2000.<sup>43</sup> However, a Southeast Asian multilateral security structure similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is unlikely to emerge. ASEAN is characterized by traditional rivalries, the guiding principle of non-intervention in each other's internal affairs, and a lack of consensus on adopting a common position towards China. Of the ten ASEAN nations only six can be said to be democratic. Complex internal and external socio-economic problems exist throughout the region. Finally, low-level conflicts between nations (i.e. the recent burning of the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Pen, Cambodia) make an alliance similar to NATO unlikely. Rather, "The broad trend in the Asia-Pacific region has been to subordinate the military competition to the maintenance of an environment that encouraged economic development and prosperity through trade."<sup>44</sup>

Economic development and prosperity are currently on a fast track to recovery, but could still be derailed by strategic attacks by terrorists in the region. As previously stated, Al-Qaeda's

political objective “is to set up Islamic states committed to the unequivocal observance of *Sharia* law in Muslim lands from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. It intends to do so by first deposing moderate Muslim governments and this in turn requires eliminating the American support that helps sustain such regimes.”<sup>45</sup> A look at four ASEAN members – Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia will provide some insights into the challenges these nations face.

## INDONESIA

As the largest country in Southeast Asia, a population of approximately 160 million Muslims, and a moderate Muslim democratic nation, Indonesia is a key player in the war on terrorism from the U.S. perspective because it is home to several radical Muslim groups, including the Jemaah Islamiah. Historically, the U.S. and Indonesian military worked closely together for three decades – until these military relationships were suspended by the U.S. Congress after the Indonesian Military (TNI) organized militias went on a rampage in East Timor, killing more than 1,000 Timorese, displacing 40,000 more and resulting in the intervention of an Australian-led multinational force, and eventually East Timor’s independence from Indonesia. However, Indonesia’s condemnation of the 9/11 attacks and support for the U.S. led campaign against terrorism improved U.S. military relations. Accordingly, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz “released funds that permit the training of Indonesian military officers, despite a recent vote by a key Senate committee that calls for training to be suspended until the TNI’s role in the killing of two U.S. teachers is clarified.”<sup>46</sup> However, Congress relaxed these restrictions after 9/11 and more than \$4 million in counter-terrorism training and non-lethal equipment were provided in 2002. Congress authorized \$400,000 for the International Military Education Training (IMET) program to train military officers.

The Bali bombing “left deep economic and social scars on Indonesia”<sup>47</sup> through the loss of a highly profitable tourist center and have created an enormous loss of prestige and popular support for President Megawati Sukarnoputri. “Touring the devastated bomb site one year ago, Megawati declined to make any public comment. From that moment, she has said relatively little about terrorism or militant Islam. Critics say she has failed to explain to her people why radical Islam poses a threat to Indonesia.”<sup>48</sup>

The U.S. has “criticized Indonesia for its failure to really implement an effective support to the American war on terrorism.”<sup>49</sup> Within the context of a country that has “tempered its support to the U.S. anti-terrorism campaign to avoid tensions with militant Islamic elements of Indonesian population,”<sup>50</sup> Secretary of State Colin Powell said:

This has been a very sobering experience for the Indonesian leadership when they see this kind of tragedy. So we now can see that you are not exempt from this; you cannot pretend it doesn't exist in your country. It exists everywhere where conditions are right and where this kind of terrorist organization can thrive. And that's why we have to go after them wherever they are.<sup>51</sup>

Subsequent to Secretary Powell's statement, President Megawati's government passed two anti-terrorism regulations that are "regarded as serious strategic steps by the Indonesian government to strengthen public order and promote internal security while still upholding the supremacy of law and human rights."<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, President Megawati responded to U.S. criticism in the United Nations General Assembly in September 2003. "According to Megawati's address, Indonesia and Islam are innocent victims of a four-year rash of Muslim extremist violence that stretches beyond the bomb blasts in Kuta last October and the Jakarta Marriott in August to *jihad* against Christians in the Maluku and Sulawesi, and a string of church bombings across the archipelago on Christmas Eve 2000. The real culprits: Israel and the West."<sup>53</sup> In other words, terrorists don't kill people; policies that support Israel kill people. "Terrorism is not a Muslim thing, but it's the result of a new Western crusade against Muslims."<sup>54</sup> The "crusade against Muslims" that Megawati is referring to echoes a common concern throughout the moderate Muslim community in Southeast Asia. This is a concern about the support by the United State for Israel against Palestine, and the invasion of Afghanistan and more recently, Iraq. The invasion of these two countries resulted in widespread anti-American protests and riots throughout Indonesia.

American prestige has also plummeted despite a long tradition of widespread approval of the core American democratic values presented in the "Bill of Rights," the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States among the moderate Muslims of Southeast Asia. "A survey in 2000 showed 75 percent of Indonesians had a favorable opinion of America. By 2003, however, 83 percent said they have an unfavorable opinion of America, particularly after the war in Iraq."<sup>55</sup> This does not bode well for the U.S. war on terrorism in Indonesia.

#### THAILAND

To date, Thailand appears to be one of the few success stories in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, with a strong military, political stability, a reviving economy and a growing democracy, Thailand was a disappointment for the U.S. by taking a neutral stand in the war on terrorism following 9/11. However, "the government has joined the coalition against terror by authorizing the use of U-Tapao air base for the war in Afghanistan and Thailand's National

Security Council has been tasked to formulate measures against terrorism with attention to the use of Thai territory for illegal arms, transfers and money laundering.”<sup>56</sup> Considering that Thailand has a population that is five percent Muslim and a history of Muslim secessionist movements in the southern provinces, it is remarkable that there have been no attacks attributed to Al-Qaeda linked terrorist groups to date despite an enormous Western tourist population. “Until the arrest of three Thai Muslims [in Thailand] accused of belonging to Jemaah Islamiya, Prime Minister Thaksin changed from denying the presence of terrorists in Thailand to accepting that Thailand had been infiltrated by a significant number of militants determined to carry out attacks against Western targets.”<sup>57</sup> The arrests presented PM Thaksin with an opportunity to reconcile differences with the United States, and “justification for going after southern militancy.”<sup>58</sup>

Current Thai-U.S. relations are strong and multi-faceted with Thailand being one of five U.S. treaty allies in Asia. The U.S. and Thailand have had a close and active security relationship for several decades through which the U.S. is providing technical and financial assistance in the areas of drug interdiction and trafficking in persons, military training, and a multitude of bilateral and multilateral agreements. Thailand is our seventeenth largest trading partner (\$20 billion in 2002) and the U.S. is the second largest investor in the country. <sup>59</sup> Trade has continued to expand since the signing of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement in 2002.

#### THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines is the only country in Southeast Asia where Christians comprise 90 percent of the population. Muslims comprise only eight percent of the population and are located primarily on the southern island of Mindanao.

The United States and the Philippines have maintained a close relationship since the late nineteenth century. U.S. maintained two large bases on Luzon under an agreement permitting their use until 1991. In the middle of negotiations to possibly renew the agreement, Mount Pinatubo, a volcano ten miles from Clark Air Force Base, erupted and virtually destroyed the base, rendering it useless. The talks continued over economically important basing rights at Subic Bay Naval Base amid pressure from nationalists to remove all bases from the country. Washington pulled out of the last bastion of U.S. presence in the South China Sea in 1994, leaving a void that wasn't to be filled until events following 9/11.

The Philippines is a democratic country, but it has been on a roller-coaster ride in recent years. President Ferdinand Marcos, elected in 1965 with strong military support, began a

program of rapid economic development. However, "Before his maximum of two terms in office was over, in 1972, Marcos instituted martial law and suppressed all political opposition. He also set about large-scale looting of the country's exchequer to fill his and his family's own foreign bank accounts."<sup>60</sup> Marcos also had strong support from President Reagan's administration. Opposition to Marcos took two forms: 'constitutional' opposition organized around dissenting senators such as Benigno Aquino; and the Communist Party which, linking with various tribal groups, launched an armed insurgency based in Mindanao.

By mid-1980's, the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party, was able to sustain a major insurrection right across the country in both rural and urban areas.<sup>61</sup> The turning point came with the assassination of Benigno Aquino and the resulting massive non-violent movement called "People Power" that swept Corazon Aquino, his widow, into the presidency. American public opinion was instrumental in forcing President Reagan to remove his support for Marcos. The Philippine military followed suit and Marcos was exiled to Hawaii, dying in 1989.

President Aquino served out her presidential term despite six coup attempts by disgruntled army officers and supporters of Marcos. She survived with the support of the majority of the Philippine army, in part, because of her hard line in the counter-insurgency campaign against the NPA.<sup>62</sup> She was succeeded by Fidel Ramos in 1992. Ramos won on a platform of a strong economy, which was performing well, and combating continuing insurgencies in Mindanao where the NPA threat had been replaced by the Muslim insurgents of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). This conflict was settled in 1996.<sup>63</sup>

The Asian currency crisis of 1997-1999 hit the Philippines hard. President Ramos was succeeded by Joseph Ejercito Estrada who headed up a new political party, Laban Ng Masang Pilipino (LAMP, Struggle of the Filipino Masses). However, in December 2000, President Estrada was impeached, the first such instance of impeachment against any Asian head of state, for "corruption, bribery, and culpable violation of the constitution."<sup>64</sup> He was followed by Vice-president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as president in January 2001.

The fight against terrorism and rebellion are the two top items on President Arroyo's policy agenda. While the smaller Abu Sayyaf terrorist group with Al-Qaeda links suffered a significant loss in December 2003 with the capture of its leader, Ghalib Andang (known as Commander Robot), the Philippines is still faced with armed insurgency from two large groups –The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Communist New People's Army (NPA). The MILF was established in 1978 and is the largest separatist force with 12,000 members and is fighting for an independent Islamic state in Mindanao. The NPA has been waging a 34-year campaign for

the establishment of a Marxist republic. However, President Arroyo is pressing hard for a peace deal with both these groups before May 2004. A peace deal would virtually guarantee her win in this year's presidential election. Her opponent in the election is Fernando Poe, a popular action movie star and ally of former President Estrada. His running mate, Senator Loren Legarda-Leviste is a popular fashion icon. "Without a peace deal her chances of winning the election are rather slim."<sup>65</sup>

The prospects for peace with the MILF are fair. The Malaysian government has agreed to host peace negotiations in Kuala Lumpur. "The U.S. Institute of Peace, a non-governmental organization has also been involved in several peace efforts and has assisted in preparing the negotiations and back-channel talks. Bahrain, Libya, Brunei, and three undisclosed Muslim countries have also committed to help in the Mindanao peace process. Bahrain, for example, has announced a \$1m grant for the development of Muslim communities in the Philippines."<sup>66</sup>

The prospects for peace with the NPA are better. A cease fire has been in effect since December 2003 by mutual agreement. However, one of their demands is to be removed from the U.S. State Department list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO). "While government officials noted this request was 'being taken seriously', the Communist rebels, just as Abu Sayyaf, are likely to keep their FTO tag for the time being. U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, Francis Ricciardone, made it clear that the two groups met the criteria set out by the State department when the FTO list was formulated."<sup>67</sup>

If President Arroyo's efforts are successful, there are still considerable problems with continuing threats by terrorist groups. While the Abu Sayyaf group has been hurt by the capture of "Commander Robot," the organization is still dangerous and its ultimate destruction in doubt. Secondly, according to Philippine intelligence documents "members of the Indonesian terror organization Jemaah Islamiah (JI) have been training at previously unknown camps in the Philippines since 1998. According to an Australian source, there is strong indication that the distinction between JI, as an international organization, and local Islamic groups such as Abu Sayyaf and the MILF are increasingly blurred in the southern provinces. Fighting networks of terror organizations in the Philippines is even more complicated by the fact that the country does not have an anti-terrorist law and moves to enact such legislation have been stalled by disagreement on the definition of terrorism itself."<sup>68</sup>

## MALAYSIA

This predominately Muslim country (55 percent) was colonized by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the defeat of the Japanese during WWII, the eleven separate states of

Peninsular Malaysia, as a British protectorate, were united in the Malayan Union, which became the Federation of Malaya in 1948. It wasn't until 1963 that the Federation of Malaya merged with Singapore and the former British colonies of Sarawak and Sabah (North Borneo) to form Malaysia. Singapore seceded in 1965.

Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's Prime Minister for the last 22 years until 31 October 2003, "brought stability to his country at a time of unprecedented social, political, and economic change in Southeast Asia."<sup>69</sup> Following the 9/11 attacks, Mahathir clamped down on Jemaah Islamiah (JI) and other terrorist groups, and initially supported the war on terrorism. However, he also criticized the United States for its attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and for doing so little to go after the root causes of terrorism.

Although the Malaysian government considers the terrorist threat its greatest internal threat, it has not taken action to deny these groups access to their financial resources despite the number of Al-Qaeda linked front companies and firms in Malaysia. As a result of Malaysian diplomatic pressure, the "U.S. government has yet to designate these firms as having terrorist connections and has not frozen their assets."<sup>70</sup> Mahathir's successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, "has vowed to cut down on corruption and improve education"<sup>71</sup> – two root causes of terrorism.

## SINGAPORE

Formerly a British Crown Colony, Singapore became a sovereign nation in 1965. Under the stewardship of Lee Kuan Yew, who served as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1988, Singapore has become the main commercial and strategic center for the region, and an active member of ASEAN. The country is predominately Buddhist/Taoist (52.4 percent) while Muslims make up 15.4 percent of the population (4.1 million).<sup>72</sup>

Singapore considers its single greatest threat to be the spread of militant Islamism throughout Southeast Asia, and has taken stringent steps to scrutinize financial transactions that could benefit terrorist groups. Singapore's security forces were successful recently in breaking up a JI cell that was planning to attack the American, British, and Israeli embassies in Singapore, as well as U.S. military and American commercial interests in the country. "Singapore also has provided the United States military assistance, primarily in authorizing the transit of U.S. ships and planes as well as intelligence sharing. Singapore has also provided considerable police and intelligence support to the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia in support of their counter-terror efforts."<sup>73</sup>

## **U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

Representative James Leach, Chairman, Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific, chaired a hearing on developments in Southeast Asia after 9/11. In his opening statement he laid out U.S. interests in Southeast Asia.

The U.S. has a number of important interests in Southeast Asia. While the region may lack the intrinsic strategic significance of Northeast Asia, the U.S. nevertheless has a wide range of economic, political and security interests in the area that demand the attention of policy makers. There is a broad consensus that it is in America's long-term interests to promote a community of prosperous Southeast Asian nations that is growing economically and open to free trade and investment, politically stable as well as accountable to the people, at peace within the region and able to effectively contribute to regional security, and committed to the cooperative solution of global problems – most prominently, eradicating international terrorism.<sup>74</sup>

The United States is regarded as a benign hegemon in Southeast Asia – a superpower without territorial interests, and a superpower that has been absent since the events in Vietnam and the U.S. pull-out from its bases in the Philippines. While the presence and actions of Al-Qaeda linked terrorist groups throughout the region served as a wake up call for the return of U.S. focus on the strategic importance of the area, American interests go far beyond the immediate threat of terrorism.

For the United States, Southeast Asia is growing in importance economically and strategically. For the nations in Southeast Asia, the United States “is currently the dominant extraregional power in Southeast Asia. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) continues to rely on U.S. military forces to guarantee regional stability and security and to counter the balance China's growing power. Economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region, which is important to the economic security and well-being of the United States and other powers, depends on preserving American presence and influence in the region and unrestricted access to sea lanes.”<sup>75</sup>

Economically, ASEAN is an important trading partner for the U.S. “The region is a major destination for American foreign investment and remains an important U.S. trading partner. In 2001, American combined two-way trade by Southeast Asian countries amounted to \$107B considered to be the third largest U.S. overseas export market after Japan and the European Union.”<sup>76</sup> The U.S. is also furthering its economic interests through its free trade liberalization policies with Singapore and Vietnam, and “re-established trade and investment councils with the Philippines and Indonesia. Washington has also been re-establishing a broad trade dialogue with ASEAN to expand its economic presence in the area.”<sup>77</sup> These initiatives have sharply increased the confidence of American investors in the region, as the balance sheets show.

At the same time, China is also furthering its interests in Southeast Asia through bilateral trade agreements and is a major player in ASEAN trade.

Chinese imports from the ASEAN 7 – Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – grew 14 percent from 1995 to 2000 from US\$9.7 billion to US\$20.2 billion. In absolute terms, Chinese investment in Southeast Asia is modest, but expanding rapidly. Official figures reveal that government approved investment in ASEAN rose from US\$72 million in 1999 to US\$108 million in 2000, an increase of 50 percent. Actual amounts were probably significantly higher since many companies reputedly circumvent foreign-currency controls by investing through offshore entities.<sup>78</sup>

China's economic growth portends well for peace and security in Asia and Southeast Asia – for the near future. China's ability to maintain its Communist, one party system, while continuing to modernize its military forces and ultimately realizing its ambition to become the regional hegemon is dependent on its contributions to the maintenance and peace and security throughout Asia – and its economic growth. Accordingly, China has a very real interest in eradicating terrorism as a threat to economic growth throughout the region – a region, to include the entire South China Sea, which it has historically claimed as sovereign territory. This is a claim that China has indicated that it will never renounce. Effective control of the two sea lanes of communications (SLOC) in the South China Sea is significant to U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. "The South China Sea is one of the world's busiest international sea lanes where more than half the world's annual merchant shipping traffic sails through the Straits of Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda."<sup>79</sup> The east-west route connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans, while the north-south one links Australia and New Zealand to Northeast Asia. Both routes are economic lifelines by which the economies of Northeast Asia receive critical inputs like oil and other natural resources and export finished goods to the rest of the world...[and] much of the intraregional trade also depends on these waterways."<sup>80</sup> The U.S. and its allies in the region have a number of concerns over the issues of freedom of navigation, and peace and stability in the South China Sea.

Major destabilizing situations and potential threats involve and sovereignty dispute over several reefs and archipelagoes in the South China Sea by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, and China. "China has territorial, maritime, and security goals that would extend its presence into the heart of Southeast Asia. In particular, China claims sovereignty over the entire South China Sea as well as the Spratly and Paracel islands, which sit astride these vital sea lanes."<sup>81</sup> Concerns over non-conventional threats include the historical incidences of piracy in the area; the lack of any one nation or nations having regulatory responsibility for safety of navigation in these straits; and the potential threat of terrorists who

could sink a ship in the narrow channels that comprise the straits, thereby creating an economic as well as a political cost. “The more important role these waterways play is their symbolic value. Consequently, they present Washington with an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the region’s security. By helping to ensure freedom of navigation, the United States [with contributions from the navies of the ASEAN countries and the Five Power Defense Agreement countries] can provide comfort to regional states and discourage extraregional actors from attempting to exert influence in ways that are detrimental to overall regional security.”<sup>82</sup> Militarily, the U.S. is the only country that has the power to deter armed conflict in the region. “ASEAN continues to rely on U.S. military forces to guarantee regional stability and security and to balance China’s growing power...at a time when China seeks to reassert its historical role as the dominant regional power.”<sup>83</sup>

#### **U.S. POLICY TOWARDS DEFEATING TERRORISM - WHAT WILL IT TAKE?**

We will direct every resource at our command—every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war—to the disruption and defeat of the global terror network.<sup>84</sup>

—George W. Bush  
20 September 2001

Following the attack by terrorists on 11 September 2001, the United States issued a number of strategies to deal with global terrorism. These include “The National Strategy for Homeland Security”, the “National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction”, the “National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace”, the “National Money Laundering Strategy”, the National Defense Strategy”, and the “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism.”

The “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism” is the Bush Administration’s strategy that focuses on rooting out and dismantling self-supporting terrorist entities while recognizing the importance of fostering economic, social and political development, market-based economies, good governance and the rule of law. Although it calls for defeating terrorism through diplomacy, information, military and economic power (DIME), there is a heavy reliance on the use of military force.

The goals and objectives of this strategy are to:

- (a) **Defeat** terrorist organizations of global reach through the direct or indirect use of diplomatic, economic, information, law enforcement, military, financial, intelligence, and other instruments of power. The objectives are to identify, locate and destroy terrorists.

(b) **Deny** terrorists the sponsorship, support, and sanctuary that enable them to exist, gain strength, train, plan, and execute their attacks. The focus is on the responsibilities of all states to fulfill their obligations to combat terrorism both within their borders and internationally. Of importance is working to prevent terrorists from acquiring the capability to use chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons, or high-yield explosives. The objectives are to strengthen and sustain the international effort to fight terrorism; working with willing and able states; enabling weak states; persuading reluctant states; compelling unwilling states; interdict and disrupt material support for terrorists; and eliminate terrorist sanctuaries and havens.

(c) **Diminish** the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit such as poverty, deprivation, social disenfranchisement, and unresolved political and regional disputes. The objectives are to partner with the international community to strengthen weak states and prevent the (re) emergence of terrorism; and win the war of ideas.

(d) **Defend** the U.S. and its interests at home and abroad. This includes the physical and cyber protection of the United States, its populace, property, and interests, as well as the protection of its democratic principles. The objectives are to implement the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*; attain domain awareness; enhance measures to ensure the integrity, reliability, and availability of critical physical and information-based infrastructures at home and abroad; integrate measures to protect U.S. citizens abroad; and ensure an integrated incident management capability.<sup>85</sup>

Since 9/11, efforts to combat terrorism by the United States and its allies have been focused on killing or capturing Osama bin Laden and his top leadership and stopping the flow of money to finance Al-Qaeda's world-wide operations. This approach has been successful in the short term. By February 2002 Al-Qaeda had lost 16 of its 25 key leaders through U.S. air strikes in Afghanistan and capture by Pakistani authorities.<sup>86</sup> Its financial structure has been severely disrupted and its ability to mount an attack similar to that of 9/11 has been greatly diminished. As a result, Al-Qaeda, has been reaching out and supporting regional and local Islamic terrorist groups, particularly those in Southeast Asia, who, while maintaining their autonomy and their own agendas, enabling them to "join with Al-Qaeda to learn their operational techniques or benefit from their contacts, but not be subordinate to Al-Qaeda."<sup>87</sup> More importantly, "these groups have also incorporated Al-Qaeda's ideology of global *jihād* against America and other "enemies of Islam" into their own domestic agendas."<sup>88</sup>

Al-Qaeda's evolving "franchised" network "has prompted a debate within the intelligence community over the best tactics to pursue... One option would be to focus on destroying Al-Qaeda in an effort to wither the franchises. The other would be to devote almost equal attention to destroying the smaller, regional groups"<sup>89</sup> Both options miss the target. The center of gravity of Al-Qaeda and militant Islamic terrorist groups is clearly the hearts and minds of "the 1.2

billion-strong Muslim *Ummah*, or nation, which transcends state and ethnic boundaries.”<sup>90</sup>

Winning the hearts and minds of young Southeast Asian Muslims “implies that primarily ideological and political means—with military power and other policy measures playing a strong supporting role is required.”<sup>91</sup>

### **IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE**

How can Al-Qaeda’s ideology be countered? Kumar Ramakrishna, a noted expert on terrorism echoes the argument of others that “Muslims the world over must be persuaded that Islam can co-exist with modernity, and it is possible and desirable to be both a good Muslim and still be thoroughly engaged with a modern capitalist world system.”<sup>92</sup> Muslim co-existence is diametrically opposed to Osama bin Laden’s brand of Islam which argues that “the reason why Islamic societies have fallen behind the West in all spheres of endeavor has been because they have been seduced by the amoral and material accoutrements of Westernization and have thus deviated from the original pristine teachings of the Prophet. Hence the fundamentalists want to turn the clock back...by force, if necessary—and re-institute the laws, traditions and practices of seventh-century Arabian Islam.”<sup>93</sup>

As we have seen, Muslims in Southeast Asia, by virtue of their incorporation into an environment shared with Hindus and Buddhists and other religions, developed into a moderate form of Islam that has been able to peacefully co-exist in the secular states of Indonesia and Malaysia, and is tolerant of other cultures and religions. This fact is highlighted in this year’s legislative and presidential elections in Indonesia where a recent poll showed that “51 percent of devout respondents said they would vote for non-Islamic parties in [this] year’s general election while 69.4 percent of secular Muslims would vote for secular parties... Amie Rais, who leads Indonesia’s highest legislative body, believes that ‘political [radical] Islam is not selling in this country’.”<sup>94</sup>

Despite this encouraging trend of moderate Muslims in predominately Muslim nations supporting secular governments, the West, and the United States, must fight money with money. In particular, the West must be willing to provide whatever support, and funding needed to “undercut” radical Islamic intellectuals, and their message of hatred towards anything that smacks of Western modernization. These intellectuals historically have been funded from official and private sources in Saudi Arabia, and also by local and regional terrorist groups with links to Al-Qaeda.

The West should also “encourage the moderate Islamic clerics to intensify the call for the right of all Muslims to exercise *jihad*, or rational reflection, which would enable Muslim

communities to adopt lifestyles according to conscientious individual interpretations of Islam, rather than slavishly adhere to the authoritarian *fatwas* of small coterie of radical Islamic clerics who pursue political goals under the guise of religion.<sup>95</sup> Farish Noor, a leading moderate Malaysian Islamic scholar put it this way: "Islam is simply too important to be left in the hands of the *Ulama* [religious clerics]."<sup>96</sup> The former Thai Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuwan, a devout Muslim, "laments that the spirit of inquiry—which led Arab Muslim intellectuals of the past to attain great heights of achievement in science, philosophy, and the arts—has long been absent from the faith. He argues that, today, in the religious schools in Southeast Asia, the general principle appears to be 'memorization, stop thinking, stop rationalizing.'"<sup>97</sup>

Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world today and holds great attraction for the youth of the world. America and the West should become actively engaged in supporting and giving voice to the moderate Muslim intelligentsia so that "moderate Muslims can begin to reclaim ideological ground that has been lost [to extremist fundamentalism]."<sup>98</sup> Just as terrorist organizations have learned to use modern communications technology, "Muslims in Southeast Asia should be exposed, through all available technical means, to the ideas of contemporary moderate scholars, such as Indonesia's Nurcholish Majid and Iran's Abdul Saroush. Both these scholars are 'trying to extract the prophetic truths from the Koran to show the inherent compatibility of modern-concerns with the sacred texts'."<sup>99</sup>

Muslim schools in Southeast Asia are often under funded, or do not receive support from their government. "Educational agencies and moderate Muslim religious authorities in Southeast Asia should also be urged to design modern Islamic curriculums for use in religious schools; these efforts should receive adequate funding and assistance. Apart from education in science and technical subjects, the young must be exposed to well articulated moderate alternatives to Wahhabi-inspired exclusionary worldviews. Ulil Abshar Abdullah, an official of the moderate Nadlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, conceded that, rather than "mulling over religious paradoxes and disputes about the lives of long-dead saints," moderate intellectuals must match the radical Muslims in "presenting a simple yet comprehensive ideology that can be grasped by common people."<sup>100</sup>

The United States must be circumspect, and virtually invisible in its efforts to support moderate, conservative Muslim intellectuals. Catharin Dalpino, a Fellow at the Brookings Institution and David Steinbert, Director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University, advocate encouraging "the development of nongovernmental networks in the region that approach these issues from a societal view. In the 1980's, for example, universities attempted to form an ASEAN Muslim Social Sciences Forum, which brought together scholars in the region to

consider Islam's changing social and political roles. It foundered for lack of funds."<sup>101</sup> Dalpino and Steinert go on to say that "Funds should be provided to American nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with solid field experience for projects that support these linkages. The 'brass plaque syndrome,' which requires that all official U.S. government assistance carry a clear advertisement for the United States, would be anathema to many of these efforts."<sup>102</sup>

### **POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY INITIATIVES**

The United States has a miserable record of projecting its message that the West has always been a friend of Islam whereas the Muslim *Ummah* is bombarded daily with anti-American propaganda—over the airways, within mosques, printed material—in short, by every imaginable form of communication. The Arabic-language Al Jazeera television network readily exploits anything with American involvement where Muslims are killed or injured, thereby emphasizing that the U.S. is indeed at war with Islam. The U.S. has not made any meaningful efforts to counter this propaganda, and much of what is projected is accepted as fact by the rank and file Muslim in the Middle East. The U.S. has no credibility at the street level. "The generally poor image of America in the Muslim world helps explain the stubborn belief amongst many street level Muslims that the 11 September attacks were actually the work of the Mossad, and that videotapes of bin Laden all but admitting culpability for the strikes were in fact doctored by American intelligence services."<sup>103</sup>

This perception of the United States at the street level, where Al-Qaeda recruits its followers, must be reversed by fully funding a strategic information operation similar to the full press propaganda effort made by the Voice of America and the U.S. Information Agency during the Cold War. America is not at war with Islam as a faith, nor with Muslims. "Considerably more publicity must be given to, *inter alia*, the historical efforts of American Presidents to seek solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the Western contribution to the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi aggression; as well as the humanitarian interventions in Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo in which the aim was to save thousands of Muslims from genocidal slaughter. In fact, the images of joyful Afghanis celebrating the demise of the Taliban [and Saddam Hussein] in the company of American forces and continuing Western efforts in the political economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan [and Iraq] offers much positive grist for the Western strategic information mill, and have to be exploited."<sup>104</sup>

Restoring American credibility in the eyes of Muslims everywhere is essential to winning the hearts and minds of Muslims. What efforts can the U.S. and the West make that can make a difference? First, the U.S. must follow through on the reconstruction of Afghanistan following

the defeat of the Taliban. There is a perception in the Muslim world that the U.S. abandoned a desperate and needy Afghanistan following the defeat and withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. Post-war Afghanistan must become a success story with a viable economy and regionally and internally secure. The United States and its coalition partners should encourage foreign investment as a way to expedite postwar reconstruction. Afghanistan must not again be abandoned by the West. Second, the U.S. must focus on resolving the status of Jerusalem and Palestine. Surin Pitsuwan states that “a strong sense of ‘primordial’ resentment exists among ‘all Muslims around the world, particularly here in Southeast Asia,’ and their sentiments about Jerusalem, which after Mecca and Medina is the third holiest site in Islam, and has never been seriously accommodated [by the West, and in particular, the U.S.]”<sup>105</sup> Thus, the U.S. must be seen as acting justly on the question of Palestine. The third element is to ensure that any “necessary military operations against other state supporters of radical Islamic terrorism such as Iraq, Sudan and Somalia must be carefully calibrated and controlled...to persuade Muslims that the West harbors no ulterior motive—no desire to subjugate them—as the radical Islamic movement suggests.”<sup>106</sup>

American foreign policy under the current administration is under close scrutiny, especially as it pertains to the war on terrorism. Consistency and fairness are essential. Our fundamental economic and political values consistently receive high marks in Muslim countries. The Pew Research center found that “in most Muslim populations, large majorities continue to believe that Western-style democracy can work in their countries. This is the case in predominantly Muslim countries like Kuwait (83 percent) and Bangladesh (57 percent), but also in religiously diverse countries like Nigeria (75 percent).”<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, there is a perception in the Muslim world that Muslims are singled out and treated unfairly. For example, “that focus has resulted in severe restrictions on granting educational visas for young Muslims to visit the U.S. to get higher education. If Muslim countries were to make progress in an increasing globalized world, they should be able to educate their youths in America and other Western countries. Modern education has become an important tool to fight the forces of obscurantism in Muslim countries.”<sup>108</sup>

The Pew Research Center has demonstrated that Muslims in 44 countries of its survey “place high value on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, multiparty systems and equal treatment under the law.”<sup>109</sup> How these values are incorporated into their governments; how to bring about democratization of their politics in repressive, autocratic countries is a question that constantly begs for practical answers. Changes will have to come from within their boundaries and by their citizenry. If the United States and other Western democracies are to serve as role

models and facilitators for change, the image of the United States and the policies it promulgates to prosecute the global war on terrorism must be consistent and fair. The United States must consistently “walk the talk.” Finally, the American people must be willing to stay the course, whatever the cost. The stakes are high, but so are the consequences of wavering in our resolve to see this war through to the end.

Al-Qaeda fully believes that the center of gravity of the United States is the will of the American people, and their perception that the American public is unwilling to bear major sacrifice as it was perceived to be the case in Somalia in 1993 when eighteen servicemen were killed and some dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Al-Qaeda intends to sap the will of the American people and force a U.S. retreat from Muslim lands by “generating very high levels of fear and anxiety amongst the American public in the belief that at some point in the campaign—probably after another series of spectacular mass-casualty strikes—the people will compel the American government to disengage from the Muslim world. The desire to directly target and break the will of the American people by employing extra-normal means of destruction against them is also precisely why Al-Qaeda has sought to acquire weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>10</sup> Al-Qaeda will not compromise, nor will the United States. Al-Qaeda as an ideology and Al-Qaeda as an organization must be destroyed through the application of the full spectrum of national power and influence.

## **CONCLUSION**

Terrorism remains a key security challenge in Southeast Asia. While this challenge has refocused U.S. attention on the region, American security and economic interests transcend the immediate threat of terrorism. With its strategic location, growing economies and cultural ties with the United States, it is important that the U.S. maintain its position as a benign hegemon, but capable of operating from a position of strength when necessary to promote and preserve peace and regional stability. America’s long term interests are closely tied to ASEAN’s desires for a community of prosperous Southeast Asian nations working together to promote economic growth, free trade and investment, political stability and regional security. Economic opportunities favorable to the United States are in Asia, where growth is the highest in the world, surpassing our trade with any other area.

Nevertheless, while there have been notable successes and progress in combating and eliminating regional and local terrorist groups, killing or capturing their leadership, disrupting their finances, and denying them sanctuary, the terrorist threat remains at a high level that will require multilateral cooperation throughout the region, not U.S. “boots on the ground.” This

threat remains today, and on into the future. The JI remains a potent force with the continuing ability to attack targets of economic opportunity that could destabilize the economies of several nations, and impact the whole region. The recent capture of Hambali, the group's leader, will not have a major impact on their ability to continue their *jihad* against the emerging democracies and American interests in the region.

The United States is in the unique position of being the sole remaining superpower in the world. Yet the safety of its citizens, the security of its homeland as well as the security of its allies and regional partners is threatened by terrorist organizations bent on the destruction of the American way of life. The preservation of peace, economic growth, and stability in Southeast Asia are vital interests for the United States. The war on terrorism refocused American strategic interest on the region, strengthened existing relationships and opened new levels of understanding and cooperation with former foes that can only bring greater prosperity and security to the Pacific Rim. The United States and its allies are committed to these goals.

WORD COUNT = 12,882

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