The Obligation of Empire

United States' Grand Strategy for a New Century

EDITED BY JAMES J. HENTZ

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Policy Board has been a strong proponent of regime change, especially in Iraq. See "Iraq: Saddam Unbound" in Present Danger, eds. Kagan and Kristol.

19. The 1981 Israeli attack on the Iraqi nuclear plant is a popular example of sound counterproliferation policy amongst proponents of primacy.

20. Laurent Murawiec, an international security analyst with the RAND Corporation, suggested in a briefing to the Defense Policy Board that the United States should consider seizing of Saudi oil fields.


25. The policy of Iraqi regime change was obviously more attractive to the United States than Iraqi disarmament. While a serious and verifiable disarmament effort might solve the threat of Iraqi WMDs it would do nothing to remove the conventional threat to regional security or the potential future proliferation. Simple disarmament would not remove the essence of the problem—an aggressive anti-U.S. regime. Permitting the Ba'athist regime to remain in power would require continued U.S. support for a discredited inspections regime and continued presence of U.S. military forces in Saudi Arabia to deter conventional aggression. One could easily postulate that over time the inspections regime would deteriorate and Iraq would again seek WMDs. Finally, the disarmament solution would do nothing to change the paradigm of failed governance in the region that provides traction for the type of pan-Islamic terror that represents the primary national security threat.


C H A P T E R

9

Southeast Asia and American Strategic Options

Brantly Womack

DEJÀ VU? CHASING ABU SAYYAF AND CAM RANH BAY

In the first six months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks there were two U.S. activities in Southeast Asia that were reminiscent of an earlier era. Since October, American soldiers, including Special Forces, were engaged in the southern Philippines, ostensibly as advisers to the Philippines armed forces fighting the insurgent group Abu Sayyaf. The original short-term invitation from the government of the Philippines was extended indefinitely on December 31. Not only was this the first presence of U.S. troops in the Philippines since the closing of U.S. bases in 1992, but, along with $4.6 billion in promised military and economic assistance, it also resonates with President Kennedy's use of Special Forces in Vietnam for "flood control" in the early 1960s.

Meanwhile, in early February 2002 Admiral Dennis Blair, commander of the U.S. Pacific fleet, visited Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam amid talk of an American return to the base it built in the 1960s. The Russians, who signed a twenty-five-year lease of the base in 1979 and used it in the 1980s as their major naval and intelligence center in the southern Pacific, negotiated an early withdrawal and completed it on May 2, 2002.

Is it possible that Southeast Asia could again become the venue of a major American military presence? What can the current realities of the region—its capacities, its regional organization, and its individual
states—contribute to our understanding of the feasibility of American strategic options? These two questions are the focus of this paper.

My answers, in brief, are that first, for all of our new status as the world’s only superpower, our relationship to Southeast Asia is somewhat more balanced now than it was in 1965, and, just as importantly, the relationship of Southeast Asia to East Asia has increased vastly in importance. Secondly, the fact that Southeast Asia now has more substance and more diverse interests does not negate or validate any of the global strategic options, but it does create a specific window of feasibility in dealing with the region.

The changes in Southeast Asia can be illustrated by taking a closer look at the two cases just mentioned. Although Philippine President Gloria Arroyo is not in a strong position politically, she is far from being in the position of the Saigon government in the 1960s. Ironically, the domestic popularity of her collaboration with the United States is a sign of maturity and autonomy in the Philippine-American relationship. From the American supplanting of Spanish colonialism to the abandonment of Clark and Subic military bases after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991, resentment of U.S. presence was part of Philippine national identity. But 9/11 touched a deep chord of sympathy in the Philippines, and with the bases as well as colonialism a matter of history, Filipinos can now afford to be a bit pro-American. However, Arroyo is as critical as other Asian leaders are of the “axis of evil” rhetoric, and as concerned about U.S. unilateralism. Meanwhile, military collaboration is strictly limited to the current campaign against a hundred radicals supporting themselves (and occasionally their military pursuers) through kidnap ransoms, and U.S. involvement is partially explained by the presence of two Americans among the hostages. In the broader picture, Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia recently signed a draft accord for cooperation in combating terrorism and international crime.

The case of Cam Ranh Bay is more interesting. Admiral Blair was clearly shopping for naval real estate on his visit at the beginning of February 2002, although ostensibly not for a permanent naval base in Southeast Asia. After his departure, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry made the ambiguous statement on February 5 that “Cam Ranh is a port of Vietnam. Vietnam advocates utilizing and developing Cam Ranh port in a way to most effectively utilize its potential and advantages to serve the renovation cause.” Three days later, on February 8, the Foreign Ministry added, “Vietnam will not enter any treaty with other countries on the utilization of Cam Ranh for military purposes.” On February 20, it was suddenly announced that China’s President Jiang Zemin would visit Vietnam from February 27 to March 1, immediately after the conclusion of President Bush’s visit to China. His visit included Hue, Danang, and Hoi An in central Vietnam, though he did not make it as far south as Cam Ranh. Although Cam Ranh would not have been an appropriate topic for official communiqués, Jiang emphasized the importance of friendly relations between China and Vietnam and was enthusiastic about the exponential growth of trade in the past two years. It is a safe inference that China was gratified by Vietnam’s declaration concerning the use of Cam Ranh Bay. Further developments on the use of the facility are likely to be more significant as a footnote to Sino-Vietnamese relations than as a foothold for the U.S. Navy.

The details of these cases illustrate the magnitude of the contextual change in U.S.-Southeast Asian relations since Lyndon Johnson landed at Cam Ranh Bay in 1965 and exhorted the American troops there to “nail that coonskin to the wall.” Clearly U.S. interests and intentions have changed as well, and that is the general subject of this conference.

THE NEW REALITY OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

How our new intentions, whatever they are, can play out in Southeast Asia will be determined by the region’s new realities.

The Economic Transformation of the Southeast Asian Region

No one would mistake today’s Southeast Asia for the Southeast Asia of 1965, but it is important to consider the magnitude of changes in the past generation and their impact on the identity and momentum of the region. The region is far less vulnerable to American unilateral action than it was thirty-five years ago, and therefore it is in a stronger negotiating position vis-à-vis the United States.

As Figure 9.1 indicates, there have been significant changes in the mass of the Southeast Asian economies relative to the United States. In 1965 Southeast Asia’s combined economies were only 2.2 percent of the American economy, and we could add that there was virtually no intraregional trade and investment at this time. Even if we adjust for the greater purchasing power of money in Southeast Asia by using purchasing power parity (PPP) estimates, the region’s economy was only 5 percent of the U.S. economy. In 1999 (which, due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis, was not a vintage year for the regional economy) the region had risen to 7.5 percent of the U.S. economy in $US or almost one-fifth in terms of purchasing power parity. Although the U.S. economy is still much larger than the regional economy, this represents a share increase of 170 percent.

More strikingly, the economy of East Asia has gone from around one-third of the U.S. economy to two-thirds in dollar terms and the rough equivalent in terms of purchasing power parity. What is the relevance of East Asia? In 1965 the larger regional context of Southeast Asia was significant only because China was perceived as a threat and Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong were useful staging areas for U.S. efforts in Vietnam. At the
Figure 9.1 Percentage of U.S. Gross National Income, 1965–1999

*The data for this figure are calculated from World Bank, World Development Indicators 2001, Tables 1.1 and 1.4, and supplemented where necessary by individual country estimates as indicated in the notes to the following table. The 1965 data are calculated by iterative subtraction of the increase generated by the average annual growth rate for 1965–1999 (supplied by World Bank), and are adjusted for inflation. GNI is Gross National Income, the moral equivalent of Gross National Product (GNP).

present time, however, the economies of East Asia and Southeast Asia have become far more important to one another. The economies of both regions have a historical preference for the U.S. consumer, but intra-Asian trade and investment has expanded enormously. Roughly one-half of China's trade is with its Asian neighbors.

Table 9.1 Asian Economies as Percentage of U.S. 1965 and 1999

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<td>1.2</td>
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Source: The World Bank does not supply average annual increase data for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, so the regional average was used as an estimate. This probably underestimates the value of their economies in 1965, but, given wartime conditions, not by much. The figure for Myanmar is calculated from the CIA World Handbook data for 1999 GNP per capita, using the Laspeyres deflator for U.S. dollars, and then the World Bank's average annual increase estimates. The estimates presented here—cannot be precise at this level of aggregation and projection.

Table 9.1 provides more detail about the individual Southeast Asian economies. There are three general points to be made from these data. First, although the U.S. economy grew faster than the world average in this period in terms of GNI per capita,13 virtually every country in Southeast Asia has significantly improved its economic standing vis-à-vis the United States: The partial exceptions are the Philippines and Myanmar, both of which grew slightly faster than U.S. growth in the aggregate but more slowly in GNI per capita.14 The seventeen-point increase in the region's relationship is not the result of isolated cases, even though the rich have become richer faster. The second observation is that, despite the glamour of Singapore, economic mass in Southeast Asia correlates well with demographic mass. Despite the Asian financial crisis, Indonesia in 1999 was by far the largest Southeast Asian economy in terms of PPP and equal to Thailand in dollar terms. If we look at
the 1965 data, the Philippines was the largest economy in the region. Third, there is still considerable inequality in the region. While Singapore's per capita GNI is in the ballpark of Japan and Hong Kong, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar are one-twentieth of that of the United States even in terms of PPP. Vietnam and Indonesia are not much better off, and are now significantly behind China. But in 1965 everyone was a poor relative to the United States.

Table 9.2 gives a general picture of regional trends in trade over the past decade in comparison to the United States. It shows that while Southeast Asian and East Asian imports have grown, they have grown slightly less rapidly than U.S. imports. By contrast, U.S. export share has remained fairly static, while East Asia has increased somewhat and Southeast Asia's share of world exports has increased by 40 percent. If we compare the size of Southeast Asia's economy to its trading activity, it is about five times more active in importing than the United States and about ten times more active in exporting. If we consider the U.S. share of the region's trading activity, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore import more than the world average of 12.5 percent of their total imports from the United States, and Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand export more than the world average of 18.5 percent of their total exports to the United States. However, only the Philippines is unusually dependent on U.S. trade.

The trade and investment relationships within Southeast Asia and between Southeast Asia and East Asia are far too complex to be analyzed in detail here, but perhaps a sense of the transformation can be had by a look at the most problematic of the trade and investment relationships, that between China and Vietnam. In the sixties China gave $20 billion in goods and services to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), but there was little commercial trade. Economic contact died away in the mid-seventies, and was effectively at zero during the hostile decade of the eighties. Border trade began to develop in the nineties, and in the last three years trade with China has become quite important for Vietnam. Total trade between Vietnam and China in 2000 was more than twice Vietnam-U.S. trade.

If we back up to consider the big picture of Western Pacific economies, it is clear that in 1965 Japan was the only significant economy in the region. By 1999, although Japan's economy is still four times the size of China's if measured in dollars, it has become significantly smaller than China's in terms of domestic buying power. In any case both countries have become massive new realities to their Southeast Asian neighbors. Japanese investment and trade have contributed to the region's growth over the past two decades. China looms as the massive market relatively insulated from regional and world trends, as well as the rapidly growing giant next door.

Figure 9.2 illustrates the change in Asian military budgets relative to the United States over the middle 1990s. It is clear that in general Asia prefers rice to rifles, and that Southeast Asia in particular could earn the title of most pacific area in the Pacific region. If we subtract the United States from

<table>
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<th>Table 9.2 Asian Shares of World Trade</th>
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<td><strong>Imports</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>% of total imports by US</td>
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<td>% of total exports by US</td>
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<td>Southeast Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total imports by US</td>
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<td>% of total exports by US</td>
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<td>East Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total imports by US</td>
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<td>% of total exports by US</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Calculated from International Monetary Fund, Directions of Trade, reported March 6, 2002.
asserted that the states of Southeast Asia are far more secure against domestic turbulence than they were in the sixties. There are now militaries as well as economies in Southeast Asia.

**ASEAN AND ITS PURPOSES**

In 1967, it appeared that Southeast Asia could not be organized, either from the inside or from the outside. The United States had tried to organize the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in the 1950s as an Asian NATO, but it was a disappointment to its Southeast Asian members as well as to the United States. In 1961 the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) was organized with only three members, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand, but border disputes led quickly to its collapse. So the United States became involved in Vietnam with what might be called a “coalition of the willing” that included Thailand and the Philippines as well as Korea, Taiwan, and Australia.

The U.S. war in Vietnam demonstrated the vulnerability of the region to great power intrusion and was a major reason for the organization of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. As Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, one of ASEAN’s principal founders, put it, “The motivation for our efforts to band together was thus to strengthen and protect ourselves against Big Power rivalry.”

The autonomy of the region and of each country was threatened not only by communism but also by containment. Because ASEAN was founded explicitly as a nonmilitary regional association rather than as an alliance, its potential has been discounted by external observers. During the 1980s its most prominent function was as a regional entente against the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, in collaboration with the United States and China. Although some wondered if ASEAN could survive peace, it expanded into a true regional organization in the 1990s, admitting Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and finally Cambodia in 1999.

With its plethora of committees, dialog partners, associated organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and annual ministerial meetings, ASEAN has established itself as the major vector of both regional politics and the region’s relationship to the world. Since 1999, special cooperation between ASEAN and China, Japan, and Korea (known as “ASEAN + 3”) has been a major theme.

In its origins, interests, and structure, ASEAN is a risk-avoiding organization. It was formed to minimize the threat of conflict in the region, whether caused by internal unrest, regional conflict, or extraregional pressures. Since the individual governments in the region are more vulnerable on their own, their collective interest in stability is considerably strengthened by their regional organization. The regional organization cannot itself be a threat to the autonomy of its members because its practice of consensus allows any member to block a measure that it opposes. Meanwhile, ASEAN cannot
threaten extraregional countries because it is not a military alliance. Even in the case of Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, ASEAN acted as an isolating entente rather than as a military counterpart. Moreover the economic policies of ASEAN aim at greater fluidity within the region but not at the formation of a trading bloc.

ASEAN concern about Big Power involvement in the region has been expressed most clearly in two of its principal documents, the “Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration” of 1971 and the “Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone” of 1995. The ZOPFAN agreement was the first major ASEAN agreement after the founding Bangkok Declaration of 1967, and the 1995 treaty was the first truly regional agreement of Southeast Asian, having been signed by all ten regional prime ministers even before some of the countries had been admitted into ASEAN. Although these agreements do not have enforcement mechanisms, they express a long and strong collective concern about the involvement of Southeast Asia in large-scale conflict.

The global presence of the United States is important to ASEAN because it has been the underpinning of a global order that since 1980 has been favorable to regional growth and cooperation in Southeast Asia. Although China has improved its relations with ASEAN and with every country in the region since 1980, its rapid growth as an economy and as a regional presence makes the distant presence of the United States desirable. ASEAN abhors a vacuum. On the other hand, it does not view China as a threat in need of containment. Its posture toward the United States and China is “both/and” rather than “either/or.” It would view with alarm an attempt by either to require an exclusive relationship.

The difference that ASEAN makes in the region’s posture and capabilities regarding global strategies is that it amplifies common concerns about instability and common interests in regional cooperation. ASEAN is not likely to be quick to leap to the microphone and denounce threats, but it is available as a venue for expressing serious, sustained concerns.

Even if we grant the role of ASEAN as described above, to what extent is it valid to talk of “regions” in Southeast Asia? If we aggregate the data from sovereign states that must make their own decisions about war and peace, are we not committing a version of the methodological error of “ecological fallacy,” in which a characteristic of a whole is assumed to be true of its parts? And isn’t this even more a problem for East Asia, which includes such noncooperative and potentially conflicted actors as China, Taiwan, and Japan? To use the terminology and perspective made famous by Kenneth Waltz, there is no hierarchic regional order and, therefore, anarchy must prevail. Certainly his criteria that “none is entitled to command” fits ASEAN. If, for instance, the Philippines must make its own decisions of “fight or flight” with regards to every other country, what difference do regional aggregations make?

SOUTHEAST ASIA AND AMERICAN STRATEGIC OPTIONS

The best answer to this question would be a full empirical and theoretical exploration of “regionness” in Southeast Asia and in East Asia. Fortunately for all, such a task is beyond the scope of this paper. But simpler answers can be given that provide an adequate defense for regional considerations. The first is a minimalist answer, one that presupposes that states will not be constrained by regional structures. The second argues that regional precommitments and leadership are important.

First, at a minimum, regions indicate location, and location affects even the self-help calculus of states. If one’s immediate international environment changes from one of weak and anxious poverty to prosperity, then the proportionality will be affected between domestic and regional concerns, and regional and global concerns. All politics is localized, even international politics. The choices made by any Asian country in its relations with the United States will be informed by the transformation of the Asian environment described in this paper. Even if we consider the undeniable anarchy of East Asia, the calculus of both China and Japan in the relations of each with the United States is and will be affected by their common regional terrain.

Secondly, in reality, national self-help does not preclude international cooperation. The creation of ASEAN effectively addressed common security problems without creating a hierarchic authority. Sovereign decision making does not preclude enduring communities of interest, and location is the most natural condensation point for their institutionalization. Such localized communities of interest are fundamentally different from the balancing ploys recognized by structural realists. While they may occasionally have the function of balancing against powerful outsiders, their primary function is to create an orderly regional matrix of states. Hence ASEAN did not fall apart with the end of its entente against Vietnam in 1991, but rather expanded to include Indochina. Its urge toward regional completeness was sustained after its collective security concern was satisfied.

It is a dizzying leap from the daily realities of Southeast Asia to the visions, fears, and ambitions roiling within the beltway in Washington since the end of the cold war. Southeast Asia appears dull. It has fewer potential crises per capita than most regions, and no potential global opponents. Although terrorism and antiterrorism are supple enough to involve even states like Singapore in global concerns, homegrown terrorism such as Abu Sayyaf seem ridiculously local.

Nevertheless, Southeast Asia is hardly irrelevant to U.S. global posture. Even in 1965, the realities of the region were sufficient to frustrate the most sustained American intervention of the cold war era. This paper has argued
<table>
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<th>Unilateral</th>
<th>Episodic</th>
<th>Hierarchic</th>
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<td>Cooperative action</td>
<td>Collective security</td>
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**Figure 9.3 A Taxonomy of American Strategic Options**

that Southeast Asia today has been transformed in ways that make it an even more potent reality test of global ambitions. Its internal capacities relative to the United States are greatly strengthened, its relations to East Asia are much tighter and more cooperative, and it has developed a regional organization and identity.

It would be fatuous for me to fantasize about what sort of global America Southeast Asia would prefer. Southeast Asia contains a range of countries and individuals with different interests and opinions, and in any case the United States does not exist to please Southeast Asia. However, it is possible to speculate reasonably about the real-time, real-place constraints that the present realities of Southeast Asia present to U.S. strategic options. In other words, what sort of window of feasibility does the region present to U.S. global presence?

Before this question can be addressed a field of global strategic options must be sketched. For this I rely on Barry Posen and Andrew Ross’s seminal description of post-cold war strategic options. Not only can most later opinions be fit into this scheme, but I will argue that it has a tighter theoretical foundation than the authors realized. Since the first half of the book deals directly with these themes I will only sketch them briefly in Figure 9.3.

I divide the four options vertically by a preference for episodic or hierarchic action. Episodic strategies focus on the resolution of current crises, while hierarchic strategies focus on the maintenance of the existing world order. The horizontal divide distinguishes between strategies in which the strategic commitments are decided on the basis of a unilateral calculation of national interests or are in principle open to codetermination and collaboration. Like most tables of this sort, the four categories define a field of options rather than four dichotomous choices, but one should be able to place any option in this field and to discuss its component logics.

**Minimalism and Southeast Asia**

Although some supporters of minimalism are isolationists, it seems to me that the term “neo-isolationism” does not capture the logic of the position, nor does it well describe its most reasonable adherents. The basic notion is that the larger and more complex the situation the more likely it is for the exercise of power to distort and limit situational potential rather than to optimize it. To put it more poetically, if as Lao Zi said (and Ronald Reagan quoted), ruling a large country is like cooking a small fish, then being the world’s only superpower must require the talents of a sushi chef. The temptation to make things right should be disciplined by the likelihood of unintended consequences.

Since ASEAN’s regional strategy could be described as a sort of collective minimalism, the logic of the minimalist position is familiar and appealing. Southeast Asia has been more harmed by the United States doing too much rather than by its doing too little. On the other hand, minimalism is unilateral; if it does use force it would only be for purposes fitting within a narrow construction of national interests. This would be unsettling for Southeast Asia because it relies on a world order that it itself cannot sustain or enforce. A passive U.S. presence is therefore desireable, while a passive U.S. absence might have deep consequences for East Asia and therefore for Southeast Asia.

It should be recalled, however, that the current U.S. presence in Southeast Asia is more psychological than military. Just like a mature stranger fig no longer needs the tree it once entwined, Southeast Asia is too strong individually and too coordinated as a region to be in real danger from its neighbors. Southeast Asia is habituated to the current global context and does not want it disturbed, but its security might not truly require the vague and implicit global guarantee that it currently enjoys.

**Cooperative Action and Southeast Asia**

What Posen and Ross call “selective engagement” I have returned “cooperative action” because the defining characteristic of this category is that its strategy is pragmatically defined by current crises rather than by structural considerations. Another important part of the pragmatic orientation is the building of coalitions of states sharing the interests of the United States in managing or resolving the crisis and willing to collaborate in action. Clearly the best example of this approach is the Persian Gulf War.

The most basic concrete problem with cooperative action is the definition of the crisis. Even in the case of a problem such as terrorism, which everyone opposes, the scope of the crisis and the desirability of solutions will look different from different vantage points. Another problem that is separable from the first but often embedded in it is known as the “collective action problem,” namely, the logical tendency of actors to avoid bearing the costs of common projects.

Southeast Asia has raised collaborative indecision to a fine art. Avoiding confrontation is usually a higher priority than getting things done, which is not unreasonable, considering the region’s experiences with the unintended consequences of action. The structure of ASEAN, unlike that of NATO, would not lend itself to adaptation to military projects. Individual countries may well collaborate on projects, especially on an informal basis. But even in
these cases they would be concerned about the consequences for regional solidarity.

The exception that proves the rule was the involvement of ASEAN countries in the peacekeeping operations in East Timor (called Interfet) under the leadership of Australia in 1999. But it should be noted that this was at the invitation of Indonesia and that the United States was not directly involved. The ASEAN teams joined the Interfet project rather late, and clearly with an interest in helping Indonesia and countering Australian ambitions to be a regional policeman. An action that implied regional discord, or that implied confrontation with East Asia, would be far less likely to be supported.

Collective Security and Southeast Asia

Especially after 9/11 the argument for collective security would seem to be unassailable, and to some extent that is true. All Southeast Asian governments condemn the bombing of the World Trade Center and are supporting efforts to isolate and eliminate al-Qaeda. And in general ASEAN and its members are supportive of established orders at all levels—global, regional, and domestic.

However, perceptions of security and insecurity differ between Southeast Asia and the United States. The United States had a traumatic experience of insecurity and violation on 9/11. The rest of the world sympathized but saw it from the sidelines. The United States does not feel threatened by the pursuit in force of terrorists across international boundaries, the intimidation of states with hostile potential, or the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons, because no other country could do the same to the United States. By contrast, as we have seen, ASEAN came into existence because Southeast Asian governments felt that they were being marginalized in their own region by global forces. Southeast Asian governments have no interest in abetting terrorism, but they do have an interest in their prerogatives as sovereign nations. The “Asian values” debate of five years ago was less about specific differences between Asian and Western values than it was an assertion of the value and autonomy of Asia.

The escalation of the “war on terrorism” into a more general hostility to the “axis of evil” does not directly involve Southeast Asia, but it may lead to greater alienation and tension between the region and the United States. While no Southeast Asian state is on the target list, it is also true that no Southeast Asian state feels threatened by Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. As the United States moves more deeply into general hostility with Islamic states, hostile actions against Americans and against symbols of U.S. presence become more likely. The kidnap victims of Abu Sayyaf are an example, but the cooperation between the United States and the Philippines in this case might not be repeated in future instances. Abu Sayyaf was not protesting U.S. presence in Afghanistan or the invasion of Iraq. In the case of the latter, governments in the region are critical of U.S. actions, and therefore are less likely to wish to identify themselves with U.S. efforts to rout out local opposition. Particularly in the case of Indonesia, where several of the largest political parties are Islamic and there is a history of violent anti-American demonstrations, an American escalation that includes Iraq is likely to produce incidents that the government may not be able or eager to suppress. On the other hand, Indonesia has and will cooperate in controlling egregious acts of terrorism such as the nightclub bombing in Bali.

Another major issue of collective security where regional and American interests may differ is the defense of Taiwan. One might suppose that Chinese aggression toward Taiwan would be seen as threatening by the neighborhood of small nations to the south, but Southeast Asia generally accepts the claim that the China–Taiwan region is a sui generis situation not applicable to their own bilateral relations with China. All nations in the region recognize the People’s Republic of China, and they are acutely aware of the interplay between Taiwan’s provocative behavior and China’s response. Of course, a peaceful solution of the cross-Strait tension is preferred, but, depending on the circumstances of a future crisis, Southeast Asia is likely to view it as an internal matter for China rather than as international aggression.

A more immediate collective security problem for Southeast Asia is posed by conflicting sovereignty claims over the Spratly Islands. There are five and one-half claimants to the islands. China and Taiwan share the Chinese claim, and Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines also have overlapping claims. The islands themselves are insignificant as real estate, with a total of only five square kilometers of damped sand and no fresh water. They do not qualify as habitable according to the Law of the Sea, and thus do not carry rights of coastal waters. There has been speculation concerning oil and gas reserves, but they are unproven and their exploitation would require regional cooperation. The presence of a Chinese sovereign claim so deep in Southeast Asian waters and conflicting with most of the maritime states of Southeast Asia is disturbing to the region’s sense of security, and one of the most frequently cited reasons for desiring a continued U.S. presence in the region. But it should be emphasized that no country in the region is calling for the removal of China from the Spratlys or the formation of an anti-China bloc. The regional concern with the Spratlys is that the status quo be maintained or that development of the islands be cooperative. However, in November 2002 China and ASEAN formally committed themselves to peaceful resolution of conflicts in the South China Sea, and that agreement has apparently changed the tone of the relationship from competitive mini-crises to cooperation.

Finally, collective security is often imagined as a consortium of a group of powerful states deciding world affairs. For obvious reasons, such an approach is potentially more attractive to China and Japan than it would be to smaller states. The states suggested for inclusion differ, but they never
include the individual states of Southeast Asia, and the occasional nods to ASRAN as an organization might be difficult to operationalize given the consensual, nonmilitary nature of ASEAN. Therefore the region as a whole and its individual members are confronted with the disquieting prospect of existing without voice in a world order determined by an oligarchy of powerful states. Since Southeast Asia is accustomed to being marginal to global leadership this scheme does not pose new terrors, but clearly the interests of the region would lie in a more inclusive security organization, with the UN being the default structure.

**U.S. Primacy and Southeast Asia**

In some basic respects, U.S. primacy is not a problem for Southeast Asia. There is no global challenger in the region, nor even a regional challenger like Iraq that might present localized opposition. The current global order is very important to the region because it relies heavily on international economic openness and also faces more powerful East Asian states. So the United States as the guarantor of the present political economic order is appreciated.

However, the logic of primacy presented by many American supporters of a U.S. global imperium contains elements that would be very unsettling to Southeast Asia. First, it is formulated as a unilateral primacy. It is U.S. preponderance of power that establishes primacy, and the United States is thereby entitled to enjoy the privileges of its central global position. Every country pursues its own interest, and the United States is simply better positioned. Secondly, primacy is concerned about contenders, and the most likely contender is China. Both of these elements deserve discussion.

In contrast to the passive unilateralism of minimalism, the unilateralism of primacy seeks to maximize the utility of U.S. power for U.S. interests. Although primacy might create side benefits of world order for others, U.S. leadership, in this view, is not determined by collective interests and collaboration but rather by U.S. power. Primacy requires cooperation, but cooperation is based on compliance with American will.

By the same logic, of course, every other country should seek to maximize its own autonomy and to shield itself from U.S. domination. Although Southeast Asia is in no position to challenge the United States, in foreign affairs the "weapons of the weak" (a phrase that originated in the study of Southeast Asia) are not inconceivable. Public opinion in the region is likely to side with the small countries that are the targets of U.S. power. There are many dimensions of U.S. presence that depend on the general friendliness of host countries rather than on formal agreements—hospitality toward tourists, businessmen, and students, for example—and these could sour if most people and their governments saw the United States as a threat. It is hard to force someone else to smile. By drawing a line between its own interests and everyone else, the United States may isolate itself and dry up the sensitive capillaries of individual empathy and interaction. The United States would remain at the center of world affairs, but it would be in fact increasingly isolated from the periphery.

Besides the weapons of the weak, there is the problem of the limits of power. The main point of the first half of this paper is that the countries of Southeast Asia and the region as a whole are not as weak, disorganized, or isolated as they were in 1965. And it may be recalled that, contrary to the expectations of Lyndon Johnson and his advisors, direct U.S. intervention was a failure even then. While Southeast Asia does not have the strength or will to challenge the United States as a global power, its capacities are more than adequate to frustrate U.S. actions in the region if they are viewed as disruptive. If a preponderance of power equated simply to domination, then Vietnam would have lost first to the French, then to the United States, and finally to the Chinese.

The second problem with primacy is an indirect one for Southeast Asia, but it is nevertheless serious. If primacy is defined in terms of a preponderance of power, then any country automatically becomes a threat as it approaches parity with the current hegemon. China is often pictured as a contender, since its GNP is likely to reach parity with the United States in terms of aggregate purchasing power parity in 2015–2025. 11

Figure 9.4 projects the growth of the Chinese and Southeast Asian economies as a percentage of the American economy to 2030. Needless to say, such projections are not worthy of the name "predictions," they serve merely to illustrate the long-term significance of current trends. Nevertheless, they are useful because they demonstrate that China's GNP in tradiable, "real" dollars would reach only 27.1 percent of the United States by 2030, quite close to the projected Japanese GNP of 33.6 percent of U.S. GNP and double the size of the Southeast Asian economy. By these projections China would reach PPP parity with the United States in 2023. By 2030 China would be at 123 percent of U.S. domestic purchasing power, while Southeast Asia would be approaching half of U.S. purchasing power and considerably more than Japan's GNP PPP (at 26.4 percent of U.S.). Dollar GNP is probably more important for military capacity comparisons than purchasing power parity (PPP), because the cost of new weapons is more likely to be set by the price of international technology than it is by the local price of rice and vegetables. In dollar GNP terms China would be projected to reach parity with the United States in 2075. 12 Moreover, such projections are probably far too sanguine about continuing PPP growth because greater prosperity usually brings higher prices. However, PPP is quite important for estimating the economic mass of China and thus its gravitational pull as a regional market. Nevertheless, China will remain a poor country relative to today's developed world. From the per capita perspective, China in thirty years will still be at less than a quarter of the United States and about one-third of Japan.

Although it is at least arguable from the points just made that, as far as security is concerned, China will not be in a position of military parity with

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11. Figure 9.4 projects the growth of the Chinese and Southeast Asian economies as a percentage of the American economy to 2030.

12. Dollar GNP is probably more important for military capacity comparisons than purchasing power parity (PPP), because the cost of new weapons is more likely to be set by the price of international technology than it is by the local price of rice and vegetables. In dollar GNP terms China would be projected to reach parity with the United States in 2075.
To build further on the sands of the future, the regional political consequences of these economic projections for Southeast Asia can be formulated in terms of the locational and cooperative notions of regionalism discussed at the end of the first section of this chapter.

At a minimum, even if we assume that the region of Southeast Asia matters to its component states only as a location, the attitude of each state toward a confrontation between the United States and China will be quite different from 1965. To begin with, even if regional unity dissolved and various states bandwagoned with this or that contender, the regional consequences of such contending alliances would be much graver. Regardless of global military presence, the Philippines and Indonesia could do significant damage to one another. So the unpredictable consequences of regional dissonance would strengthen the case for a common stance.

If we assume a cooperative attitude toward security in Southeast Asia, it will be the quality of China's leadership as a regional power and the quality of American leadership as a global power that would determine regional affinities. At present, the region's notion of common security includes both the world order anchored by the United States and China's expanding presence in Asia. Both China and the United States have been threatening to Southeast Asia in the past; both have the capacity to be threatening in the future. A hegemonic China could alienate Southeast Asia, but so could a unilateralist United States. One could predict that the region would do all it could to avoid taking sides in an impending conflict because of the risk involved. But which side would be taken if push came to shove would not be a foregone conclusion. It would depend on the level of risk perceived by Southeast Asia at that time, which is a very different matter from the level of threat intended by the antagonists. It might also depend on who pushed.

In contrast, therefore, to the American primacy arguments that demand the containment or prevention of other countries achieving parity, Southeast Asia's concern about China is far more likely to be contingent on China's actual behavior, which since 1980 has been quite pacific. Unless China gives Southeast Asia cause for panic, the region as a whole and most of its members would probably be noncooperative with efforts that try to contain China simply because it was getting too big relative to the United States. After all, Southeast Asia has been living for a long time with a China larger than itself.

NOTES

1. My thanks to Dr. Paige Johnson Tan and to James Hentz for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

27. Eventually Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, and South Korea were involved in Interfet under the command of Australian Major-General Peter Cosgrove in an operation that lasted from September 29, 1999, to February 22, 2000.


30. This idea corresponds roughly to the notion of multipolarity put forward by Chinese experts in international relations in contrast to U.S. unipolarity as the sole superpower.


32. Assuming Japanese growth at 1 percent per year.

33. Much water flows under many bridges in seventy-five years. Imagine forecasting the current global situation in 1925.

34. This argument is made from a different perspective in Brantly Womack, "How Size Matters: The United States, China, and Asymmetry," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24 (2001).