

## *Conference, Symposium, and Panel Reports*

# Security Cooperation and Governance in Southeast Asia

From 26-28 September 2006, Hawaii's Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) and Singapore's Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) co-hosted a conference in Singapore entitled "Security Cooperation and Governance in Southeast Asia: Responding to Terrorism, Insurgency, and Separatist Violence in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines." Attended by American and Southeast Asian academics, policymakers, and security practitioners, it assessed the current status and prospects for resolving Southeast Asia's three primary security threats: separatism, insurgency, and terrorism.

The patterns of political violence in these nation-states display many similarities. However, as they and their associated militant movements are generally dealt with separately, such similarities are frequently overlooked.

### **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

- Political violence typically manifests itself at the peripheries of nation-states in marginal and marginalized regions and where many locals feel neglected by the remote capital.
- Porous borders and high levels of traditional mobility thwart the security forces' efforts to track and interdict militants and the flow of weapons.
- The security forces' response has generally been problematic, thereby exacerbating problems by consolidating the perverse synergies of mutual interest between protagonists and by radicalizing brutalized individuals and groups.
- The absence of sufficient trust between local communities and security agencies makes sustained "community policing" difficult.
- National governments have, in some cases, failed to engage adequately with legitimate underlying grievances that are only partly economic and poorly understood.
- The national governments' legitimacy and "soft power" is further diminished by corruption, poor local governance, and the loss of hope that conditions will ever improve.

Several leading subject matter experts gave the following key insights:

### **ACEH**

- The 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami opened the way for international involvement and provided the Indonesian military (TNI) an occasion to be rewarded for reform and openness, focused attention on achieving peace if long-term aid was to con-

tinue to flow, consolidated Jakarta's political will to push for a comprehensive settlement, and convinced the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) to negotiate an end of hostilities.

- Newly elected president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has a clear public mandate, a good working relationship with his former TNI colleagues, and considerable prior experience as a coordinating minister for political and security affairs in working for a settlement.
- Jakarta's current approach, which is broadly correct, needs to be encouraged to prevent local TNI and aberrant GAM figures from disrupting the peace process.

### SOUTHERN THAILAND

- The core issue is essentially Malay identity and Bangkok's failure to accommodate Malay aspirations; religion is secondary. Linkages with the ulama, mosque, and madrasah are thus secondary and essentially coincidental as sites for traditional Malay community consultation and leadership.
- As with Aceh, Wahhabism has made little headway among Thailand's Malay communities, which are hostile to it.
- There is no clear evidence of global *jihadi*, such as the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), activity there. However, this might change if the conflict drags on.
- Kuala Lumpur can help Bangkok, but its political will is constrained by the governing UMNO party's desire to defeat the Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS), Kelantan's Islamist opposition party. Approximately 300,000 ethnic Malay Thai citizens live in that state and, because they have Malaysian identity cards, they can vote.
- Bangkok's approach up until 18 September 2006 was deeply flawed. The Thaksin government's end may well lead to renewed engagement, but such leaders as the Muslim but ethnically Thai Gen Sonthi, whose previous efforts to engage with the south were rebuffed by Thaksin, must understand that the root problem is Malay identity, not Islam.

### MINDANAO

- Islam plays a much greater role in the southern Philippines. But even there, it is only one factor in a very complicated mix.
- This is true even within the highly factionalized Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which no longer represents a single, coherent organization. Some factions are strongly motivated by Islamist (and *jihadi* Islamist) political aspirations; others are willing to negotiate with Manila and accept a secular government and social pluralism. The role of personal charisma and personal networks cannot be underestimated.
- There are many key actors, most of whom have a very fluid orientation. This needs to be remembered while analyzing current and future JI links with MILF factions.
- The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), best understood as a violent criminal group, has rebuilt its strength to about 600 fighters. However, the contribution of *jihadi* ideology, which ebbs and flows, should not be ignored.
- The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA), its militant wing, represent a growing threat in the south and nationwide. They have demonstrated a much better strategic planning ability and a more disciplined focus than groups like the MILF and the ASG, and have garnered broad public support nationwide.
- If the Philippines were a strong state with a growing economy, it still would be seriously challenged. Given its persistent weakness, however, it is difficult to see Manila making any sustained progress against the current levels of insurgency, terrorism, and separatism. Manila has done many things right in the south, but much more is required.

**EASTERN INDONESIA AND THE JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH (JI)**

- JI is much less a geographically driven phenomenon than the others, but it has also been shaped by and benefited from “ungoverned spaces.”
- JI began its “jihad” in post-Soeharto Indonesia in Maluku and Central Sulawesi by sending in mujahidin to exacerbate the ongoing communal conflict. Some members apparently wanted to confine JI’s activism to these troubled and weakly governed regions, but lost out to the pro-bombing faction. Now, substantially crippled and greatly constrained, JI will likely seek to rebuild and consolidate itself in eastern Indonesia and perhaps the southern Philippines.
- Just as al-Qaeda’s future appears to lie largely with semi-autonomous cells recruiting and acting alone, inspired and directed by the “idea of al-Qaeda” rather than the organization, so too it appears that the JI will become a far looser, and perhaps more dangerous, network.
- Jakarta’s response, particularly that of the Indonesian police (POLRI) since the 12 October 2002 Bali attack, has exceeded all expectations. Nevertheless, TNI-POLRI tensions need to be resolved, the military and police should be encouraged to work together, better cooperation between the relevant intelligence agencies is needed (including POLRI intelligence), and community policing needs to be developed nationwide, especially in the east.

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