

# **The Nature of Southeast Asian Security Challenges**

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*Jürgen Rüländ*

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Dr. Jürgen Rüländ is professor of political science in the Department of Political Science at the University of Freiburg, Germany, and director of the Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute, Freiburg.

## **1. Introduction**

The main argument of this paper is that there is a convergence of security challenges in Southeast Asia and the OECD world, although differences in scope and approaches to tackle them remain. This means that in Southeast Asia inter-state wars and other conventional security threats such as territorial disputes and arms races have subsided in the last ten to fifteen years, while the region is increasingly confronted with non-conventional security risks emanating from international terrorism and organized crime, separatism and piracy, irregular migration, environmental issues, energy shortages, economic crises and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and SARS. Some of these new security issues are closely intertwined and hence aggravate the risks as well as impeding solutions. The increasing similarities of security challenges may be explained by the ambiguities of globalization. Like the OECD world, even if for different reasons, Asian governments (including regional great powers such as China and India) prioritize economic development. They pursue policies promoting economic growth which, they believe, will attract investors and capital, stimulate technological progress, save or create jobs and hence, strengthen their legitimacy. These objectives can be best pursued in a peaceful international environment, free from armed conflict, tensions and costly defense commitments. The flipside of their growing integration into the world economy is an increasing interdependence which gives rise to many of the bordercrossing pathologies of globalization mentioned above. They call for new cooperative security approaches to which, however, Southeast Asian governments subscribe only hesitantly.

## **2. Conventional security threats**

With the end of the Cold War the OECD world was freed from the tensions and risks arising from the confrontation of two military pacts, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact Organization, which had kept each other in check for nearly four decades mainly by means of nuclear deterrence. In Southeast Asia, the confrontation fed first by the bipolar and later the tripolar great power rivalry between the United States, the Soviet Union and China also receded. The Soviet Union, and after its collapse in 1991, Russia, ended its military presence in Indochina and stopped alighting the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Vietnam, in turn, sought to compensate the loss of Russian support by a rapprochement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), eventually becoming a member of the grouping in 1995. At the same time, it sought to improve its relations with China with whom it fought a war in 1979, was locked in violent border incidents throughout the 1980s and with whose navy it clashed in the Spratlys in 1988. However, unlike in Europe, the ideological underpinnings of inter-state conflict did not entirely disappear as China, Vietnam and Laos still adhere to a socialist political order. While, as we know from regime theory, ideological conflict is the type most resistant to mediation and resolution, the policy of economic liberalization pursued by these countries has relegated ideological issues to a backseat.

Today the likelihood of inter-state wars in Southeast Asia is greatly diminished, although – unlike in the OECD world - territorial disputes and conflicting claims in maritime areas still linger. Most of them have not been resolved, but rather bracketed or swept under the carpet. The still most contested issue is the demarcation of maritime borders in the South China Sea where at least six claimants – China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei – have occupied atolls and islets in the Spratly archipelago and erected military installations. The South China Sea is believed to be rich in natural gas, oil and fish, although there are

conflicting estimates about the size of the deposits. As early as 1992, ASEAN's Manila Declaration sought to oblige all claimants to abstain from actions which would heighten tensions in the area. However, ASEAN's policy of restraint initially fell on deaf ears in China. As a latecomer among the claimants, China passed a law on the territorial sea and the contiguous zone in February 1992 on which it based its U-shaped claim covering almost the entire South China Sea. In 1995, China occupied Mischief Reef, which was claimed by the Philippines as part of their Kalayaan islands, and in 1998 it reinforced the structures set up there in 1995. While Beijing proposed joint development of the resources, it refused to enter into multilateral negotiations, insisting on bilateral talks which would have given it an edge over its neighbors. However, increased American military presence in the region after September 11, 2001, and the obvious commitment of the U.S. to support allies as displayed in the Taiwan crisis of 1996 have convinced the Chinese that an accommodation with ASEAN is a less costly option than unilateral pursuit of claims. In 2002 Beijing eventually signed a declaration on conduct in the South China Sea which was earlier discussed in various rounds of negotiations between China and the Philippines and in ASEAN-China dialogue meetings. Although the declaration fails to meet ASEAN's expectations, it denounces the use of force. It is the first multilateral declaration on the South China Sea signed by China, giving some credence to its "new security concept" (Buszynski). In October 2003 China was the first non-ASEAN state to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), thus once more explicitly recognizing ASEAN norms of peaceful conflict resolution.

Other Asian hot spots which may trigger inter-state wars such as Taiwan, the Korean peninsula and Kashmir are located outside the region. Even if they explode into armed conflicts, their effects on Southeast Asia will be more of an indirect nature. They may increase the presence of external powers and militarize the region, but it is unlikely that they will draw the region into hostilities.

Invasions such as that of Cambodia by Vietnam in 1979 are now increasingly remote. The same may be said about border wars like those between Thailand and Laos in 1984 and 1987. Yet, occasional border skirmishes persist. A flash point in this respect is the Thai-Burmese border where incursions of Burmese troops on Thai territory, usually in hot pursuit of ethnic rebels, have repeatedly provoked armed clashes. Fiery nationalistic demagoguery reviving or keeping alive primordial stereotypes has occasionally also caused tensions, for example at the height of the Asian financial crisis between Indonesia and Malaysia on the one hand and Singapore on the other, or even lead to riots as in Phnom Penh where in early 2003 a mob attacked and ransacked Thai property. In the end, however, in all these instances reason and peaceful mechanisms of dispute settlement prevailed.

Also supporting the convergence argument is the fact that, like much of the OECD world (except for Japan and South Korea), Southeast Asia is mainly threatened by nuclear proliferation outside the region. In the region, the danger of horizontal proliferation is next to zero. All three constraints on nuclear proliferation named by Rod Lyon exist in Southeast Asia: no or only restricted access to fissile material, lack of technological skill to build nuclear devices and the non-existence of any compelling motivation to overcome the first two barriers. While ASEAN has convincingly shown its intention to comply with the non-proliferation norm by establishing a Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) in 1995, risks persist due to the fact that nuclear powers including India, Pakistan and North Korea have so far not acceded to the convention.

Less clear is the convergence argument in the area of conventional armaments. While after the end of the Cold War, the OECD world experienced a process of arms reduction, Southeast Asia was widely perceived as engaging in a veritable spree of buying weapons. Some of the weapons no longer used in the West even found their way to Southeast Asia as the sale of the GDR navy by the German federal government to Indonesia shows. This led some observers to

speak of an unfolding arms race, motivated partly by substantial increases in Chinese and Indian defense spendings and partly by the scramble for resource-rich maritime zones. Others were less alarmist and spoke of a process of arms modernization and an adjustment of defense capabilities to the increased economic potentials. Yet, as the increases in defense expenditures were substantial in absolute terms and as arms modernization pursued the objective of power projection, the concern of observers could not entirely be dismissed. For the outside observer it was particularly worrying that in most countries military modernization was widely accepted by the public as a symbol of national strength. Unlike in the West, there was, with the exception of some members of the local and transnational NGO community, no pacifist movement pushing for disarmament.

However, the Asian financial crisis marked a watershed in the military build up as most Southeast Asian countries shelved expensive arms acquisition programs, bringing the region back in line with trends in the OECD world. Defense expenses are again on the rise since September 11, 2001, but only Singapore exceeds the levels reached in the mid-1990s in absolute as well as in relative terms. The convergence argument is also supported by the fact that from the mid-1990s onward the situation was not uniform in the OECD world either. The military technology revolution pushed by the U.S. government markedly drove up defense expenditures. Under the Bush administration and after September 11, 2001, the defense expenditures of the U.S. have increased by leaps and bounds and reached unprecedented levels, in contradiction to Japan and the EU.

Unlike developments in the OECD world, Southeast Asia witnessed an increasing penetration of external forces. While the OECD world is characterized by U.S. dominance, it is important to note that it is nonetheless a dominance exercised by an external power. Ever since the inauguration of its ZOPFAN concept in 1974, ASEAN sought to reduce external influences and to avoid becoming a theatre of great power rivalries. While ASEAN indeed successfully

emancipated itself from the influence of external powers in the 1990s and was on the way to becoming a “regional security manager” (Haacke), the more recent past has seen a reversal of this trend. It would however be wrong to attribute this change entirely to the repercussions of September 11. External influences on the region already began to increase after the Asian financial crisis which exposed the weakness of regional institutions and left crisis management to the international financial organizations dominated by the West and, in particular, the U.S. The crisis virtually paralyzed ASEAN and engulfed the grouping in acrimonious disputes over its principles of cooperation. ASEAN was thus unable to act in the East Timor crisis and grudgingly had to leave its resolution to an UN intervention led by Australia, the self-styled deputy sheriff of the U.S. Even prior to September 11, the U.S. negotiated visiting rights and logistic support for its navy with Singapore and concluded a Visiting Forces Agreement with the Philippines in 1998.

September 11 undoubtedly intensified external interest in the region. The U.S. designated the region as a “second front” and hence elevated its security priority to a level unprecedented for the post-Cold War period. Southeast Asia’s renewed security priority became most visible in joint military exercises and the stationing of U.S. troops in the Philippines, the conclusion of a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement with Manila in November 2002, the stepping up of military exercises with Thailand, talks with Vietnam about the use of the former Soviet base of Cam Ranh Bay, closer intelligence cooperation with ASEAN governments, increased CIA presence in the region and the deployment of additional aircraft carriers from the Atlantic to the Western Pacific. The U.S. also provided friendly governments with development and military aid and in October 2002 President Bush launched the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) with the offer of bilateral Free Trade Agreements between the U.S. and ASEAN member countries. After the Bali bombing, Australia also declared she might resort to preemptive strikes to stem terrorist attacks on her territory, a policy statement which,

though not naming concrete targets, could only be directed against neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

The increased U.S. presence in the region triggered balancing moves by Asian great powers and ASEAN itself. However, in the light of U.S. dominance these moves steered clear of power balancing and concentrated mainly on institutional balancing. They are directed not only against the U.S., but also against each other. Chinese efforts to conclude a Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN, though originating prior to September 11, 2001, must be seen in this light as well as Japanese and Indian overtures to establish comprehensive economic partnerships with ASEAN. India also sought to foster institutional networking with Southeast Asia by revitalizing BIMSTEC and – possibly balancing Chinese influence in Southeast Asia - participated in naval patrols with the U.S. in the Strait of Malacca. ASEAN was highly receptive to all these moves, as they were seen as chances to engage the region’s great powers and to balance U.S. dominance. This also refutes David A. Kang’s recent claim that Asian countries are bandwagoning China and comes much closer to the position of Amitav Acharya who decried ASEAN’s attitude toward China as “hedging” and “double-binding.”

### **3. Non-Conventional Security Risks**

Like in the OECD world, international terrorism has gained highest priority on the security agenda of Southeast Asian nations since September 11. While terrorism is a new type of threat neither for Southeast Asia nor the OECD world, the challenge is its increasingly transnational organization and the fact that it is often directed against “soft” targets and civilians. Its rise, spread and efficiency as a type of asymmetric warfare is facilitated by new communication technologies, the use of global business networks and globalized traditional channels of remittances such as the *hawala* system (Zachary).



After September 11, 2001, Southeast Asia came into the focus of U.S. antiterrorism strategists. Catching their attention was the Islamic revival in the region which began in the 1980s and gained momentum in the 1990s, the region's complex geography and porous borders, weak states, Islamic rebellions and ethnic strife. Some observers went so far as to liken Indonesia to another Afghanistan and the Abu Sayyaf to the Taliban. After the U.S. military action against the Taliban, reports circulated that al-Qaeda operatives and Arabs fighting for the Taliban were fleeing to Southeast Asia and getting involved in the ethnic conflicts in the Moluccas and Central Sulawesi. Other analysts feared that Southeast Asia with its weak and unregulated banking systems would become a financial hub for international terrorists. In short, Southeast Asia was proclaimed as the "second front" in the war against international terrorism.

A more sober analysis suggests that the threat perceptions circulating in the security community of the U.S., which are shared by Singaporean and Malaysian authorities, may be exaggerated. This is not to belittle real threats and the close connections Southeast Asian Islamists entertain throughout the region and with Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, a closer look reveals that, despite their transnational links, terrorist activities are mainly homegrown. Although evidence of links between local terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Kumpulan Mujahedin Malaysia (KMM) and Abu Sayyaf to al-Qaeda exists, the cohesion and intensity of these links is difficult to gauge. Views portraying Southeast Asia as a launching pad and a haven for international terrorism seem to be as much off the mark as categorizing the MILF and Abu Sayyaf as "associate groups of al-Qaeda" (Gunaratna). Some of the sources cited by the proponents of the second front hypothesis come from rather dubious and murky sources. Recent assessments of the Muslim unrest in the South of Thailand also deny that international terrorist networks have any hand in it (Büntel).

While the risks caused by transnational terrorist networks are undeniable, it should also be taken into account that despite the Islamic revivalism, Southeast Asian Islam is still highly diverse and on the whole more tolerant than Middle Eastern brands (Hefner). Even the rise of Salafist and other puritanical Wahabite versions of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia should not automatically be taken as an equivalent of terrorism. Although in Indonesia the number of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) has increased considerably over the last twenty years, only a small minority of them entertains links to terrorist circles. So far, Islamist terrorists constitute a small radical fringe. Recent elections in Indonesia and Malaysia have not indicated a worrying advance of Islamist forces, despite the gains in Indonesia of the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) which received a surprising 7 percent in the April 2004 parliamentary elections. Broadly speaking, however, the cleavage structure in Indonesian society has remained more or less the same since 1955 when the first and only free elections until 1999 were held. Moreover, after initial silence, the two large Islamic socio-religious organizations, the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, have repeatedly spoken out against Islamist agitation and moves to include the Jakarta Charter (which would subject all Indonesian Muslims to the shariah) in the revised constitution failed. In Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, literal Islam is only a thin veneer cast over an *adat*-based syncretist culture, as many studies show (McKenna).

The security risks caused by international terrorism in Southeast Asia have also been viewed in bleak terms because of the initial denial of the problem and inactivity by some governments in the region. Especially Indonesia, but also Thailand and the Philippines, were often blamed for their allegedly lacklustre efforts to fight international terrorism. While in some cases official denial of the problem may have been a tactical move to avoid retaliatory actions by the terrorists, in other cases, viz. Indonesia, the problem was real. However, since the Bali bombing Indonesia has passed an *Anti-Terrorism Act* and seriously stepped up its activities against terrorists. Most of the nearly 200 Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists apprehended so far have

been captured in Indonesia. Although far from working smoothly, various anti-terrorism pacts have intensified and improved intelligence sharing among ASEAN countries and with the U.S., and contributed to the capturing of key al-Qaeda and JI figures in the region. Yet, it would be wrong to regard anti-terrorism cooperation as a new federator of ASEAN.

Separatism as a security risk still exists, but overall – despite the recent outburst of violence in Southern Thailand – seems to be on the decline. Like in the European periphery, there was an upsurge of separatism and ethno-religious violence in Southeast Asia in the 1990s. Most affected by communal strife was Indonesia – which was seen by observers to be disintegrating and even labelled a “failing state.” Separatist rebellions raged in East Timor, Aceh and West Papua, violent communal conflicts in Kalimantan, the Moluccas and Central Sulawesi. They caused thousands of deaths and displaced hundreds of thousands. Some of these conflicts have now given way to a fragile peace. The Malino peace agreements ended violence in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas, although hostilities still occasionally flare up. In East and Central Kalimantan ethnic strife between Dayaks and Madurese only came to an end after the latter had left the area. East Timor became independent in 2002. In Aceh and West Papua violent clashes between insurgents and the army continue. Several ceasefires have not led to a lasting peace in Aceh; a situation for which the Indonesian military as well as the rebels of the Gerakan Merdeka Aceh (GAM) are responsible. However, the heavy-handed military offensive started in May 2003 and the military emergency imposed on the province for six months have exacerbated the situation and complicated the search for a solution. While in previous rebellions the Acehnese fought for greater autonomy, they now demand independence. East Timor serves as a precedent in this respect.

While we may expect continued ethno-religious turmoil in Indonesia, the ethnic heterogeneity in most provinces is cushioning communal strife. So is the consociational nature of the revised Indonesian constitution which provides protection for minorities. Decentralization

may also work in that direction, though it could be a double-edged sword if it consolidates ethnic loyalties and accelerates horizontal conflicts. Separatism in Burma is likewise declining, continuing in the Philippine South and newly flaring up in Southern Thailand.

One of the concerns of anti-terrorism experts are links between terrorism, separatism, ethnic strife, piracy and organized crime. Links between separatism and terrorism exist, as the training of JI members in camps of the Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) suggests. They also exist in areas of ethno-religious conflict such as Central Sulawesi, but they are less clear in the Moluccas and do not seem to exist in Aceh. Laskar Jihad leader Umar Jafaar Talib is said to be critical of Osama bin Laden and dissolved the organization after the Bali bombing. Front Pembela Islam mobilized *jihadis* for fighting against the U.S. in Afghanistan and was involved in violence against Christians, but it is difficult to prove bonds with al-Qaeda. Even more speculative are suspected links between international terrorism, separatism and piracy. Although piracy is rapidly on the rise in Southeast Asian waters, there is so far only weak evidence for links between separatist groups such as GAM, piracy and al-Qaeda.

A more visible relationship exists between separatism and international crime. Separatist forces as well as the government troops fighting them are engaged in arms smuggling, drug trafficking, illegal logging, protection rackets and money laundering. Most Southeast Asian states are thus still on the negative list of the OECD's Finance Action Task Force (FATF). Here is also a link to international terrorism as terrorist cells may also make use of poorly supervised banking systems in their attempt to get access to funds for the purchase of arms and explosives. These risks also exist in the OECD world, although more effective monitoring and enforcement help to contain them.

Fragile democratization also poses security risks. These are certainly greater in Southeast Asia than in the OECD world. One reason is that democracy is deeply embedded in most OECD societies and even in Eastern Europe's new democracies it is less fragile than in Southeast

Asia. Although democratization has made considerable headway since the Philippine people's power revolt, there are still several semi-democratic, socialist and outrightly authoritarian regimes in the region. Moreover, even the countries which have experienced democratic transition are often disparagingly categorized as "electoral democracies," "defective democracies" or "delegative democracies." Human rights violations, political repression, discrimination of minorities and endemic corruption are major impediments to human security and socioeconomic reform in these polities. As they encourage veto powers including elements in the military and the bureaucracy, representatives of the *ancien regime*, separatists and religious fanatics to oppose the new rules of the political game, they jeopardize democratic consolidation. The same holds true for overly stringent anti-terrorism laws and counter-insurgency measures. While popular demands for a strong hand may thrive under conditions of political turbulence, terrorist threats and sluggish economic growth, the fears of many Indonesian NGO and democracy activists that a president with a military background signifies a reversal of democratization are nevertheless exaggerated. However, the slow progress in democratization should not obscure the fact that even in the area of human security there is a convergence of the OECD world and Southeast Asia. The severe human rights violations committed by U.S. security personnel in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Bagdad or in Guantanamo and the curtailment of civil rights in the wake of homeland security are hardly more justifiable than the human rights violations criticized by the U.S. in Southeast Asia's authoritarian regimes.

Convergent are also security problems related to international migration. In many Western countries, it is increasingly evident that the integration of migrant communities has not been a success story. Tensions and violent incidents are on the rise. Recent incidents in the Netherlands are only the top of an iceberg. Migratory problems have also dramatically increased in Southeast Asia. While in past centuries the region was repeatedly the destination of migratory waves, in much of the post-Second World War period it was mainly a sending

region. This changed markedly under the impact of rapid modernization and inequitable growth in the region from the 1980s onward. Today Southeast Asia is a sending region and a destination of migrants at the same time. While Indonesia, the Philippines and Burma are still sending nations, Malaysia and Thailand have become sending as well as receiving countries. Singapore is mainly a net receiver. At present there are about seven million migrants in the region. Indonesia also has become a transit country for migrants from the Middle East en route to Australia. As much of this migration is irregular, especially from Indonesia to Malaysia, periodic expulsions of illegal migrants by Malaysia have strained mutual relations. Many of these migrants are smuggled into the country by dubious syndicates, leaving the migrant workers exposed to the whims of their employers and the authorities in the receiving countries.

Other non-conventional security problems transcending borders are environmental problems such as haze, the loss of biodiversity and climate change. They are caused by illegal logging and swidden agriculture and in the past mainly originated from Indonesia. They have contributed not only to a marked increase of respiratory ailments in neighboring countries but also to enormous economic losses. Tourist arrivals have been adversely affected by the recent SARS epidemic, while AIDS/HIV infections are still on the rise in Burma and Indochinese countries. These security challenges are certainly more serious in Southeast Asia than in the OECD world, where international cooperation and more effective government responses have kept epidemics and environmental problems better in check. Economic crises, while not sparing the OECD world as the EMS crisis of 1992/1993 indicates, are considerably more serious in Southeast Asia. The Asian currency crisis of 1997/1998 and its socioeconomic consequences can probably only be compared with the Great Depression in the 1930s. While Southeast Asian countries have made steps to reform their corporate sectors and banking systems under the tutelage of the IMF, have established a financial surveillance system and participated in the Chiang Mai Initiative (a system of bilateral swaps for countries facing

liquidity problems), many of the domestic problems believed to have contributed to the crisis still prevail. Despite the establishment of an ASEAN Task Force on Social Safety Nets, social security nets as manifestations of human security are still in their infancy. All this does not bode well for the prevention of future crises which may become a recurrent characteristic of Southeast Asian economies.

#### **4. Southeast Asian Responses to Security Challenges**

Southeast Asia's security challenges may converge with security issues in the OECD world, but the way they are handled differs. Security in the North Atlantic is provided by NATO which for much of its existence was a collective defense pact, but in recent years is increasingly assuming functions of a collective security system. It is paralleled by institutions of common and human security such as the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), although the latter has become increasingly marginalized and by-passed by recent U.S. unilateralism. ASEAN on the other hand has never been a security pact. It relied on national security based on the doctrine of "national resilience" (*ketahanan nasional*) and its regional extension, "regional resilience." From the 1980s onward, there was a gradual shift from national security to "comprehensive security" and in the 1990s even toward "cooperative security." Creeping moves toward "cooperative security" occurred mainly in the area of conventional military security and, more recently, to some extent in the war against terror. Manifestations of these (hesitant) shifts toward "cooperative security" are the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) formed in 1994, the confidence building measures it adopted, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), numerous track two forums (such as CSCAP or ASEAN-ISIS), the still vague concept of an ASEAN Security Community and the various declarations against international terrorism. But as all these mechanisms adhere largely to the so-called "ASEAN Way" of cooperation with its strong emphasis on national sovereignty and noninterference in

the domestic affairs of fellow members, strong realist notions of security informed by the concept of power balancing are still predominant in the Southeast Asian security discourse. Mechanisms of cooperative security such as the ASEAN High Council and the Troika have never been used to settle security problems. Even more disturbing is the fact that cooperation occasionally takes a backseat in the face of aggressive nationalist rhetoric as evidenced during the Asian financial crisis. This has adverse cognitive effects as such rhetoric keeps alive primordial stereotypes and other prejudices which hamstring cooperation.

While in the OECD world security is increasingly viewed as a common good and non-conventional security challenges are tackled by regime-building, there is little progress in this direction in Southeast Asia. This holds particularly true for problems such as international migration, environmental degradation and epidemics. Except for the emergence of epistemic communities and track two meetings in these areas, these issues still tend to be handled nationally. Even when ASEAN ministerial meetings do tackle them, they hardly go beyond non-binding declarations which may at best be considered proto-regimes (Aggarwal) emphasizing certain common principles, but usually not transcending this early stage of regime-building. Separatism, too, even if it has bordercrossing consequences, has always been seen as a threat that should be handled nationally and preferably by military force. Although there was mediation by Indonesia and Malaysia in the Moro conflict and some Philippine and Thai involvement in Aceh, ASEAN countries are averse to multilateral mediation. However, their reliance on military solutions is highly counterproductive as rebel demands move from autonomy to secession. Governments usually fail to recognize the highly complex nature of these conflicts and the cognitive processes underlying them. They are usually shaped by previous interactions, socioeconomic disparities, experiences of political and cultural discrimination and single traumatic incidents which are revitalized by the collective memory whenever inter-ethnic relations deteriorate.



National sovereignty is still the most essential value in Southeast Asian security discourse, even though it came under pressure in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. However, Thai and Philippine moves towards “flexible engagement” and “enhanced interaction” did not find acceptance by the majority of ASEAN governments. More recently Indonesia also saw turned down its calls for an ASEAN peace keeping force. This shows the thorny path towards human security, the type of security which is closest to the liberal pole on the realism – liberalism continuum of security concepts.