

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

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1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE <p style="text-align: center;">2 Jun 00</p>	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED <p style="text-align: center;">Master's Thesis 6 Aug 99--2 Jun 00</p>
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>IS A U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA NECESSARY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?</b>		5. FUNDING NUMBERS
6. AUTHOR(S) MAJ Terry Siow, Singapore Armed Forces		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD 1 Reynolds Ave. Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027-1352		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/ MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING

20001115 088

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES	
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12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT  Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.	12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE  A
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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)  
 For many years, the U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia (SEA) has served as an important stabilizing factor in region and has allowed countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to sustain high economic growth, and develop social and political stability. With the loss of the Philippine bases in 1992, the only forward deployed U.S. forces in the Asia-Pacific region are located in Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Hawaii. At the same time, the U.S. military in SEA is maintained through the use of port facilities and a multitude of bilateral security relations, and military exercises with individual ASEAN states. In the twenty-first century, ASEAN will continue to be confronted by a number of security concerns. This study shows that the significant threats facing the region are an aggressive and assertive China, conflict in the South China Sea, and an unstable Indonesia. In view of these security concerns, the study argues that a U.S. military presence in SEA is still necessary in the twenty-first century. Maintaining such a presence will yield significant benefits to the U.S. and ASEAN. However, the continued presence of the U.S. military in SEA is expected to face greater challenges due to lower military resources and support, as the U.S. finds itself increasingly embroiled in conflicts worldwide. The study proposes three possible options in which a continued U.S. military presence in SEA can be maintained, namely, maintaining the status quo, an increased presence and a surrogate presence. On balance, maintaining a surrogate presence, by empowering a suitable country within ASEAN, presents the best option for the U.S. and ASEAN.

14. SUBJECT TERMS Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Southeast Asia, security relations and concerns, China, Indonesia, US military presence	15. NUMBER OF PAGES <p style="text-align: center;">116</p>
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT <p style="text-align: center;">UNCLASSIFIED</p>	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <p style="text-align: center;">UNCLASSIFIED</p>	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT <p style="text-align: center;">UNCLASSIFIED</p>	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <p style="text-align: center;">UL</p>
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**IS A U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA  
NECESSARY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?**

**A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree**

**MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Strategy**

**by**

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BEng (Hons), University of Manchester (UK), 1993**

**Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
2000**

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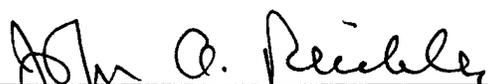
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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

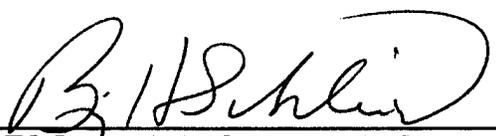
Name of Candidate: MAJ Terry M. M. Siow

Thesis Title: Is a U.S. Military Presence in Southeast Asia Necessary in the Twenty-first Century?

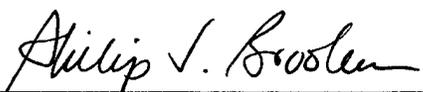
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any government agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

**IS A U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA NECESSARY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?** by MAJ Terry Siow, Singapore Armed Forces, 111 pages.

For many years, the U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia (SEA) has served as an important stabilizing factor in region and has allow countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to sustain high economic growth, and develop social and political stability. With the loss of the Philippine bases in 1992, the only forward deployed U.S. forces in the Asia-Pacific region are located in Japan, the Republic of Korea and Hawaii. At the same time, the U.S. military in SEA is maintained through the use of port facilities and a multitude of bilateral security relations, and military exercises with individual ASEAN states.

In the twenty-first century, ASEAN will continue to be confronted by a number of security concerns. This study shows that the significant threats facing the region are an aggressive and assertive China, conflict in the South China Sea, and an unstable Indonesia. In view of these security concerns, the study argues that a U.S. military presence in SEA is still necessary in the twenty-first century. Maintaining such a presence will yield significant benefits to the U.S. and ASEAN.

However, the continued presence of the U.S. military in SEA is expected to face greater challenges due to lower military resources and support, as the U.S. finds itself increasingly embroiled in conflicts worldwide. The study proposes three possible options in which a continued U.S. military presence in SEA can be maintained, namely, maintaining the status quo, an increased presence and a surrogate presence. On balance, maintaining a surrogate presence, by empowering a suitable country within ASEAN, presents the best option for the U.S. and ASEAN.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis could not have been completed without the invaluable advice and guidance from the members of my thesis committee comprising Mr. John Reichley, Mr. Geoff Babb, and LTC Benjamin Schleider. I am also grateful to the Combined Arms Research Library staffs who have been most helpful in obtaining the many research materials that were needed for the thesis, and to the staffs of the Graduate Degree Programs Office for assisting in the formatting of the thesis.

My heartfelt thanks and love goes to my fiancée Stephanie Heng for her encouragement and moral support throughout the course of my research work. Last but not least, I am grateful to God, for His rich blessings, guidance, and grace in making all these possible.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview of Association of Southeast Asian Nations

The term *Southeast Asia* (SEA) is of recent origin. The first conceptualization of the region as an entity came about during World War II, when the territories south of the Tropic of Cancer were placed under British Lord Louis Mountbatten's SEA command.<sup>1</sup> Much of the region was under the colonial rule of the British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese with the exception of independent Thailand and the Philippines which were under U.S.' rule. Most scholars currently use the term SEA to include the geographical areas bounded by the states of Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. However, no formal regional organization within the region existed until the late 1960s.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was born out of conflicts: Indonesia's *konfrontasi* with Malaysia and Singapore; the Philippines' dispute with Malaysia over Sabah; and Singapore's separation from Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> When ASEAN was founded on 8 August 1967, with the Bangkok Declaration, the founding members included Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The original purpose of ASEAN as stated in the declaration was "to foster regional economic, social, and cultural cooperation and to promote regional peace and stability."<sup>3</sup> It is understandable that the founding members chose economic cooperation as the main focus of ASEAN in consonance with the preoccupation of nation building for the member states after gaining their respective independence from their colonial masters.

Since 1967, ASEAN has gradually expanded to a ten-country organization with the inclusion of Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997), Myanmar (1997), and

Cambodia (1999). This by itself is a great achievement as it was less than two decades ago when war still raged in Indochina (comprise of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar), with the ever-looming threat of engulfing the rest of SEA. After almost a century since the first conceptualization of the region as an entity, the first glimpse of regional unity in SEA is seen in the form of an organization under ASEAN.

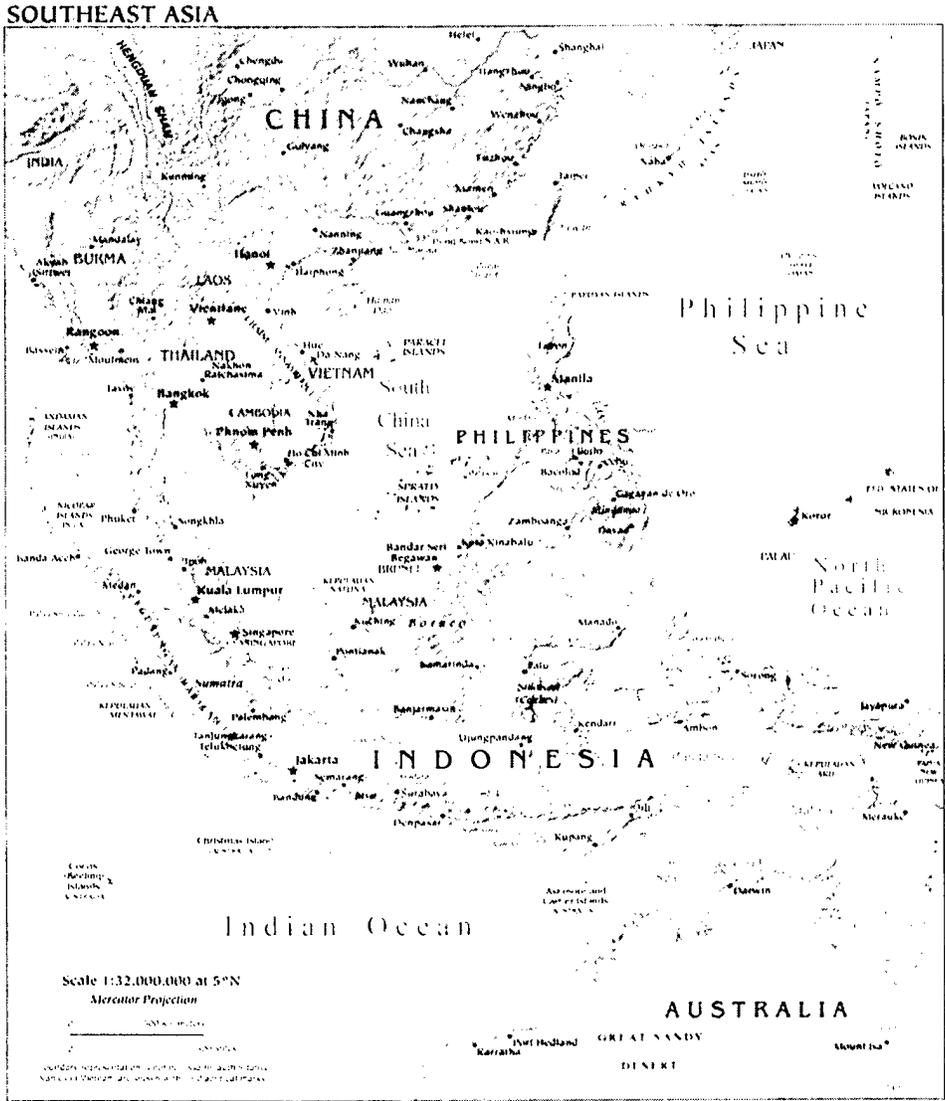


Figure 1: Map of SEA (extracted from CIA website)

### Importance of the Southeast Asia Region

In an age when sea lines of communication (SLOCs) formed the primary means of international trade, the Southeast Asian countries found favor in the eyes of their former colonial masters. The countries of ASEAN straddle the vital SLOCs between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean which serve the trading activities among Northeast Asia, the East Indies, and the Middle East. Collectively, they control the three main sea passage lines: Malacca Straits, one of the three busiest straits in the world; and the Lombok and Sunda Straits. Whoever controls the region controls trade between East and West.

In the present context, the importance of the region brought about by its strategic location remains unchanged. Of significance is the conduct of the oil trade. Petroleum from the Middle East has to transit the region to reach Northeast Asia, most noticeably Japan, and to the U.S. instead of via Europe. There is no doubt that the control and influence over this region will allow major world powers to exercise freedom of action to further their political, economic, and military gains, whatever they may be, as seen from the earlier days of the colonial powers.

The focus on trade in the early days of ASEAN allowed the countries rapid economic growth. In fact, ASEAN has been dubbed the most successful example of a regional organization in the Third World.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding the recent financial and economic crisis that spread along the Asia-Pacific rim like a contagious disease,<sup>5</sup> the importance of ASEAN to the overall Asian economy as a whole should not be understated as the situation is only temporary. Prior to the crisis, the ASEAN states averaged 6 percent annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth. The U.S.-ASEAN trade has grown at double-digit rates. From 1988 to 1993, American exports to ASEAN rose 120 percent. In fact, ASEAN represents the U.S.' third largest market, behind the

European Union and Japan. This trend suggests a continued expansion of U.S.-ASEAN links in the future. These economies will continue to serve as significant emerging markets for U.S. companies, as well as those of other developed countries, well into the twenty-first century.<sup>6</sup> With the twenty-first century widely termed as the century of the Pacific, the importance of ASEAN in world affairs will become increasingly more significant.

#### Broad Security Outlook for SEA

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the SEA region has been an essentially benign regional security environment. While outright conflict does not exist among the ASEAN states, there are still elements of uncertainty and potential external insecurity in SEA in the post-Cold War era.<sup>7</sup> Iraq's invasion of Kuwait illustrated the general principle that unrestrained middle powers can wreak regional havoc and threaten the security and integrity of smaller and more prosperous states. Apprehension that the withdrawal of U.S. military presence from the region would create the perception of a vacuum that other, and perhaps less acceptable, powers (Japan, China, and, to a certain extent, India and Indonesia) might feel compelled to fill.

China's influence in maritime SEA is based on its claims to the Spratly Islands and, therefore, much of the South China Sea. The conflict in the Spratly Islands involves six nations: China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Vietnam. Each country has at least a partial claim to the islands. The chance of instability is further reinforced by the potential of a blue water naval capability by China. The longstanding dispute between China and Taiwan has in recent times led to tensions across the straits. While this is essentially an internal affair as viewed by China, its potential adverse economic repercussions will be felt throughout SEA.

The persistence of disagreements among the ASEAN states relating to undefined maritime and land boundaries, fishery disputes, the Philippines' long-standing claim to Sabah, economic disparity among members of ASEAN, and residual ethnic suspicions about the Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia are potential factors for regional conflicts. More recently, the political unrest in the Indonesian archipelago since the demise of the Suharto rule has potentially destabilizing effects on the region. The danger of more conflicts erupting due to the upsurge of separatist movements by different ethnic groups, as in the case of East Timor, is a worrying factor for members of ASEAN.

#### Major Powers' Interests in the Region

The strategic location of the region, coupled with its rapid economic growth in the last ten years, has necessarily attracted the attention of major powers, namely the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, and India. It is unlikely that one party will assert predominant control over the region; rather, each will play an active role in shaping the affairs in areas ranging from economic to military to political. The degree of influence will be dependent on the interplay of bilateral relationships between ASEAN as an entity and each of the above major powers.

While U.S. interests in Asia will continue to center on Northeast Asia, the continued engagement in SEA cannot be overlooked. The latter covers a wide spectrum ranging from economic to military to diplomatic. SEA offers the U.S. freedom of passage through the region for its exports and military forces to the Middle East. The region holds the gateway in allowing the projection of forces between its two major theaters of concern of the Middle East and Northeast Asia via the sea route. Since the end of the Vietnam War, there has not been much domestic support for American involvement in

SEA. The withdrawal of U.S. military bases from the Philippines bore further testimony to the reduced military presence in the region. But there are critical strategic interests that would prevent a complete withdrawal, primarily the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca.<sup>8</sup> From an economic standpoint, SEA is a growing and attractive market for U.S. investments and products, which the U.S. will not ignore.

Historically, the presence of China's influence in SEA dates to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. More significantly, the famous Chinese Muslim eunuch, Admiral Cheng Ho, established trade in the South Seas in the fifteen century during the Ming Dynasty. In recent years, relations between China and ASEAN have improved tremendously since the end of the threat of communism to the ASEAN states. As China finds its way on the world stage as an emerging superpower, the triangular relationship with Japan and the U.S. will be the most important in the medium term. However, relations with the ASEAN states in the next few years are also important, not least because they are neighbors and can influence the outcome of China's relations with the other great powers.<sup>9</sup> For ASEAN, a good relationship with China is vital from the economic standpoint as well as finding the new balance of power in establishing a regional order that is supported by the great powers. An important test of ASEAN-China ties is Beijing's response to the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea and its role in the resolution of the Spratly dispute.

Japan's interests and role in SEA will largely be economic. A stable and friendly ASEAN will continue to benefit from a growing market for Japanese investments and goods. As 75 percent of Japan's energy consumed passes through SEA, any instability in the region will severely affect her access to energy resources. In the security arena, it is unlikely that Japan will play an active role, militarily or politically, in the medium term. This stems primarily from the scars Japan made on many of the SEA nations during World War II. Japan will continue to lean toward the U.S. in establishing strong security

relationships. Some have argued that a U.S. presence in Japan inhibits its remilitarization, which is welcomed by many people in Asia. For those who are wary of the rise of China's power in the region, a close U.S.-Japan alliance will serve to balance the influence of China.

Despite the current domestic political and economic problems in Russia, its influence over the SEA region cannot be discarded completely. It still possesses a formidable military force that can exert its influence in the Western Pacific if it wishes to. In the near future, it suffices to say that Russia's emphasis on strategic outlook will be skewed strongly toward Europe. However, with half its continent being part of Asia geographically, and with the economic potential of SEA, it will in some point in time play a greater role in the region. An important factor to bear in mind is the sales of Russian arms to the Southeast Asian countries. If left unchecked, this may have the potential of turning into an arms race, which will have a destabilizing effect on the region.

Like China, India is a country on the rise both economically and militarily. Its sheer size and proximity to SEA mean that any discussion of regional security would not be complete without its consideration. In fact, India controls the western exit of the vital sea lanes out of SEA. Indian's strategic concern over the region is largely fueled by the realization of the growing closer relationship between ASEAN states and China, a long-time rival of India. The recent move by China to build a naval base in Myanmar (Burma) is viewed as a threat to India. It is expected that India would seek to improve her relationships with the ASEAN states to counterbalance the increasing influence of China. Apart from the above strategic concerns, India's interest in SEA is also motivated by economic rationale, and trade is a significant element in India's promotion of a closer relationship with the ASEAN states.

Another country that would have a vital interest in the region is Australia, even though it cannot be considered a major power in the same league as the above countries. Geographically and historically, many would argue that it is part of Asia. The important role that Australia played in the defense of British Malaya in World War II shows that its active involvement in the region may be sufficient ground to grant its legitimacy to be called "Asian." The economic potential to be reaped from ASEAN would certainly attract greater interest from Australia. Politically, the high profile leadership role that the Australian Defense Force (ADF) took in the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) is testimony to the country's desire to assume a more influential role in the affairs of ASEAN states, despite some reservation among members of ASEAN.<sup>10</sup>

#### U.S. Military Presence in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Direct U.S. military involvement in SEA dates from 1898 with the annexation of the Philippines from Spain at the end of the Spanish-American War.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. became the rising new power in the Far East, with great consequences for itself and the Pacific region.<sup>12</sup> After the independence of the Philippines in 1946, the U.S. military continued to maintain forward deployed forces in the region at naval and air bases in the Philippines. With the loss of the Philippine bases in 1992, U.S. permanent military facilities in the region are located entirely in Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK).<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, a diverse range of access arrangements for logistics support in several ASEAN states, most notably Singapore, has offered the U.S. military valuable stopping points between Guam in the Western Pacific and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. On 13 November 1990, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew signed an accord with Vice President Dan Quayle to allow American air and naval forces to routinely pass through Singapore and formalized access to facilities in Singapore.<sup>14</sup> While this

agreement sparked some criticism within ASEAN, there has been an increased acceptance as the positive effects of a U.S. military access in the region in terms of bringing about greater stability and security.

Virtually all Southeast Asian states favor an American presence, regardless of the differences among them over bilateral relations with the U.S. The U.S. is and has been viewed as a more desirable alternative to unilateral Japanese or Chinese naval deployments in the region. The U.S. is also perceived as the only power that can balance a growing Chinese blue water capability, particularly given China's claims in the South China Sea.<sup>15</sup>

However, the region's hopes that the U.S. will be willing to serve as a regional security guardian beg the question whether it is in Washington's interest to become involved militarily in regional conflicts in the future. The question can be examined in part by first looking from the perspective of the benefits of maintaining a peaceful environment to U.S. interests. Secondly, the question can be examined by looking at how a U.S. military presence would, in turn, serve to maintain the desired balance of power in the region.

The U.S. will continue to see SEA as a back door to the Persian Gulf. The U.S. Navy (USN) and U.S. Air Force (USAF) units regularly transit this strategic region en route to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea from their bases in Japan and the continental U.S. (CONUS).<sup>16</sup> This route provides a vital alternative to the traditional LOCs via Europe for the projection of a U.S. military influence in the above regions. The freedom of transit through the maritime straits of Indonesia and Malaysia is central to the U.S.' strategic interests in SEA.<sup>17</sup>

The preservation of security in the region is also a great economic interest of the U.S. The economic relationship between the U.S. and ASEAN has grown dramatically

over the years. Besides the traditional supplies of such key commodities as natural rubber, tin, copper, and petroleum, the ASEAN states have emerged as the location for new and important processing, manufacturing, and service industries. From 1988-1993, American exports to ASEAN rose 120 percent and ASEAN represents the U.S.' third-largest market, behind the European Union and Japan.<sup>18</sup> In addition, ASEAN has emerged as an important player in the Asian economy as a whole and specifically to key U.S.' Asian allies, Japan and South Korea.<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, ASEAN states see the U.S. as a benign guarantor against the buildup of the military capability of Japan and China. While some may question the U.S.' resolve to get directly involved in defending ASEAN members' territorial claims in the South China Sea against, for example, Chinese aggression, the presence of the U.S. military in peacetime undoubtedly serves as an indispensable stabilizing factor in the region. As the ASEAN states continue their military expansion and force modernization programs, the U.S. will be regarded as an important source of assistance through foreign military sales, training, joint exercises, and other means to assist in the development of their military capabilities. Economically, the ever-increasing level of investment by American companies has helped to fuel much of the rapid growth in the economies of ASEAN states.

In the twenty-first century, SEA will be a fundamentally different region from the Cold War battleground of the latter half of the twentieth century. While several factors that have influenced a U.S. military presence in ASEAN will remain unchanged, it remains to be seen how a presence in the region will evolve. How willing would the U.S. be to "get its hands dirty" by being militarily involved in a conflict in the region? If the U.S. recent low-level involvement in East Timor<sup>20</sup> is an indication of that readiness, the

above question will certainly be most pertinent for concerned academics and decision makers to ponder as the twenty-first century closes in.

### Research Objectives

The focus of this study is to examine the U.S. military presence in the ASEAN region in the twenty-first century. To do this, the following list of secondary questions will be examined:

1. What are the major shifts in security environment and concerns in ASEAN since the post-Cold War period?
2. Which major powers would have an interest and influence in the region?
3. What are the benefits and limitations of a U.S. military presence for both the U.S. and ASEAN?
4. What are the possible alternatives and variations in model for a U.S. military presence in ASEAN?

### Assumptions

This research effort will be predicated on the following key assumptions:

1. The study of the security situation in the twenty-first century is dependent on the continued existence of ASEAN in its current form.
2. There will be no catastrophic collapse in the world or regional economy that will precipitate regional insecurity and major social unrest in the countries concerned.
3. There will not be a breakup of Indonesia in the post-Suharto era although the possibility of separatist movements in isolated areas, such as Ambon and Aceh, may occur.
4. The U.S. will remain engaged in Asia with a strong military presence.

### Definitions of Terms

For this study, the following definition of terms will be adhered to:

The term China, will refer to the People's Republic of China, (i.e. mainland China), and Taiwan as the Republic of China.

Security, refers to the absence of both a real and perceived threat.

Threat, refers to any action or intent that would challenge the existing benign and peaceful condition.

U.S. military presence in ASEAN can range from the establishment of a logistics element in the region for the support of U.S. military operations in and from the region, to the presence of military bases.

The short-term, is defined as the time frame of five years or less. The medium-term refers to the time frame of six to ten years. And the long-term refers to the time frame of longer than ten years.

### Limitations

The study will draw insights from current sources of information. While there are a considerable number of books and monographs that have hitherto been devoted to the study of this subject, both directly and indirectly, the latest source available to the author at the time of research would be from open article analysis and the "Singapore Straits Times."

As the countries of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar have recently joined ASEAN, much of the analyses found in written literature was written without the knowledge of the impacts of the above countries' inclusion in ASEAN. As such, the author would need to draw his own conclusions should such an analysis be required.

Two main current events in the region are still in a state of flux at the time of research: the rekindling of China-Taiwan tension in relationship and the future leadership of the Republic of Indonesia.

#### Delimitations

To facilitate the research process, the scope of the study will be confined to the study of events that occurred up to 31 December 1999, since the creation of ASEAN in 1967.

ASEAN comprises ten countries of very diverse circumstances and each faces unique challenges in its own right in the areas of internal security and national cohesion. In particular, the newly recruited members of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar have had a more turbulent road toward nation building in recent years compared to the other members of ASEAN. The study will restrict its analysis to security issues that are externally felt or perceived, with the exception of Indonesia, as explained earlier, from the perspective of individual nation-state as well as ASEAN as a single entity.

#### Significance of the Study

In the post-Cold War period, while there has been a significant decline in the number of major wars (the Persian Gulf War being the only war engaged since the 1970s), the same cannot be said of armed conflicts, which the U.S. committed to militarily in most of them. In recent years, the U.S. has largely been seen as playing the role of a "global policeman" often under the mandate of the United Nations. This perception will likely continue to exist in the twenty-first century with the U.S. being the only superpower. How would this impact the way the U.S. accords her relative emphasis, in terms of military investment and involvement, to the SEA region vis-à-vis

other traditionally more important regions? This question is even more critical against the backdrop of the downsizing and shrinking resources of the U.S. military which threatens to reduce the presence of overseas military forces still further. A critical analysis on the future military role that the U.S. could play is important in helping the U.S. government reshape her military options in fulfilling her national interests.

For the ASEAN nations, the issue of U.S. continued military presence is important after more than thirty years in existence. It is necessary to critically examine how the U.S. security umbrella will shift in the light of the changing environment confronting ASEAN. What are the alternatives to the traditional "comfort zone" provided by the U.S.?

## Endnotes

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8. Robert H. Scales Jr. and Larry M. Wortzel, "The Future U.S. Military Presence in Asia: Landpower and the Geostrategy of American Commitment," *U. S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute* (6 Apr 1999): 10.
9. Jusuf Wanandi, "ASEAN's China Strategy: Towards Deeper Engagement," *Survival* 38, no. 3 (autumn 1996): 117.
10. Following the Australian leadership in commanding the UN peacekeeping forces in East Timor, there was criticism in quarters of the ASEAN community over Australian's perceived aggressive foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region. A Malaysian opposition leader was cited as saying "The burial of the Howard Doctrine of Australia as the deputy sheriff in Asia to the U.S. as global policeman should be a lesson to the Australian government that it has not yet developed the mind-set to be accepted as an Asian nation." Extracted from the article "Australia softens tone of assertive Asia policy," *The Straits Times Interactive* (29 Sep 1999).
11. Larry H. Addington, *The Pattern of War since the Eighteenth Century*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 117.
12. *Ibid.*, 126.
13. Sheldon W. Simon, "U.S. Strategy and Southeast Asian Security: Issues of Compatibility," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 14, no. 4 (March 1993): 303.

14. Robert C. McAdams, David S. Hyres and Carey E. Mathews, "Strategic Partnership: The Case for Singapore," *The DISCOM Journal* (spring 1999): 3.

15. Sheldon W. Simon, 305.

16. Perry Woods, 123.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 122.

19. Ibid., 126.

20. Out of the 7,500 troops deployed, the U.S. sent about 200 military personnel, half of whom served on the ground in East Timor, and supported from Pacific Fleet. The US also transported troops from other nations and help with logistics, communications and intelligence.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Since the formation of ASEAN in 1965, several works have been written to analyze its security developments. Over the span of more than thirty years, several factors have caused major reassessments of the situation. The significant ones include the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military withdrawal from the Philippines in 1991, the rise of China's influence in the region, and the realization of the ten-member ASEAN. A review of existing literature on the U.S. military presence in the region invariably takes the reader through the stages of development and highlights the key trends of the evolution. However, with the joining of Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia as a recent event, very few works, if any, have taken into consideration the impacts of these new members on ASEAN and the prospect of U.S. military presence in ASEAN. Existing literature on the subject can be divided into four main areas for the purposes of this analysis: general works on ASEAN, main security concerns, major powers' interest in the region, and the U.S. military presence in the SEA region, to include alternatives to a U.S. military presence. The following section reviews the works published according to the themes highlighted above and identifies the gaps that the thesis fills on the subject of the U.S. military presence in ASEAN in the twenty-first century.

#### ASEAN

Before one can begin to look into the security issues facing ASEAN, it is important to first understand the essence of ASEAN--the circumstance of its formation,

the guiding principles of the organization, and an analysis of its successes and shortcomings thus far. Ronald D. Palmer and Thomas J. Reckford, in *Building ASEAN-- 20 years of Southeast Asian Cooperation*, provided a useful background on the circumstances under which ASEAN came into being. The book also traced the main issues ASEAN had to address during the course of its existence from 1967, its year of formation, to 1986. It also looked critically at the successes of the organization in achieving its objectives and its shortcomings. In the concluding portion of the book, the authors opined that ASEAN has indeed "come a long way from its shaky beginnings in 1967."<sup>1</sup> Despite the impressive economic growth it had achieved within the nineteen-year window, the success was "due largely to the achievements of the individual nations, rather than to ASEAN as an institution."<sup>2</sup> The authors asserted that the possibility of ASEAN becoming a fully integrated association, much like the European Community (EC), is difficult and most unlikely in the near future. In terms of U.S. involvement in the region, the book said that the economic growth was largely attributed to U.S. investment, with Japanese and other investment. There is prospect for greater U.S. attention in the region. While containing a good historical account on the growth of ASEAN, the author did not examine the possible impact of the Indochina countries joining ASEAN, which has now become a reality.

Looking ahead into the next millennium, Chin Kin Wah, in *ASEAN in the New Millennium* (1997), highlighted some of the pressures of change confronting ASEAN. Economic concerns will continue to be high on the ASEAN agenda, given that economic growth and development are equally crucial defining elements in a state's security calculus. The big challenge, however, is the reconciliation of the varying degree of economic development that may create pressure on the more mature economies to assist in the development of the slower trackers to avoid "a new SEA divide between rich

ASEAN and the poor Southeast Asian nations.”<sup>3</sup> In terms of its external relations, greater engagement with China will be the case, with three new members (Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam) sharing land borders with China and greater economic interdependence between China and ASEAN. The evolution of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) process has gone beyond its traditional Southeast Asian strategic horizon to include more of the Northeast Asian strategic concerns. As ASEAN widens its arena of engagement externally, it will come under increasing pressure to address and improve its human rights records. The author fell short of providing an assessment on how the larger ASEAN would affect the influence of external power in the region.

Robert A. Scalapino<sup>4</sup> (1999) did provide an upbeat assessment for the new ASEAN in the twenty-first century. He saw the recent trend toward making ASEAN an organization encompassing the entire region as encouraging. Despite the current financial crisis and greater diversity of its members, he opined that the capacity of the Southeast Asian nations to communicate regularly with each other and to present a collective front in bargaining with the major states, especially China, would be an asset to ASEAN. However, he failed to highlight the fact that even with this unwavering unity within ASEAN, it would still lack the ability to stand on its own against external powers, particularly in the area of regional security.

#### Major Security Concerns

Earlier assessment of the security concerns tended to focus on the interference of external powers (i.e., U.S., China, and Soviet Union), with the conflicts in Indochina taking center stage. Since the end of the Vietnam War and the demise of the Soviet Union, there has been a reassessment of the security environment.

*ASEAN into the 1990s* (1990) by Alison Broinowski (ed.), was a compilation of essays that explored the challenges, both security and economic, facing ASEAN in the 1990s. The agenda for ASEAN then “has Indochina near the top, but also the problems of how to cope with the economic prowess of Japan, the growing military strength of China, and moves for Pacific regionalism.”<sup>5</sup> Even though the assessment of the author written in 1990 was already outdated, it does provide good insights on the evolution of threat in SEA from the early days of the Vietnam War period.

Sheldon W. Simon, in *The Future of Asian-Pacific Security Collaboration* (1988), discussed the impact of major powers on the security of SEA--namely the U.S., Russia, Japan, and Australia. Specific references were also drawn on ASEAN. The author argued that increased military cooperation among Japan, Australia, the ASEAN states, and the U.S. would develop. If there is to be a potential source of conflict in the region, the dispute over the South China Sea is it. In his most recent work, *The Economic Crisis and ASEAN States' Security* (1998), Simon looked at the impact the economic crisis, which started in 1997, has had on the security of ASEAN. The direct impact is a “precipitous drop in Southeast Asian weapons acquisitions highlighting the fact that military modernization has been driven less by threats than by the availability of new-found wealth and the desire for national prestige.”<sup>6</sup> The country hit hardest by the crisis, Indonesia, witnessed the worst social unrest since the rise of former President Suharto. The armed forces were forced to return to internal security as the major focus, while Malaysia contended with the problems of combating illegal economic migrants. He argued that the security issue in SEA remains predominantly internal but failed to highlight the imminent danger to regional security of a possible disintegration of Indonesia that could be precipitated by the impact of the economic crisis on Indonesia.

Tim Huxley, in *Insecurity in the ASEAN Region* (1993), stated that since the end of the 1980s the external security preoccupation of the ASEAN regimes has shifted (from the Vietnamese role in Cambodia and the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance) to “China’s growing power and international assertiveness in the region (especially in relation to the South China Sea).”<sup>7</sup> The possible emergence of a “China threat” was further emphasized by Zara Dian (1994)<sup>8</sup> and Dana Dillion (1997),<sup>9</sup> while Seldom Simon (1997)<sup>10</sup> argued that China would not be able to pose a serious threat to SEA security within the next ten to fifteen years due to its lack of power projection capabilities. The claims asserted by the above authors support the threat analysis put forth in chapter 4 of the thesis.

Clearly, the next millennium will see China posing a stronger security concern to ASEAN, particularly in the way it approaches the South China Sea issue. While a brief review of existing literature highlighted the changes in security concerns for the SEA region in the future, an obvious gap is the security assessment of the impact of an unstable Indonesia which is by far the largest and most populous nation in ASEAN (and fourth in the world). The current situation in Indonesia still warrants some serious cause for concerns not just within ASEAN but also for external parties who may have a vital interest in the stability of the region.

#### Major Powers Influence in Southeast Asia

The influence of major powers in the SEA region has always been present ever since the genesis of ASEAN in 1967. The major powers cited in existing literature are the U.S., China, the former Soviet Union, Japan, and India. The reasons cover a broad spectrum from military to economic to political. Australia has also been included in the literature review for the purpose of this research.

Tim Huxley, again in *Insecurity in the ASEAN Region* (1993), provided a good analysis on the roles of major powers (the U.S., China, the former Soviet Union, Japan, and India) in the security of ASEAN which has undergone fundamental changes since the late 1980s. Overall, he analyzed that with the exception of the U.S. military presence in the region, China, the former Soviet Union, Japan, and India have been viewed with apprehension and unfavorable concerns by the ASEAN states.

Huxley opined that the pursuit of close economic and political relations with ASEAN would undoubtedly restrain China from using force to assert its claims in the Spratly Islands. However, that does not stop China from the use of its military power and influence, even without resorting to the use of force, to intimate ASEAN members into making economic concessions. It is clear that the reduction of Moscow's military presence in the region has removed much anxiety in the ASEAN region concerning a putative Russian threat to sea lane security. However, its naval and air presence still pose an opposing force to China's domination of the South China Sea. In terms of Japan, Huxley alluded to the fact that there is apprehension in the ASEAN countries concerning the prospect of an expanded Japanese military role. This is worsened by the recent and potential reduction in the U.S. military role in East Asia. It was claimed that India's growth in naval power would be more likely to impinge on the region as a result of naval competition with China. Huxley argued that the initial concerns over the Indian threat have been overshadowed by that of China.

There have also been differing views among ASEAN members on the desirability of external powers' influence in the region. Sheldon Simon in *Alternative Visions of Security in the Asia Pacific* (1996) alluded to the fact the SEA countries do not have a consensus view on the way that external powers can play in the security of the region. Countries like Thailand and Singapore have favored a more inclusive approach in

engaging external powers, while Malaysia and Indonesia preferred not to have a strong influence of external powers in the region. However, the author did not go into the specifics in examining the relations between each member of ASEAN and the various major powers.

In the 1999 Pacific Symposium, titled "*U.S. Engagement Policy in a Changing Asia: A Time for Reassessment?*" (1999), S.R. Nathan highlighted that the countries of SEA still require the presence of larger powers in the region in the face of strategic uncertainty in the region, coupled with the presence of long-standing causes of concern, including outstanding bilateral territorial disputes, and that between some of the states and China over the Spratly Islands. As a result of the above, the countries of SEA "being small and medium size states would lack the strategy autonomy of larger powers" or the "commensurate strength to contend militarily with any power, should conflict arise with any of them."<sup>11</sup> He asserted that the key to peace and stability in the region would still remain the triangular U.S., China, and Japan relationship.

Daljit Singh, in *ASEAN and the Security of SEA* (1997), further reiterated this point. He opined that the policies of the major powers of the Asia-Pacific will continue to play a critical role in the security lookout of SEA. This would largely be influenced by the way the major powers--the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, and India shift their relative weights in relation to each other. While a new post-Cold War security structure is still not yet in place, the three key elements of the evolving structure, viewed from a SEA perspective, "are the continued American forward military deployments in the Western Pacific and the U.S.-Japan bilateral security alliance, the rising power of China, and cooperative security and dialogue mechanisms like the ARF."<sup>12</sup> However, given the topic of his book, the author was unclear in defining if a U.S. military presence is necessary in SEA.

Offering a different perspective on the issue, Chan Chun Sing in his MMAS thesis, "Whither a Common Security for SEA?" (1998), argued that within the next five to ten years, "it is unlikely an external party (U.S., China, and Japan) will emerge to take on the leadership role for a common Southeast Asian security."<sup>13</sup> These external parties either do not have the will to do so or are not acceptable to the SEA countries. In the absence of a predominant external influence in the region, "any common security regime is likely to either depend on collective action by the Southeast Asian countries, or the emergence of a leader with ASEAN."<sup>14</sup> However, the latter is unlikely given the fact that no one country within ASEAN has the means or the resources to command the followership of the rest. Chan concluded that a common security regime, akin to that of the NATO model, is unlikely to emerge in the foreseeable future. Given the continued preoccupation with economic developments and in the absence of a substantial threat in the region, SEA countries will only seek a common security regime in the economic sphere, and leave the search for a common military security regime to the indefinite future. While Chan's analysis was well substantiated, it does not answer the question on how ASEAN is to solve a major threat to its security. Although a common security regime, akin to that of the NATO model, is not likely to be formed in the near future in theory, there is still a need for a workable option for ASEAN.

John Ravenhill, in *From Paternalism to Partnership: Australia's Relations with ASEAN* (1997), provides good insights into the changes in the relations between SEA and Australia. He alluded to the fact that ASEAN's importance to Australia stems not only from the benefit to be ripe from the region's economic growth but also from Canberra's efforts to reorient its foreign, defense, and trade policies toward the Asia-Pacific region in general and East Asia in particular. However, he highlighted that "if Australian governments have moved towards adopting the ASEAN way in their

diplomacy with their SEA neighbors, ASEAN states at times have shown little reciprocity or, indeed, public understanding of the constraints under which Australian governments operate in."<sup>15</sup> In terms of military interactions, he highlighted the fact that the military forces of each ASEAN members have undertaken more joint exercises with the Australia military than with that of any other country, including other ASEAN members. This illustrated the fact that Australia would be of increasingly importance in Southeast Asian affairs, even though it is not a member of ASEAN, and supports the thesis' argument to include Australia as one of the external influences that would have an impact in the region.

From the above survey, it is clear that major powers still have a stake in the region. Conversely, members of ASEAN will also want a certain form of external security assurance or balance of power in the region as they wrestle with the issue of a common security with ASEAN. However, there is a lack of a comprehensive and critical analysis in determining the suitable major power(s) that could provide this security assurance given the new security environment in the region in the twenty-first century and the withdrawal of the U.S. military bases in the Philippines in 1991. This thesis assesses the possibility of each of the major powers asserting a predominant military presence in the region, and for each of these possibilities, the impact of such a dominance on the other major powers is analyzed.

#### U.S. Military Presence in Southeast Asia

The most significant development in recent years with regard to the U.S. military presence in SEA was the withdrawal of the U.S. military bases from the Philippines in 1991. The literature selected for review was produced in the years following that event, with the exception of the first literature.

Perhaps the most focussed piece of work devoted to examine the necessity of a U.S. military presence in the SEA was done by Michael Lim Teck Huat in his MMAS thesis "Security of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member-states in 1995: Is a U.S. Military Presence Necessary?" It was written in 1990 shortly before the withdrawal of the U.S. military bases from the Philippines. His analysis on ASEAN's threat perception reviewed that it does not share a common threat. He argued that for the immediate future (back in 1990), ASEAN countries were more concerned with internal problems than with threats from the superpowers or major powers (U.S., China, Japan, and India). With that as the background, he alluded to the fact that the continued U.S. military presence in the region was necessary and "should the U.S. military leave the Philippines, the facilities at Clark and Subic would likely not be available to friendly users. The resultant power vacuum would simply invite the interests of the major powers and perhaps even the eventual return of a stronger Soviet influence."<sup>16</sup> To support his case further, Lim considered several alternatives that could replace a U.S. military presence, while minimizing the effects of the U.S. military withdrawal, in meeting ASEAN's perceived external and internal threats. The one that was considered most capable was a combination of intra-ASEAN bilateral and multilateral security links and agreements with non-ASEAN powers. However, this alternative was found to fall short of the benefits of the U.S. military presence in the Philippines to the region and could not effectively and sufficiently replace the U.S. military presence in the region in the next five years (from 1990).

Written at a time when the Bush-Aquino negotiations regarding the extension of the lease of the Philippine bases was still on-going, the thesis did provide a useful analysis for decision makers in ASEAN in their deliberation on the alternative facilities within ASEAN that could be offered to and used by the U.S., should the negotiation fail.

However, nine years have since passed and the withdrawal of the U.S. military bases in the Philippines is now history. This thesis, to a large extent, picks up from Lim's analysis to look at the impact of the U.S. military withdrawal since and, more importantly, discuss whether a U.S. military presence in SEA is still necessary in the twenty-first century. Some of the analysis made by Lim would still be relevant today.

Several writers have also provided valuable works in discussing the importance and necessity of a U.S. presence, in general, in the region since the withdrawal of the military bases in the Philippines. The angles examined were taken from both the perspectives of the U.S. government and that of the ASEAN members at large.

Perry Wood, in *The United States and SEA: Towards a New Era* (1996),<sup>17</sup> analyzed the transformation of SEA in the new post-Cold War era. His reassessment of the external security situation predicted that ASEAN states would attempt to preserve strong ties with Washington. However, the U.S. appears increasingly preoccupied with its internal affairs and is complacent regarding the region's role in America's wider global interests. While the continued presence of the U.S. military in the region is mutually beneficial to both the U.S. and ASEAN, from the political and military viewpoints, it must be tempered with the U.S. people's perception of a clear threat in the region.

Echoing a similar note in terms of a reduction in domestic support for a continued U.S. military presence in the region, Sheldon Simon, in *U.S. Strategy and Southeast Asian Security: Issues of Compatibility* (1993), highlighted the fact that public support for a sustained U.S. forward deployment in the region would be difficult in an environment which lacked specific adversaries. Furthermore, as East Asian countries appeared to be seen increasingly as economic competitors, it would difficult to convince American decision-makers to "provide public good of security to a group of free riders."<sup>18</sup> However, he added that the gradual modernization of conventional forces of the ASEAN

states could have the effect of “weakening the free-rider objection to the maintenance of some U.S. forward deployed forces in the region”,<sup>19</sup> as it could be interpreted as the ASEAN states taking a proactive and responsible role in the security of the region. He argued that if the regional militaries could provide defense in areas contiguous to national boundaries, this would complement the role of the U.S. Pacific forces in SEA, which is to patrol the major SLOCs (sea lines of communications).

Larry M. Wortzel, in *Asian Security without an American Umbrella* (1996), alluded to the fact that “the confidence of Asian friends and allies in the U.S. security umbrella has undergone a slow process of erosion over the past two decades.”<sup>20</sup> The withdrawal from the U.S. military bases in the Philippines came at a time when the U.S. Pacific strategy began to examine the viability of the concept of “places not bases” (i.e., securing access rights with no permanent presence). It was also a time of cutbacks in defense spending and reduction in military force structure. The perception that the U.S. simply left when it got too expensive and hard to maintain those bases has shaken the confidence in U.S. security guarantees and capabilities among ASEAN countries. Adding to that was the ambiguity over U.S. national interest in the region. Wortzel stated ASEAN’s perception that the U.S. does not have a post-Cold War policy and strategy to carry out its business in the region. He pointed out that the reduced U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific, combined with conflicting claims over the South China Sea islands, were the principal factors that contributed to the development of the regional security dialogue in ASEAN, such as the multilateral dialogues like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). He further observed that the closing of the bases in the Philippines and changes in the U.S. national security strategy has caused Australia to be more engaged with ASEAN and its Asian neighbors. While it is true that the gradual withdrawal of U.S. military presence in SEA has brought about a reduction in the region's confidence on the

U.S., the above articles may appear to lead an uninformed reader to deduce that ASEAN was the victim of U.S. decreasing interest in the region. ASEAN itself has a role to play by not having a united view in showing a strong support for a continued U.S. military presence in the region.

Robert H. Scales Jr. and Larry M. Wortzel in *The Future U.S. Military Presence in Asia: Landpower and the Geostrategy of American Commitment* (1999),<sup>21</sup> argued that the U.S. is expected to remain committed in Asia. They went on to say that a withdrawal militarily from Asia would spell disaster to the region and for the security of the U.S. Specifically, the nexus of U.S. interests in Asia lies in Northeast Asia due to the presence of five traditionally warring powers there: North and South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China. However, with regard to the SEA region, the authors repeated the earlier authors' opinion that after the Vietnam War, there would not have been much domestic support for American involvement in the region. Although he mentioned that there are still areas of strategic interest and concern for the U.S. in SEA, namely the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca, there was no mention of how the U.S. should support it militarily.

The alternatives to a U.S. military presence in the region were discussed in part by the various writers cited above. While the majority of them alluded to the possibility of the setting up of a security arrangement within ASEAN, there were some who have highlighted the problems within ASEAN that would serve as stumbling blocks for such an arrangement. This thesis looks at some of the other possible alternatives to a U.S. military presence in the region.

Since the subject of a U.S. military presence in SEA was last studied by Lim in 1990, not many authors have specifically written about the need for a continued U.S. military presence, especially after the withdrawal of the U.S. military from bases from the

Philippines in 1991. Of those who wrote about this subject, Perry Wood, Sheldon Simon, Robert H. Scales Jr. and Larry M. Wortzel have suggested that it would be difficult to harness the necessary domestic support in the U.S. for a continued military presence in SEA. Almost all the writers cited above have opined that some form of a U.S. military presence in the region would be necessary both now and in the future. But none has gone far enough as to propose how such a presence, if necessary, can be achieved.

### Conclusion

From this brief review of the literature, it is evident that there will be several challenges facing ASEAN in the twenty-first century as it tries to cope with the new dynamics of having a ten-member structure. At the same time, it will also have to cope with external powers' influence in the region as each tries to gain a pie in the economic potential of the region. While some recent authors have suggested that some form of U.S. military presence is still necessary in the security of the SEA region, there have been limited discussions on the form that this presence could and should take, and the conditions that would be necessary to bring this about. Additionally, limited discussions, if any, have also been devoted to the possible alternatives that could complement or replace the presence of a U.S. military in the region.

This thesis contributes to the study on the security of the SEA region in the twenty-first century by analyzing the following questions:

1. How would the security environment of SEA be like in the twenty-first century and would it differ from present?
2. Which external powers would have an interest in the region and what would their relations be with the ASEAN states?

3. Is a U.S. military presence in SEA necessary and, if so, what form should it take?

4. What are the possible alternatives to a U.S. military presence in the region?

## Endnotes

1. Ronald D. Palmer and Thomas J. Reckford, *Building ASEAN: 20 years of Southeast Asian Cooperation* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 127.
2. Ibid.
3. Chin Kin Wah, "ASEAN in the New Millenium," in *ASEAN in the New Asia: Issues and Trends*, ed. Chia Siow Yue and Marcello Pacini (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), 153.
4. Robert A. Scalapino, Professor Emeritus, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, was delivering the keynote address at the 1999 Pacific Symposium titled "U.S. Engagement Policy in a Changing Asia: A Time for Reassessment?" The topic of his address was "The American Response to A Changing Asia."
5. Alison Broinowski, ed. *ASEAN into the 1990s* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 148.
6. Sheldon W. Simon, "The Economic Crisis and ASEAN States' Security," *U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute* (23 October 1998): 6.
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8. Zara Dian, "The Spratllys Issue," *Asian Defence Journal* (November 1994): 6.
9. Dana Dillion, "Contemporary Security Challenges in SEA," *Parameters* 27, no. 1 (spring 97): 119-133.
10. Simon Sheldon, "Alternative Visions of Security in the Asia Pacific," *Pacific Affairs* 69, no. 3 (fall 1996): 381-395.
11. S.R. Nathan, The Future of the Southeast Asian Strategic Environment, 1999 Pacific Symposium, titled "U.S. Engagement Policy in a Changing Asia: A Time for Reassessment?"
12. Daljit Singh, "ASEAN and the Security of SEA," in *ASEAN in the New Asia: Issues and Trends*, ed. Chia Siow Yue and Marcello Pacini (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), 142.
13. Chan Chun Sing, "Whither a Common Security for SEA?" (MMAS thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth KS, 1998), 59.
14. Ibid.

15. John Ravenhill, "From Paternalism to Partnership: Australia's Relations with ASEAN," Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1997, 23.

16. Michael Lim Teck Huat, "Security of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member-States in 1995: Is a U.S. Military Presence Necessary?" (MMAS thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth KS, 1990), 224.

17. Perry Wood, "The U.S. and SEA: Towards a New Era," in "Asian Security to the Year 2000," ed. Dianne L. Smith, *U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute* (15 December 1996).

18. Sheldon Simon, "U.S. Strategy and Southeast Asian Security: Issues of Compatibility," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 14, no. 4 (1993): 307.

19. Ibid.

20. Larry M. Wortzel, *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Asian Security without an American Umbrella*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1996, 2.

21. Robert H. Scales, Jr. and Larry M. Wortzel, *The Future U.S. Military Presence in Asia: Landpower and the Geostrategy of American Commitment*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1999.

CHAPTER THREE  
METHODOLOGY

The study of the research topic requires an understanding of ASEAN, both its past and future. The analysis begins by laying out a brief history of ASEAN to look at the circumstance that precipitated its formation in August 1967 and the past attempts at organizing the SEA region since World War II. The essence of ASEAN and the purpose of its formation are explained. The progress it has made over the past thirty years of its existence is highlighted to show the areas of its success and shortcoming. The circumstances that led to the inclusion of four new members in the 1990s, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia are mentioned. The analysis next looks into the new millennium and assesses the conditions that would need to be present in order to ensure the continued success of ASEAN, particularly with regard to the challenges posed by the inclusion of the new members in the unity of ASEAN. The analysis next follows a methodology depicted in the flow diagram in figure 2:

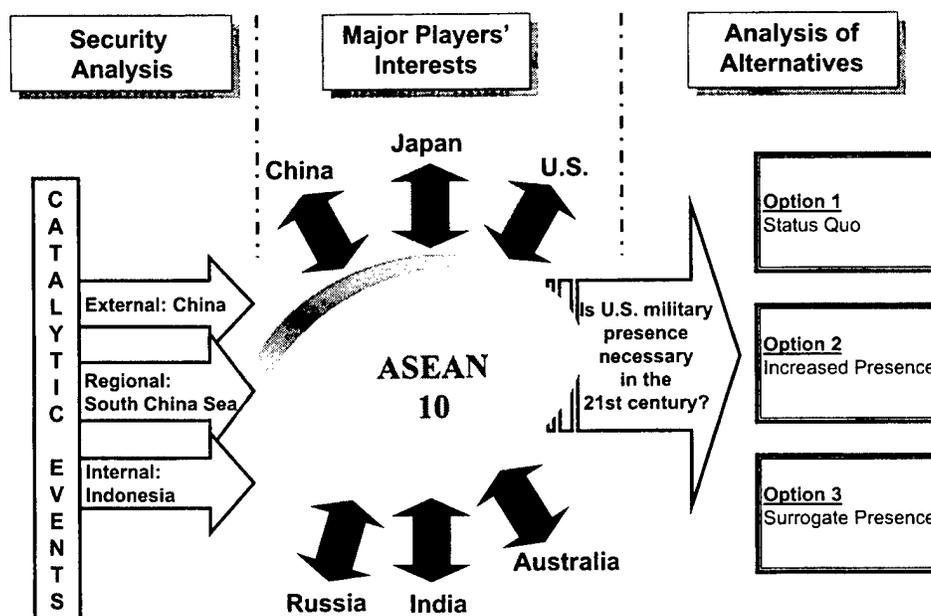


Figure 2: Flow Diagram of Analysis

The analysis of ASEAN lays the background for the assessment of the security environment of SEA. The security environment of SEA has obviously changed significantly in the post-Cold War period and the previous chapter on literature review highlighted some security concerns for the future. This analysis identifies three plausible threat scenarios or catalytic events that would have an adverse impact on the security of the region in the new millennium. These three catalytic events are expected to pose a threat to the external, regional, and internal security of SEA and they are "An Aggressive and Assertive China," "Conflict in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands," and "An Unstable Indonesia" respectively. The purpose of identifying these catalytic events is not so much to accurately foretell the most possible security threats to confront the region, though they are plausible events based on a strategic assessment of the geopolitical environment. The main impetus of this endeavor is to present a complete spectrum of scenarios from which the issue of a U.S. military presence in the region in the twenty-first century can be analyzed.

Before entering the main thrust of the research, it is important to look at all the possible external players that can and want to influence the region. The thesis looks at the interests of the U.S., China, Russia, Japan, India, and Australia in the region in the twenty-first century. This analysis is important as the result of their respective interests, and threats to the region in certain cases, will directly affect the question of a U.S. military presence in the region. For each of these countries, the analysis focuses on its interests in the region, possible threat to the region, and strength and weakness of the respective country in allowing it to achieve its intent in the region. As the ASEAN member-states do not have a common view of the threats and benefits of the influence to be asserted by the above countries, the different views of each member-state of the various countries are analyzed and presented in the form of a ten-by-six matrix. The

purpose is to identify any possible powers that could serve as an acceptable alternative to a U.S. military presence in the region. Conversely, it also analyses the need of a U.S. presence in the subsequent section of the thesis.

This main section of the thesis begins by reviewing the evolution of the U.S. military presence in the region, beginning with the establishment of Clark Air Force Base and Subic Naval Base in the Philippines. A review of the circumstances leading to the withdrawal of both bases in 1991 is presented. Since then, the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) has continued to maintain military alliances with Thailand and the Philippines, and has established access arrangement with Singapore and other ASEAN members. With regard to the necessity of a U.S. military presence in the region in the future, the argument is laid out by looking at the benefits to be gained from the perspective of both the U.S. and ASEAN. For the U.S., the approach is to look at how U.S. national interest in the region can be protected and served by a U.S. military presence in the region. Additional factors considered from the perspective of the U.S. were that of the internal political support and the American public support for a U.S. military presence in the region. For ASEAN, it was to look at whether the security of the region can best be assured by such a U.S. military presence as opposed to an alternative external power or even without the presence of a predominant external power in the region. To provide better focus to the analysis, the three catalytic events identified in an earlier section were used to determine the pros and cons of a U.S. military presence in resolving each of the three possible security concerns.

The analysis concludes by looking at the possible alternatives to a U.S. military presence in ASEAN compared to the present arrangement. The possible models examined were--maintain status quo, an increase in the U.S. military presence, and having a surrogate country to represent U.S. interest in the region.

Only after the above have been addressed can the question of the necessity of a U.S. military presence in the region in the twenty-first century be answered.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ASEAN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

#### PART I. ASEAN AND THE SECURITY OF SEA

##### Introduction

The organization of ASEAN has survived the challenges of its formation and has now become even stronger with the additional memberships of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Like all regions on the world, the security environment of SEA has seen significant changes since the formation of ASEAN in 1967. With the end of the Vietnam War and as the world enters the post-Cold War period, the clear threat of communism which had plagued almost all of ASEAN's founding members has virtually vanished. Instead, the threat to the security of the region has become ever more diffused and varied. This chapter explores the challenges that ASEAN is expected to face in the twenty-first century as it grapples with its expanded membership, with special emphasis on the security challenges facing the region by highlighting three possible threat scenarios that the region could face. These lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion and analysis for the need for a U.S. military presence in the region.

##### Brief History of ASEAN

The formation of ASEAN was a result of several failed attempts to establish some form of an association in the region. The first serious attempt at forming a regional alliance in SEA was during the post-colonial period when the SEA Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed in 1954. SEATO comprised the U.S., U.K., France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand. However, SEATO was ineffectual

from the beginning because the members had different security interests and it eventually died a quiet death in 1977.<sup>1</sup>

The Association of SEA (ASA) was formed in Bangkok on 31 July 1961, comprising Malaya (the former Malaysia), the Philippines, and Thailand. Again, this organization was handicapped by its limited membership of the SEA region. The organization fell apart two years later in 1963 deal to territorial dispute over Sabah (then known as North Borneo) between Malaya and the Philippines. The next serious attempt in organizing the region was when MAPHILINDO, which comprised Malaya, the Philippines, and Indonesia, was formed in 1963. This had an obvious exclusion of Thailand in the appliance. MAPHILINDO eventually failed because of the *konfrontasi* between Indonesia and Malaysia and, again, the conflicting claims of Sabah by the Philippines and Malaysia. Hence, it was clear that the initial attempts to organize the region during the post-colonial period was marred by both territorial disputes, of which the claims of Sabah was but one example, and the lack of comprehensive inclusion of nation-states in the region.

Against this backdrop of failed attempts, ASEAN was formed in Bangkok declaration in 8 August 1967 which then consisted of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The main reason for the above countries to be willing to enter into this effort of regional co-operation was the need for reconciliation following Indonesia's *konfrontasi* against Malaysia and Singapore, which ended in 1966.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there were no precise goals and future role which the founding members saw ASEAN achieving at the time of its formation. The sentiment of unclear interest was evident from the comments made by the former Foreign Minister of Singapore Mr Rajaratnam in a speech to an ASEAN ministerial meeting in Jakarta in May 1974:

You may recollect at the first meeting in 1967, when we had to draft our communiqué, it was a very difficult problem of trying to say nothing in about ten pages, which we did. Because at that time, we ourselves having launched ASEAN, were not quite sure where it was going or whether it was going anywhere at all.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this ambiguity and uncertainty, the Bangkok declaration confined itself to a generalized appeal to promote understanding and cooperation in economic, social, and cultural fields, as well as an indication that the grouping had an underlying political purpose, as stated in the preamble to the declaration:

The countries of SEA share a primary responsibility for strengthening the economic and social stability of the region and ensuring their peaceful and progressive national development and . . . they are determined to ensure their stability and security from external interference in accordance with the ideas and aspirations of their peoples.<sup>4</sup>

The modus operandi in decision making of the organization has been based on consensus, meaning that all countries must be represented in the inevitably complicated structure of working groups, expert groups, and subcommittees that have proliferated as ASEAN grew over the years. With national interest and national growth taking higher priority over regional development in the minds of the member states, some have argued that these have seriously hampered the progress of ASEAN since its formation. Efforts in enhancing the security of the region were confined to efforts taken by the leaders to increase regional reconciliation and cooperation. Despite the slow progress made in the early days, ASEAN still stands as the most successful regional organization among the developing countries in the world.

With regard to its security orientation, there was an idealistic vision of creating a region that was to be relatively free from external interference as embodied in the Bangkok Declaration, that "the countries are determined to ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form or manifestation . . . all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries

concerned.”<sup>5</sup> This was an ambitious statement bearing in mind that all the members of ASEAN except Indonesia had foreign bases on their soil in 1967. The second initiative reflecting the same vision was articulated through the 1971 Declaration on the Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) which basically expressed the vision that the countries of SEA should seek to be in charge of their own destiny with minimum intervention from outside powers. As idealistic as this vision may be, there were obvious obstacles to achieving this goal. In 1971, the SEA region is deeply divided into two sub-regions: one comprising countries making up ASEAN (Brunei can be considered to be part of ASEAN here even though it only joined ASEAN in 1984) and the other comprising the Indochina countries (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar). Parenthetically, the threat of communism was facing all members of ASEAN, which required the presence of external powers (mainly the U.S.) to help combat it. As the war in Indochina raged, it was clear that the region had become the battleground of three major powers (the U.S., the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, China). From the 1970s to the end of the Cold War, there appeared to exist two overlapping security orders in the region: one determined by the major powers and their rivalries, and the other a developing security and political order confined to ASEAN. ASEAN had pursued a complex strategy of maintaining the security equilibrium in SEA by maintaining the vision of a region in which the countries within were chiefly responsible for their destiny while, on the other hand, tacitly supporting the presence of the U.S. military to maintain a balance of power in the broader Asia-Pacific setting. It was clear that the security assurance provided by the presence of the U.S. military had allowed ASEAN to pursue its respective economic growth and nation building with minimal external adverse interference.

The end of the Cold War had ushered in a period of peace and stability in the region in which the SEA region found itself at peace for the first time since the end of

World War II. It meant the end of the security threat from Vietnam and, to a larger extent, the Soviet Union and the threat of communist expansion toward SEA. As the war-afflicted countries of Indochina focussed internally on rebuilding their economy and social fabric, these countries began to turn toward the ASEAN states for economic and political cooperation, thus ending the great divide between the original ASEAN states and Indochina that existed for more than twenty years. This eventually led to the expansion of ASEAN to include Vietnam (in 1995), Laos (in 1997), Myanmar (in 1997), and Cambodia (in 1999), which is also known as the ASEAN-Ten. The transformation of an ASEAN geo-strategic environment was complete, and a new era for ASEAN had begun.

#### ASEAN in the New Millennium

The twenty-first century holds much prospect and opportunities for ASEAN. It had overcome a shaky start to achieve much admired economic success as individual countries, with Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore making the most significant progress prior to the Asian economic crisis in 1997. ASEAN has been lauded as the success story among developing regions. If anything, the success of ASEAN in the past thirty years has shown the world that its form of organization has worked, and indeed there is no apparent reason for it not to continue to work in the years ahead. S. R. Nathan, then Director of Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Singapore, commented that "its strength always lay in the political diplomatic sphere and in staying together to help develop a climate of confidence."<sup>6</sup> This was clearly evident in the recent economic crisis when ASEAN took the time and effort to rally together and build consensus and the unity factor within ASEAN remained intact.

With the conflict and threat from Indochina well behind the mind of leaders of ASEAN, the more critical factor that would ensure the continued success of ASEAN as an organization in promoting economic growth and regional stability is how well and willing the four new members of ASEAN (Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia) can adopt themselves to the mode of operations of ASEAN, while leaving past baggage behind them. As Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong commented at the Fifth ASEAN Summit, they would have to adjust quickly to ASEAN values and corporate culture, and "they may be initially surprised at the frank and candid way in which we discuss problems and the manner in which we reach consensus."<sup>7</sup> On the part of ASEAN, there is also a need to practice the principle of "flexible consensus" to accommodate the differences of the new members. The track record of ASEAN's power of adjustment suggests that the same resilience will be carried over with the new structure. The fact that the new members are willing to join ASEAN, having observed its mode of operations since its existence, would suggest that they would be willing to conform to the ASEAN way.

While there is no apparent reason to augur a lack of resolve on the part of the original and new members of ASEAN to bind together as a united body, the success of the ASEAN-Ten in the next millennium will lie critically on the fulfillment of two important conditions. Firstly, there is a need to prevent the creation of a divide between the rich and the poor ASEAN states, as the new members attempt to gain a piece of the economic prosperity of the region. The Secretary-General of Vietnam's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, prior to his country's admission into ASEAN expressed his concern that "many businesses are very worried about surviving or being competitive even in the domestic market once we join ASEAN."<sup>8</sup> It would require the more mature economies to assist in the development of the slow-trackers, much like the Singapore-

Johor-Riau Growth Triangle and the Southern Thailand-Northern Malaysia-Sumatra Growth Triangle, in order to create a win-win situation for all parties so that all can have a share of the wealth generated. The second condition to ensure the success of ASEAN-Ten is the maintenance of internal stability, both politically and socially, of the new members. As the maintenance of internal stability in the old members was crucial in the early days of ASEAN in providing the basic backdrop for cooperation, so it will be as ASEAN seeks greater scope of cooperation from its new members. To achieve that, the maintenance of a steady economic growth in these countries is critical and should take priority.

In discussing the future of ASEAN, there is always an enduring fact that will define its importance in the world, especially in the eyes of the major powers. Three countries of ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) straddle the vital sea lines of communication (SLOCs) between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean which serve the trading activities among Northeast Asia, the East Indies, and the Middle East. Collectively, they control the three main sea passage lines: Malacca Straits, one of the three busiest straits in the world; and the Lombok and Sunda Straits. The importance of the region brought about by its strategic location will always exist. Of significance is the conduct of the oil trade. Oil from the Middle East has to transit the region to reach Northeast Asia, most noticeably Japan, and the U.S. instead of via Europe. There is no doubt that the control and influence over this region will allow major world powers to exercise their freedom of action to further their political, economic, and military gains, whatever they may be, as seen from the earlier days of the colonial powers.

In summary, ASEAN's future looks bright. Being a larger and stronger organization, it stands to play a more significant role and influence in the greater Asia-Pacific region. It remains to be seen whether it will be able to fully harness its potential

to develop into a stronger organization than it is today, but the signs are good. The implication in the twenty-first century is that the SEA region will continue to attract great interest from major powers.

### Security of Southeast Asia--Three Catalytic Events

The analysis of possible threats to ASEAN is important in determining the necessity of a U.S. military presence in the region both from the perspective of the U.S. and ASEAN as a collective body. As mentioned earlier, the most significant security concern facing the region was the threat of a possible spillover of the war in Indochina into the rest of ASEAN, particularly Thailand. In addition, there was also the threat of communist insurgency that had plagued all the founding members of ASEAN, with the exception of Brunei. This had served as a force to galvanize ASEAN and had contributed to its unity since its formation, despite the existence of bilateral disputes among members of ASEAN, such as the dispute over Sabah between the Philippines and Malaysia, and the occasional downturn in relations between Singapore and Malaysia.

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the threat of a southward expansion of communism from Vietnam had ceased and the SEA region has enjoyed a long-awaited benign regional security environment. The countries (chiefly Vietnam and Cambodia) that had previously been regarded as a security threat to the ASEAN states have given up their arms and joined in the pursue of economic and social progress, and are now part of the ASEAN. While outright conflict does not exist among the ASEAN states now, there are still elements of uncertainty and potential insecurity in the SEA region in the post-Cold War era. The purpose of the ensuing section is to postulate three plausible catalytic events--external, regional, and internal, that may cause a

potential security threat to the region. They are: (1) an aggressive and assertive China; (2) conflict in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands; and (3) an unstable Indonesia. The objective is not so much to foretell with absolute certainty that they would happen in the near or distant future even though they are plausible events that could happen based on an analysis of the current security dynamics. It is possible to argue the issue from both the pessimistic and optimistic standpoint. For the purpose of this analysis, a more pessimistic slant is taken in postulating the events. They will eventually be used in the discussion and analysis on the need of a U.S. military presence in the region in the next chapter.

#### External--An Aggressive and Assertive China

Daljit Singh (1997)<sup>9</sup>, a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, argued that the biggest challenge to the security of the SEA region in the post-Cold War security ledger is China. The fact that China is a superpower in the making and in the throes of modernization for years to come is undisputed. If its current economic growth continues, and barring any major internal unrest, China will take over Japan to become the leading economy in Asia. The question is what would it do with its power and influence to commensurate with the gain in its economic and political vibrancy. Echoing a similar pessimistic tone, Denny Roy (1996)<sup>10</sup>, a lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the National University of Singapore, argued that a burgeoning China poses a long-term danger to Asia-Pacific security for two reasons. First, a future Chinese hegemony in East Asia is a strong possibility, primarily due to its vast economic potential and its potential to build a superpower-sized military. Second, economic development will make China more assertive and less cooperative with its neighbors, and China's domestic characteristics make it likely to use force to achieve its

political goals. History has shown that China has always seen SEA to be within its ambit of influence. In fact, its historical concept of security in the early days has regarded China as the center of the world with the rest of the surrounding countries subservient to its needs. There is reason to believe that this hierarchical mentality, in which SEA is not seen as equal, will manifest itself even more as China grows in international prominence and stature. The clearest manifestation of this mentality is the way China shows no sign of respecting the interests of others (co-claimants of the area) in the South China Sea and has repeatedly refused calls from ASEAN to delineate the extent of its territorial claims in the South China Sea.<sup>11</sup> (The details of the Chinese actions in the South China Sea are discussed on the next section.) With three ASEAN members (Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar) now sharing a common border with China, the potential for border skirmishes and disputes are now a direct problem for ASEAN to deal with. The countries that would be most wary of China's intentions in the region are the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia.<sup>12</sup>

A second cause of concern is the growing military power of China. The pessimist argues that China's record of using military force to settle disputes and the forward deployments of force in the South China Sea is a serious cause of concern to ASEAN. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has been able to redirect its military assets southward and allocate more of its growing defense budget to air and naval power projection. China's military budget has increased by more than 140% since 1989, and has just been indexed to the annual expansion of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>13</sup> China has made no secret of its desire to acquire, over the longer term, power-projection capabilities like the other great powers. Of significance are the development of the Chinese military capabilities on Hanggi Island off Myanmar as having an offensive capability, the airstrip on Woody Island (part of the Parcel Island chain) that can

accommodate SU-27 fighters, and China's attempt to build a blue water naval fleet.<sup>14</sup> With the lack of an ability for a wholesale military revolution financially, China's option in obtaining power-projection capability cheaply is through missile development.<sup>15</sup> It should also be noted that the combined military strength of ASEAN states is still no match for the military prowess of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

While the above does not mean that China would necessarily be a territorially expansionist power in the near future, it does raise many uncertainties about how China would behave given its newfound wealth, military power, and international prominence. What is obvious, nevertheless, is that ASEAN will have to be prepared to deal with an aggressive and assertive China in the twenty-first century.

#### Regional--Conflict in the South China Sea and The Spratly Islands

Some analysts argued that after Vietnam and Cambodia, the Spratly Islands issue would pose the next predominant security challenge to the Southeast Asian countries and could also serve as a source of unity.<sup>16</sup> The conflicting jurisdictional claims over the islands in the South China Sea, particularly the Spratly Islands, constitutes a major multilateral security concern involving members of ASEAN (Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Vietnam) and China. Although Indonesia and Thailand do not have claim to any of the Spratlys, the Exclusive Economic Zones which overlap with other claimant states implies that they have a vital stake in the settlement of claims. Sited astride the major sea lanes between the Persian Gulf and Northeast Asia through which twenty-five percent of the world's shipping passes, including the supertankers carrying the petroleum that fuels the economies of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea,<sup>17</sup> and over rich fishing and mineral-laden seabed, ownership and control of the islands, either in part or in totality, is of strategic and economic importance.<sup>18</sup> In a

region that depends on the maintenance of an open SLOC for the prosperity of its economy, any conflict in the South China Sea will have menacing repercussions, which member-states of ASEAN will take every measure to avoid. Only China and Vietnam have claimed ownership over all of the Spratlys, a 33-island archipelago covering more than 70, 000 square miles in the middle of the South China Sea. With the exception of Brunei, all claimants maintain military detachments on parts of the islands claimed--the Philippines and Malaysia occupy eight and three of the islands nearest their shores respectively; Vietnam occupies twenty-one islands in the west and central part of the archipelago.

The nature of potential conflict stems from the lack of a broad consensus among claimants to reach a settlement on the (shared) ownership of the islands, particularly with China and Vietnam. While the ASEAN states have agreed among themselves to a possible joint development and exploitation of overlapping maritime zones (Malaysia-Indonesia; Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand) or at least to negotiate their differences (Malaysia-Thailand; Indonesia-Philippines), no such agreements have yet been reached with China or Vietnam. While the recent inclusion of Vietnam into ASEAN membership (in 1995) will assert pressure on Vietnam to come to an amicable agreement with members of ASEAN, no such leverage is available vis-à-vis China.

Right from the beginning, China's approach toward the resolution of the conflict has caused much concern on the part of members of ASEAN, even though each has been careful to avoid any advocacy on the subject. Although China has gradually appeared to be willing to talk, it has shown no inclination to give up territory in the South China Sea, nor is it willing to consider joint development of the Spratlys among all claimants. China's position on joint development has been passive resistant.<sup>19</sup> Coupled with its growing military might with regard to the development of a blue water naval

capability, which without a doubt is the strongest among the claimants as well as non-claimants within ASEAN, and China's willingness to use force to protect its indisputable sovereignty over the Spratlys, the potential for an armed conflict is a real possibility.

If history is any good indicator, the dispute has so far produced several armed conflicts, albeit localized. In January 1974 Chinese forces drove South Vietnamese naval forces out of the Paracel Islands (located north of the Spratlys islands) after a sharp clash in which one South Vietnamese corvette was sunk and two destroyers were damaged. The naval battle between Vietnamese and Chinese ships erupted for the second time in March 1988 when the two navies fought over the disputed Johnson Reef in the Spratly Islands.<sup>20</sup> The PLA navy reportedly was comprised of three frigates equipped with sea-to-sea missiles and automatic cannons. Again in 1995, China used force to enforce its claims to the Mischief Reef from the Philippines. Since then, PLA personnel remain on the islets taken from Vietnam and the Philippines. Whether China would resort to such similar use of force in the future remains to be seen. But it is clear that no single claimant in ASEAN would have the ability to challenge such incursion.

While the Spratlys dispute, though protracted, does not seriously threaten the national security or existence of any of the claimants, it remains the greatest potential for a regional conflict in SEA. For the claimants, the economic stake and national pride for the control of the respective claimed islands are high. For those countries that assert no sovereignty above the islands, their desires are to see a peaceful settlement to the dispute in order to preserve the economic lifelines of the region. For until such a settlement arises, the dispute over the islands in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands will always cast a shadow of doubt over the security of the SEA.

## Internal--An Unstable Indonesia

Indonesia is by far the most populous and ethnically diverse nation in ASEAN (it also has the fourth largest population and largest Muslim population in the world). With a population of 216 million, the variety of its human geography is without parallel on earth. It consists of some 336 ethnic groups, living on 13,677 islands, speaking 250 dialects, that are religiously and culturally different.<sup>21</sup> Since its independence in 1945 from the Netherlands, the diversity of the country was intricately united through the rule of two strongmen--former President Sukarno who was regarded as the founding father of Indonesia; and former President Suharto who led Indonesia to economic prosperity for more than thirty years since the disastrous Gestapu coup of 30 September 1965 ended the rule of Sukarno. The importance of national unity is deeply held in its leaders, both political and military, and this is enshrined in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, meaning "Unity in Diversity," inscribed on the Indonesian state crest. It describes the flexibility of the Indonesian people to syncretise and to blend the various religious beliefs, traditions and cultures, and reminds the Indonesians of the necessity and virtue of the spirit of tolerance and accommodation in a multiracial, multireligious, multicultural, and multilingual society.<sup>22</sup>

The Asian economic crisis brought about an unprecedented change in the social and political landscape of Indonesia. Indonesia was the most heavily affected country in Asia during the crisis. It resulted in eighty million people living below the poverty level, and plunged the country into a state of near complete breakdown of law and order in many places. The height of the crisis saw the demise of Suharto, creating a power vacuum in the political arena. With his fall, Indonesia faced the danger of falling apart. Social unrest was prevalent throughout the country and deep-seated conflict and hatred among ethnic groups suddenly resurfaced, which resulted in the occurrence of

widespread atrocities.<sup>23</sup> The spirit of tolerance enshrined in the Indonesian motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* suddenly disappeared. Capitalizing on the upheavals in the political and social situation, separatist movements in traditionally alienated provinces were revived. Not satisfied with the offer of autonomy, East Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia. Violence immediately erupted in the province as pro-Jakarta militia resorted to the taking of arms in an attempt to block the province's path to independence. The ensuing conflict between the pro-independence supporters and pro-Jakarta militia drew international attention, which resulted in the deployment of INTERFET (International Force for East Timor). This threatened to break apart the unity and stability of Indonesia as a whole, as other provinces contemplated similar demands for independence, namely Aceh and Irian Jaya.

Beyond the above problems facing the government of Indonesia, there is also the greater question of the stability of the central government. Despite the recent conduct of peaceful presidential election that saw the election of Abdurrahman Wahid (affectionately known as *Gus Dur*--"big brother") as president in November 1999, the political situation in Indonesia is far from fully stabilized. Much will depend on whether the newly formed government is able to steer the economically battered and socially fragmented country out of its current turmoil and back on the road to economic prosperity. This is a daunting task indeed considering the fact that it had taken former President Suharto more than thirty years to bring Indonesia to where it was before the economic crisis. Besides, some have argued that it would take a political genius with a mastery of governance to balance the diverging political powers in the country, particularly from the Armed Forces (TNI), as what Suharto had achieved through his "divide-and-rule" tactics. The early years in the twenty-first century will be turbulent years for Indonesia as it struggles to maintain stability and unity within.

Indonesia today is indeed a fragile nation. The stability of Indonesia is critical to the security of the region. An unstable Indonesia will be detrimental to ASEAN in the highest degree, not least because Indonesia is the largest and most populous country in ASEAN. There is always a real danger that its internal problem will have a spillover effect on the rest of the region. One need not have to look far into history to recall how former President Sukarno attempted to externalize Indonesian's internal unrest by staging the *konfrontasi* with Malaysia and Singapore in 1965. Beyond that, with the Indonesian archipelago lying astride vital shipping lanes linking Asia to the Persian Gulf, stability in Indonesia is of strategic importance to the external powers.

#### Summary

The SEA region indeed contains distinct threats to regional security. The three scenarios presented above stipulate three possible security scenarios that could arise in the SEA region in the twenty-first century. They are not mutually exclusive events as any two or three could possibly coexist, as in the cases of "An Aggressive and Assertive China" and "Conflict in the South China Sea and The Spratly Islands."

However, this is not to say that other security concerns do not exist, nor are they any less important than the ones presented. The region still bounds with interstate territorial conflicts whose origins date back to the pre-Cold War period. The conflict between Malaysia and the Philippines over Sabah is the oldest and the most serious of all existing intra-ASEAN territorial disputes. There are overlapping claims over a small island (Batu Puteh) between Malaysia and Singapore, and the dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia over the two small islands of Sigitan and Lipadan. In short, some elements of uncertainty still lie beneath the surface of economic prosperity of ASEAN.

## PART II. ASEAN AND THE MAJOR POWERS

### Introduction

The strategic location of the region, coupled with its economic potential in the twenty-first century, will necessarily attract the attention of major powers, namely the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, and India. This section of the thesis looks at the interests of the U.S., China, Russia, Japan, India, and Australia in the region in the twenty-first century. This analysis is important as the result of their respective interests, and threats to the region in certain cases, will directly affect the question of a U.S. military presence in the region. For each of these countries, the analysis focuses on its interests in the region, possible threat to the region, and strength and weakness of the respective country in allowing it to achieve its intent in the region.

As the ASEAN member-states do not have a common view of the threats and benefits of the influence to be asserted by the above countries, the different views of each member-state of the various countries are analyzed and presented in the form of a ten-by-six matrix. The purpose is to identify any possible powers that could serve as an acceptable alternative to a U.S. military presence in the region.

### External Power in Southeast Asia

The SEA region has always existed with the presence of strong external powers. The strategic location of the region and the economic potential of the countries within will always attract the attention and interest of major powers. Before the discussion on the interest of these major powers, it is important to understand the need for the existence of external power in the region from the perspective of ASEAN in the years to come.

ASEAN needs the presence of external power in the region. This need stems from the basic fact that ASEAN by itself does not possess the capability to formulate a

common security regime (militarily), akin to that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) model. The reasons for that are many. The lack of a commonality in defense priorities and military doctrine is one. Key threats facing the region require the backing of larger powers to prevent and resolve. In the case of an aggressive China, ASEAN lacks the commensurate strength to contend militarily to it. For the Spratly Islands conflict, the presence of China and the complication of involvement from members of ASEAN would certainly require the presence of an external power to mediate. Even though the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) points toward ASEAN taking a more prominent role in influencing the security of the region as well as the larger Asia-Pacific context, it only serves as a platform for dialogues without any concrete mechanism for peace enforcement. Besides, the success of the ARF requires the active support and participation of external powers.

The ensuing section looks at the suitability of the various major powers in playing a dominant military role in the region.

### Interest of Major Powers in the Southeast Asia Region

#### United States

U.S. "strategic interest in SEA centers on developing regional and bilateral security and economic relationships that assist in conflict prevention and resolution and expand U.S. participation in the region's economics."<sup>24</sup> More specifically, the SEA region offers the U.S. the freedom of passage through the region for its exports and military forces. The region holds the gateway for the projection of forces between its two major theaters of concern in the Middle East and Northeast Asia. U.S. Navy (USN) and U.S. Air Force (USAF) units regularly transit this strategic region en route to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea from their bases in Japan and the continental

U.S. (CONUS).<sup>25</sup> This route provides a vital alternative to the traditional LOCs via Europe for the projection of U.S. military influence in the above regions. Freedom of transit through the maritime straits of Indonesia and Malaysia is a key U.S.' strategic interest in SEA.<sup>26</sup> In the economic arena, SEA provides a lucrative market for U.S. goods and services. Besides the traditional supplies of such key commodities as natural rubber, tin, copper, and petroleum, the ASEAN states have emerged as the location for new and important processing, manufacturing, and service industries. From 1988-1993, American exports to ASEAN rose 120 percent and ASEAN represents the U.S.' third largest market, behind the European Union and Japan.<sup>27</sup> In addition, ASEAN has emerged as an important player in the Asian economy as a whole and specifically to key U.S. Asian allies, Japan and South Korea.<sup>28</sup>

Of the six countries under analysis, the U.S. poses the least threat to the region. The analysis of the U.S. as a potential threat to the region may seem as a surprise. Clearly the U.S. does not harbor hegemonic desires, even though its traditional promotion of democracy may not necessarily be well received by ASEAN members. Like other states, the U.S. conducts foreign policies based largely on its national interests and these may conflict with the interests of ASEAN. When the two interests are in conflict, a situation may arise when the actions of the U.S. may be viewed as a threat to the region. The U.S. has a history of supporting revolutionary or opposition groups when it does not agree with the government of that country. Nicaragua is a case in point. In the case of Myanmar, it is clear that the U.S. does not view the military government with favor. Should the U.S. decide to take action against the government unilaterally in defense of its national interests, ASEAN's cohesiveness would be questioned as Myanmar is now a legitimate member of ASEAN. In addition, the U.S. may pose an indirect threat to the security of SEA through the lack of reliability of its

foreign policy and that of its long-term commitment to the region. Through its recent history, the Southeast East Asian region has relied and benefited much from the security umbrella provided by the U.S. military presence, which created the necessary condition for economic progress in the region. However, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam has been viewed by the ASEAN states as quitting the fight against the communists. More recently, the slow U.S. response to the region's economic crisis also renews doubts in the mind of the Southeast Asian countries of the reliability of continued U.S. leadership in the region.<sup>29</sup> On balance, however, the U.S. is not considered a threat to the SEA region.

Without a doubt, the U.S. enters the twenty-first century with the world's strongest economy and military, both of which are crucial instruments of power. Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has continued to draw down its military forces overseas due to its reduced threat assessment, domestic public support, and decreasing defense budget.<sup>30</sup> Public opinion in the U.S. has also tended to swing toward a more isolationist stance. With regard to SEA, public support for a U.S. military commitment in the region will be weak in the absence of a clear and immediate threat to U.S. national interest. In addition, with the Asia-Pacific as a whole being seen increasing as an economic competitor, it would be difficult to convince the American public to commit American lives in the security of the region. Hence, despite its economic and military prowess, it would be increasingly difficult for the U.S. to commit itself militarily to the region even though it may be necessary for it to do so in support of its national interests.

The SEA region is important to the U.S. both economically and militarily. U.S. national interest requires its continued engagement in the region in accordance with its national security strategy. However, the degree of its commitment will have to be

balanced against its military commitment in other parts of the world, domestic public support, and defense budget.

## China

As China emerges in the twenty-first century as a major power economically and militarily, the SEA region will be important in three aspects: a lucrative export market, a source of investment, and control of vital SLOCs. The last aspect dictates that China will always be actively involved in the region as any instability in the region will severely and directly disrupt China's economy owing to the fact that the uninterrupted access to the South China Sea is a direct lifeline to its economy. In this regard, it is to China's interest that the region be free from the dominant influence of any other power including the U.S., Japan, Russia, and India, the last three countries being its traditional rivals. Instead, it would want to play an increasingly influential, if not dominant, role in the region. In recent years, China has taken steps to improve its relations and image with countries in the region. This could be seen from China's keen interest to help stabilize the Southeast Asian economies in the October 1997 currency crisis. China's decision not to devalue the *renminbi*, which would have exacerbated ASEAN's export-led recovery, was received positively by the regional countries.<sup>31</sup>

The increasing strength of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is a source of concern to ASEAN states. As highlighted in the previous section on threat analysis, competing claims over territories and resources in the South China Sea will reinforce fear in ASEAN of Chinese hegemony in SEA. China's military posture in the South China Sea vis-à-vis the Spratlys issue is bound to prove worrisome for other ASEAN claimants--Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The tendency of China to resort to the use of force to settle differences and its previous support for communist

insurgents in most Southeast Asian countries, like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, have caused the Southeast Asian countries to be cautious of China's long term motives in the region. For example, Vietnam still bears the scars of the 1979 border war and the 1988 battle over the Spratly Islands with China. One indirect aspect of China's threat to the region is related to the issue of the Chinese minorities in the many Southeast Asian countries. The minority Chinese have dominated businesses and the economies of Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The resultant uneven distribution of wealth is a source of social tension in these societies as the Chinese are often the resented group of the population. To make things worse, there is a perceived linkage of these overseas ethnic Chinese with China, even though this has been diminishing over time with the younger generations. Should China become a dominant power in the region, the suspicion of the countries on the loyalty of these Chinese minorities may resurface.

Central to the threat perception in the region is China's increasing military might. China has embarked on the development of a blue water navy that can project power with the primary purpose of protecting its interest in the South China Sea. Additionally, China has also built airstrips and forward naval logistics support posts on the Spratly and Paracel Islands to mitigate its lack of sufficient power projection capability. China has also committed resources in Myanmar naval bases in the Andaman Sea, at the western end of the Straits of Malacca, which will provide an alternative to exploit the land route to the Indian Ocean to circumvent any constriction in the South China Sea. However, the development of the PLA and the PLA's navy still lag that of the U.S. and Japan. Besides, the PLA's limited forward deployment capability would be stretched by the need to address various fronts--the Taiwan issue, the separatist movement in Xinjiang and Tibet, the situation in Northeast Asia, its defense against traditional rivals Russia and

India, and domestic stability. Therefore, the PLA's capability is expected to be stretched but will nevertheless still allow China to actively influence the region.

In conclusion, it is clear that China desires to play the dominant role in SEA. Its growing military power will allow it to do so, albeit in a limited way. From the perspectives of its interest and power, China is a strong alternative candidate to the U.S. in playing a dominant role in SEA. However, the threats it poses vis-à-vis the South China Sea issue and the sensitivities of the minority Chinese in certain countries in ASEAN mean that its attempts at influence, much less domination, in the region will not be welcomed by the Southeast Asian countries.

#### Russia

Since the end of the Cold War, SEA no longer has as much strategic value to Russia as it offers the U.S. and China. The region no longer serves as a source of competition against the U.S. for influence in this part of the Pacific, as was the case during the Vietnam War. In the twenty-first century, Russian interest would be focussed on economic co-operation with ASEAN as a strategy to ride on the economic vibrancy of the region to help jump start its sluggish domestic economy, and to influence the regional balance of power in favor of Moscow's long term political and security interests vis-à-vis China, Japan, the U.S., and India. Moscow is aware of the vast potential in trade expansion and economic cooperation with the Southeast Asian countries as well as the other East Asian countries. Given the impressive growth rates of the latter, Russia is ever more convinced that its own economic future lies in the gradual integration of its economy into the already formed structure of East Asia. Should China decide to exercise over-whelming control over the South China Sea, Russia would be obliged to assert its military influence, in order to negate China's control of its southern

lifeline. However, in the near future, it suffices to say that Russia's strategic outlook will be skewed strongly toward Europe, in combating separatist movements like Chechnya, and its relations with the former Soviet states like Georgia.

In viewing the prospective role of Russia as a major power in the region, ASEAN would be less concerned about a prospective Russian threat to the security of the region.<sup>32</sup> The extent to which Russia will be able to re-emerge as a more significant major power in the region is greatly dependent on the success of its political and economic reforms. Should Moscow fail, there is every tendency that it will externalize its domestic problem which will have a destabilizing effect on the SEA region. Meanwhile, the threat that Russia would likely pose to the region is its conduct of arms sales to the Southeast Asian countries. The low cost of weapon systems offered by Russia is an attractive alternative to the traditional western-made systems for most countries whose defense budgets were reduced by the economic crisis. Malaysia and Indonesia are examples of ASEAN states that have acquired Russian-made systems in a substantial way. This could have a long-term effect of generating an arms race in the region as a whole. Additionally, the possible sales of naval capabilities to claimants of the South China Sea islands will serve to heighten the tension surrounding the issue, particularly if such acquisition is aimed at countering China's naval superiority.

As mentioned, Russia's ability to assert its power in the region will be greatly hampered by its political and economic problem at home. However, Russia still possesses a formidable military force that can exert its influence in the Western Pacific if it wishes to. Additionally, there may be a remote possibility of Russia resurrecting the use of Cam Ranh Bay, through bilateral negotiation with Vietnam, when it becomes necessary for Russia to assert its power in the region. But the final analysis is that Russia will be lame power in this region at least in the medium term.

On balance, it is unlikely that Russia would play a significant role in the region in the short and medium terms, nor would it pose a significant threat to the security of the region, as it continues to be preoccupied internally and toward the west. In this regard, the influence of Russia on the overall balance of power in the SEA region in the short and medium terms will be minimal, unless there is a surge of influence by its traditional Asian rivals China, Japan, and India. Therefore, it is an unlikely alternative candidate to the U.S. in playing a dominant role in the region.

### Japan

Japan's interest in the region is similar to China's--a market for goods, a source of investments, and freedom of passage through the vital SLOCs. Perhaps to a greater extent than China, the SEA region is more important to Japan due to its limited natural resources as can be seen from the fact that seventy-five percent of Japan's energy source passes through the Southeast Asian SLOCs from the Middle East. Hence, the maintenance of uninterrupted SLOCs and the security of the region in general are critical to sustain Japan's vast economy. The gradual but steady retrenchment of American power in SEA as well as in the larger Asia-Pacific region has spurred Japan to take on a more influential and dominant role. Former Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's decision to send Japanese soldiers to Cambodia in support of UN peacekeeping operations reflects the growing Japanese desire for a greater political/military role in the international arena.<sup>33</sup> Reflecting his country's desire for a greater involvement in Asia, Miyazawa emphasized that "in Asia, not only do we intend to continue economic co-operation, but we also hope to play a role in promoting political stability."<sup>34</sup>

To assess Japan's threat to the region, one need not have to look too far back into history. In the decades since the end of World War II, the Southeast Asian countries

and other Asian countries have feared a resurgence of militarism in Japan. Given Japan's scarce natural resources, it would always have to look externally for resources to feed its economy. The quest for resources was *raison d'être* for Japan's Southeast Asian campaign during World War II. Constitutional restriction on the use of the military aside, the gradual rearmament of the Japan Self Defense Force (SDF) is inevitable given the need to protect its economy. There is a latent fear on what an unconstrained Japan would do with its military and it is highly unlikely that the region will easily dispel doubts about Japan's unfortunate past. Almost all Southeast Asian countries still bear memories of the atrocities committed by the Japanese during World War II.

Another aspect of the threat perception of Japan by regional countries is the unwillingness of the Japanese government and society to officially admit its acts of aggression committed in many of the countries during the World War II campaigns. This is a major stumbling block in relations with the Southeast Asian countries. Saburo Ienaga, a professor emeritus of education at Tokyo University of Education, has also observed an increasing promilitary slant in Japanese education.<sup>35</sup> An indirect aspect of Japan's threat to the security of the region is in the control of the South China Sea. No doubt Japan does not hold any legal claim to any part of the islands, but its interest in seeing the area free from the dominant control of a single country, particularly China, is well understood in view of the need to protect its SLOCs. Should the latter happen, the conflict situation in the South China Sea would turn even more complicated with the possibility of Japan coming into the picture. Hence, the ASEAN will continue to see the possibility of a remilitarized Japan as a threat to the region unless it is willing to deal with its past openly and responsibly.

Japan does possess the military might to assert its influence in the region. Despite the constraint imposed by its constitution for the use of its military force, the SDF

boosts the second largest defense budget in the world, and is certainly one of the most technologically advanced. It remains to be seen whether Japan is able to apply its military potential externally. In the coming years, the Japanese political system is likely to continue to wrangle between the pacifist and isolationist tendencies and the call for enlarged responsibility that would be commensurate with its economic might. Another constraint in Japan's efforts to play a more proactive role is her future demographics. The average age of Japanese society has continued to increase over the years, pointing toward an aging problem. With the society burdened by the aging population, it would be difficult to devote as many resources for a more active foreign and military policy posture. For the time being, the security alliance between the U.S. and Japan serves to check the possible expanding role of the SDF until such time when the region is ready for a greater involvement of Japan, both politically and militarily. Some have argued that a U.S. military presence in Japan inhibits its remilitarization, which is welcomed by many people in Asia. For those who are wary of the rise of China's power in the region, a close U.S.-Japan alliance will serve to balance the influence of China.

In summary, Japan will continue to play a dominant role in the economy of the region as it has done in the past decades. For the next five to ten years, it is unlikely that Japan will play a substantive military role in SEA as the regional countries are not prepared for such a role and that, internally, Japan is handicapped from doing so by its constitution.

#### India

Like China, India is a country on the rise both economically and militarily. Its sheer size and proximity to SEA mean that any discussion of regional security would not be complete without the consideration of India. In fact, India controls the western exit of

the vital sea lanes out of SEA. Historians argued that the strategic importance of the region was emphasized in 1942 when Japan posed a threat to Northeast India along the Imphal-Kohima front. This alerted India to the fact that the region could be used as a springboard for invasion against it. In addition, India's strategic position in the Indian Ocean also brings SEA within the purview of India's defense calculation, in which any adverse encroachment from the seas surrounding India will be strongly guarded.

India's economic interest in the region has also grown over the years. SEA occupies third place after the U.K. and the U.S. in terms of India's trade. India would want to be poised to exploit the growing potential of the Southeast Asian economy. The sizeable presence of people of Indian origin in the Southeast Asian countries also creates a cultural connection between India and SEA. Historians are quick to point out that the birth of Javanese culture in ancient Indonesia was strongly influenced by Hinduism from India. Despite this cultural linkage with the ethnic Indians in the region, India has always maintained a passive relationship, unlike China and the overseas Chinese.<sup>36</sup> Indian's strategic interest in the region is also fueled by the realization of the growing closer relationship between ASEAN states and China, a long-time rival of India. The recent move by China to build a naval base in Myanmar is viewed as a threat to India. In the long term, it is expected that India would seek to improve its relationships with the ASEAN states to counterbalance the increasing influence of China.

India's growth in power is an increasing concern to the region in the twenty-first century. The naval bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a significant potential threat to ASEAN because control of the seas around both Islands effectively seals the northwestern approach to the Straits of Malacca. At this point India does not ostensibly possess any hegemonic designs over the region, however India's desire to express itself as a major power in the region must be considered. Of particular interest would be

India's relations with the U.S. and China. In the event of a conflict arising from the Kashmir issue, with China and the U.S. supporting Pakistan, for example, India may be tempted to seal off the northwestern approach to the Straits of Malacca in an attempt to strangulate China and, to a lesser extent, the U.S. economically. This will pose a severe threat to the Southeast Asian countries that depend on its already open SLOC for their continued prosperity. However, such conflict is unlikely to happen in the short term. Even if it does happen, it would take the form of an all-out conflict involving China and U.S. for India to resort to such drastic measure. That would certainly have an adverse effect on India's own economy and would risk severing its relations with ASEAN. Hence, India's threat to the region in this aspect is low.

With a vast growing population of more than one billion, and analysts expecting India to surpass China as the most populous country in the world by 2015, India's potential as a major power is certain. In terms of technology, the developments in computer software and electronics technology in India have been phenomenal. These could easily be translated into military terms. However, in the next 5-10 years, India still has a distance to go before it could build up a military power that could effectively assert India's interest in the region. Besides, India still lacks the internal stability to project a coherent foreign policy in this part of the world.

Therefore, while India's growing power is clear in the next five to ten years, it is unlikely that it would be able to play a dominant role in the region in the way the U.S. has done. Even though its increasing economic interest in the region will nevertheless oblige India to play a more prominent role, particularly in the event that China "flexes its muscles" in the region, India is an unlikely alternative candidate to the U.S. in playing a dominant military role in the region.

## Australia

It may seem surprising to a casual observer that Australia is considered one of the major powers that could have an interest in the region.<sup>37</sup> A predominantly white society, Australia is both culturally and ethnically poles apart from all Southeast Asian countries. Yet a 1989 decision to seek "comprehensive engagement" with the region formalized Australian reorientation of its foreign, defense, and trade policies toward the Asia-Pacific region and East Asia in particular, and highlighted ASEAN's importance to Australia. The growing economy of ASEAN states has undoubtedly is an important factor in attracting Australian's greater interest in the region. The East Asia Analytical Unit illustrated this importance in its 1992 report:

No industrialized nation has more at stake in South-East Asia's economic development than Australia. Arguably, too, our interests are more closely aligned to those of South-East Asia than any other OCED nation.<sup>38</sup>

While the inclusion of Australia as part of SEA is debatable, the security of the region and the security of Australia is closely related. Australia has always placed paramount importance on the maintenance of a free passage through the Indonesian archipelago, which is vital to sustaining its economy and even survival. The bilateral security arrangement between Australia and Indonesia underscores this importance. Additionally, Australia has played an active role in the Five Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA),<sup>39</sup> which involves the U.K, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Australian's threat to the region is hardly imaginable. Unlike the U.S., whose inaction could arguably serve as an indirect threat to the region, Australia lacks the military might to influence the region to be able to cause an imbalance in the security of the region. Hence, any analysis of threat on the region with respect to Australia is insignificant.

Given Australia's lack of threat to the region, the determining factor in analyzing its suitability to play a dominant role in the security of the region would be its military power. The Australian Defense Force (ADF) is undergoing a restructuring process that is centered at providing the ground forces with greater tactical mobility, and surveillance and reconnaissance systems. Greater emphasis in resources, however, has been rightfully devoted to modernizing its Air Force and Navy.<sup>40</sup> Despite this effort to broaden Australia's security horizon beyond its immediate shores with its military modernization, the ADF still lack the critical force projection means as well as a blue water naval capability to assert a significant influence in the region.

As a case in point, the recent small-scale deployment of forces in East Timor in 1999 has already taken up much of its ground forces and has stretched its limited resources. In all aspects of military capabilities, Australia lacks significantly compared to all the above major powers. For Australia to influence militarily in the region, it would need either a partnership with a major power or a collective effort with one or more of the ASEAN states. In other words, Australia lacks the ability to operate alone. Perhaps another critical factor in deciding Australia's ability to play a dominant role in the region is its acceptability by the Southeast Asian countries as being part of the region and be called "Asian". Despite its geographical proximity and the important role that Australian soldiers played in the defense of British Malaya in World War II, many have seen Australia as being in it but not quite of Asia. The leadership role undertaken by the ADF in the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) in East Timor brought some criticism from certain members of ASEAN.<sup>41</sup> This issue will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter.

In summary, by virtue of its geographical proximity to SEA, Australia's interest in the region has always been present and will increase as it seeks ASEAN economic

potential. Being a country that poses the least threat to the security of the region, Australia seems a good alternative candidate to the U.S. in playing a dominant role in the security of the region. However, its lack of military capability and collective legitimacy in the eyes of the ASEAN countries limit its ability to undertake such a role.

### Summary

A survey of the major powers (China, Russia, Japan, India, and Australia) in the region in the areas of interest, threat, strengths, and weaknesses clearly shows that there is no suitable alternative candidate to the U.S. in playing a dominant military role in the region. In the case of China and Japan, even though they may have the economic and military potential, the possible threats that they may impose on the region will not qualify them. This is particularly true for China, which is viewed as posing the greatest threat to the region in the uncertain way it would deal with the region given its accession in power and its claim over the South China Sea, as highlighted in the section on threat analysis. Russia is unlikely to play a significant role in the region. While India's gradual rise in power must be taken into consideration in the interplay of power, it still lacks the capability to play a dominant role. Finally, Australia does seem a good candidate from the interest and threat point of view. But it lacks the military power, which is by far the least among the rest of the major powers, to play the role of a dominant military presence in the region. Hence, there is no suitable candidate in view.

### Relations between ASEAN States and the Major Powers

The previous section has highlighted the interests, strengths, and weaknesses of the various major powers from their standpoint as well as the general threats they pose

to the region. It is now necessary to look at the suitability of each of their dominant influence over the region from the perspective of each of the ten ASEAN members.

This section of the thesis examines the receptivity of the ten ASEAN members of a possible leadership role by the major powers (the U.S., China, Russia, Japan, India, and Australia) in SEA. As the ASEAN member-states do not have a common view of the threats and benefits of the influence to be asserted by the above countries, the different views of each member-state of the various countries are analyzed and presented in the form of a ten-by-six matrix. The purpose is to identify any possible powers that could serve as an acceptable alternative to a U.S. military presence in the region. (The shaded boxes denote convergence of interest in which a particular country is likely to favor the leadership role of a particular major power. Conversely, boxes that are marked by a thick line at the perimeter indicates areas of divergence in which the leadership role of a particular major power is rejected or not favored by a particular country as depicted according to the matrix.)

**Table 1: Receptivity of the Major Powers' Leadership Role in SEA**

Country	United States	China	Russia	Japan	India	Australia
<b>Brunei</b>	Receptive to a dominant U.S. role in the region.	Concerned as a claimant over China's influence in the Spratly Islands.	Would be neutral to Russia's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Japan's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region.	Have maintained strong relations with Australia. Would be favorable to Australia's leadership role in the region.
<b>Cambodia</b>	Still normalizing diplomatic relations with the U.S. Would maintain a neutral stand at best.	Would be neutral to China's influence in the region.	Would be neutral to Russia's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Japan's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Australia's leadership role in the region.
<b>Indonesia</b>	Would support U.S. presence in the region as a best alternative to a complete absence of external influence, which is preferred, in order to counter the influence of China in the region.	Aware of past Chinese support for communist movement and has a hidden ethnic Chinese problem domestically. Would not want to see China gaining too much influence in the region.	While Indonesia does not have any contentious issue with India, Indonesia is highly sensitive to external influence in the regional security. Hence, Indonesia is likely to reject India's leadership role in the region.	Memory of Japanese atrocities still lives strongly. Would not be favorable to a more assertive role of Japan independently.	While Indonesia does not have any contentious issue with India, Indonesia is highly sensitive to external influence in the regional security. Hence, Indonesia is likely to reject India's leadership role in the region.	Despite the presence of security arrangement of Australia, Indonesia will not accept Australia's leadership role in the region for its proximity to Indonesia and its lack of military power. The recent involvement of Australia in East Timor has set back relations between the two countries.
<b>Laos</b>	Normalizing diplomatic relations with the U.S. Would maintain a neutral stand at best.	Concerned over border conflict with China.	Would be neutral to Russia's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Japan's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Australia's leadership role in the region.

Table 1 (continued): Receptivity of the Major Powers' Leadership Role in SEA

Country	United States	China	Russia	Japan	India	Australia
<b>Malaysia</b>	Like Indonesia, would support U.S. presence in the region as a best alternative to a complete absence of external influence, which is preferred. But political difference with the U.S. will limit its support openly.	Has a hidden ethnic Chinese problem domestically. Concerned as a claimant over China's influence in the Spratly Islands.	Like Indonesia and itself a strong advocate of ZOFAN, Malaysia is likely to reject Russia's leadership role in the region. Malaysia would however take a pragmatic stand against Russia in terms of purchase of arms.	Memory of Japanese atrocities still lives strongly. Would not be favorable to a more assertive role of Japan independently. But has nevertheless shown a greater openness to an enlarged Japanese role in SEA.	Like Indonesia and itself a strong advocate of ZOPFAN, Malaysia is likely to reject India's leadership role in the region.	Despite being part of FPDA with Australia, relations between the two countries have not been close. The recent reservation made of Australia's leadership role in East Timor by both the Malaysian government and press would speak volume of Malaysia's objective to a possible Australia's leadership role in the region.
<b>Myanmar (Burma)</b>	Would be least supportive of a U.S. military presence due to fundamental political differences.	Would be the most supportive of China's leadership.	Would be neutral to Russia's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Japan's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Australia's leadership role in the region.
<b>The Philippines</b>	One of the two treaty partners with U.S. and is looking at expanding security ties with U.S. though not to the expand of offering bases. Would be supportive to continued U.S. military presence.	Concerned as a claimant over China's influence in the Spratly Islands.	Would be neutral to Russia's leadership role in the region.	Memory of Japanese atrocities still lives strongly. Would not be favorable to a more assertive role of Japan independently.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Australia's leadership role in the region.

Table 1 (continued): Receptivity of the Major Powers' Leadership Role in SEA

Country	United States	China	Russia	Japan	India	Australia
<b>Singapore</b>	A strong advocate of continued U.S. military presence in the region. But the extent of its overt support has to take into consideration the opinion of its both immediate neighbors -- Indonesia and Malaysia.	Cautious of a perception of a "Chinese" state and will not be forefront in recognizing and encouraging China's leadership in the region.	Would be neutral to Russia's leadership role in the region.	Memory of Japanese atrocities still lives strongly. Would not be favorable to a more assertive role of Japan independently but would continue to support the U.S.-Japan security alliance.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region.	Have maintained close relations with Australia and has military training in Australia. Would be favorable to Australia's leadership role in the region.
<b>Thailand</b>	A traditionally close ally of the U.S. One of the two countries to have a standing security alliance with the U.S. Would be most supportive of U.S. military presence in the region.	Does not have negative opinion on China's influence but is concern over China's dominance of the South China Sea.	Would be neutral to Russia's leadership role in the region.	Have no adverse historical baggage with Japan, like most members. Would be neutral to Japan's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region. India's potential influence in the Indian Ocean will concern Thailand.	Have maintained close relations with Australia and has military training in Australia. Would be favorable to Australia's leadership role in the region.
<b>Vietnam</b>	Still normalizing diplomatic relations with the U.S. The extent of Vietnam's support for U.S. role remains to be seen. Would maintain a neutral stand at best.	Had been involved in armed conflict with China and has border conflict with China. Concerned as a claimant over China's influence in the Spratly Islands.	Despite Russia's renouncement of Communism, Vietnam is expected to be sympathetic toward its former ally and would lean toward favoring Russia's leadership role in the region.	Has received much foreign investment from Japan. Would be favorable to Japan's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to India's leadership role in the region.	Would be neutral to Australia's leadership role in the region.
<b>Overall Assessment</b>	Strongest support.	Strong objection and concern.	Neutral at best.	Strong concern.	Neutral at best.	Moderate support with some objection.

## Summary

When viewed from the perspective of the individual countries of ASEAN, a similar pattern prevails. Both the U.S. and Australia enjoy generally strong support albeit some bilateral issues that exist with individual country. For the U.S., the obvious case is between the U.S. and Myanmar over U.S. government misgivings with the military government of Myanmar. For Australia, Indonesia and Malaysia would have some reservation should Australia play a dominant role in the region. The analysis indicates that most countries will have strong objection or concern over China and Japan taking a dominant role. In the case of Russia and India, the countries would be neutral at best over their possible dominant roles.

## Conclusion

ASEAN has indeed come a long way since its formation in 1967. Expanding gradually to a ten-member organization, ASEAN is better poised than before to grow stronger and exploit the possibilities in the twenty-first century. While the region is expected to experience relative peace in the security arena, there are still certain threats facing countries of the region. They are an aggressive China, conflict in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands, and an unstable Indonesia. It is clear that the SEA region would still require the presence of major powers in the twenty-first century to maintain the peace and security that is so vital to the prosperity of the region. On the other side, it is also in the interest of the major powers that peace and security prevails in the region, upon which their very own economies are dependent on. The U.S. military has provided this security for the past three decades since the formation of ASEAN. Whether it will continue to play such a dominant role will partly depend on the availability and suitability of alternative candidates in place of the U.S. But the analysis in this chapter indicates

that none of this alternative candidate exists. Whether the U.S. military will continue to play a dominant role in the region will depend on a combination of other factors that will be examined in the next chapter.

## Endnotes

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29. During Secretary of Defense William Cohen's testimony to the House Banking Committee in Feb 1988 (after his Asia trip), he admitted that the slow U.S. response to help Thailand has hurt U.S. image as a supportive leader. (Extracted from C-SPAN).

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39. The Five Powers Defense Arrangement (FPDA) was formed in 1965 after the British withdrawal from Malaya to safeguard the security of Malaysia and Singapore in the early years of independence. Part of the reason was the fear of instability brought about by Indonesian President Sukarno's *Confrontation Policy*. Since then, this defense arrangement has played a critical role in ensuring the security of the region in general.

40. The ADF has a strategic maritime policy, which has been discussed in the Defense White Paper 1994 and Strategic Review 1997, published by the Australian Department of Defense. These documents drive Australian defense planning for procurement and have emphasis the sea and air gaps between Australia and Indonesia as critical to the safety of Australia from an incursions.

41. Following the Australian leadership in commanding the UN peacekeeping forces in East Timor, there was criticism in quarters of the ASEAN community over Australian's perceived aggressive foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region. A Malaysian opposition leader was cited as saying "The burial of the Howard Doctrine of Australia as the deputy sheriff in Asia to the U.S. as global policeman should be a lesson to the Australian government that it has not yet developed the mind-set to be accepted as an Asian nation." Extracted from the article "Australia softens tone of assertive Asia policy", *The Straits Times Interactive*, dated 29 Sep 1999.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE FUTURE OF U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN SEA

#### Introduction

For several decades, the presence of the U.S. military in SEA has been an integral and vital part of the security framework of the region. The security umbrella provided by the U.S. has allowed the countries in the region--the ASEAN states, to sustain high economic growth and develop social and political stability. However, the confidence of this security umbrella has undergone a slow process of erosion over the past two decades. A seemingly more benign security environment and a variety of domestic factors have led to the gradual reduction of a U.S. military presence in the region.

This chapter begins by recapping a recent history of U.S. military presence in SEA. Next, it discusses the enduring benefits of maintaining a U.S. military presence in the SEA region from both the U.S. and ASEAN perspectives. For the U.S., the approach is to look at how U.S. national interest in the region can be protected and served by a U.S. military presence in the region. For ASEAN, it is to look at how the security of the region can be assured by such a U.S. military presence, taking into consideration the three catalytic events illustrated in the threat analysis in chapter 4. The factors that serve to limit the extent of a U.S. military presence are also highlighted. The analysis concludes by proposing three possible options in which a future U.S. military presence in SEA can be maintained.

### History of United States Military Presence in Southeast Asia

At the height of the Vietnam War, the U.S. committed more than 300,000 troops to SEA. With the enunciation of President Nixon's post-Tet offensive "Guam doctrine" in 1969 and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam in 1973, a long-term decline in American power in SEA seemed inevitable.<sup>1</sup> Despite the call within ASEAN to establish greater autonomy in regional security, as intended by the declaration of ZOPFAN by the founding members of ASEAN, most remained reliant on either direct or indirect security guarantees from the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s.

The U.S. has a long history of close military ties with the Philippines and Thailand. Since the end of the Vietnam War, the Philippines and Thailand have maintained formal security relationships with Washington, both bilaterally and through the Manila Pact. U.S. bases in the Philippines, at Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base, constituted American's main means of projecting naval and air power into SEA, and helped to underpin regional security. Following the closure of the U.S. air base in Thailand in 1976, U.S. maritime patrol aircraft began to use U-Tapao Air Base again in 1981. In the late 1980s, the U.S. and Thailand began creating a war reserve stockpile of weapons which could be drawn by the Thai forces (as well as U.S. forces) in the event of large-scale Vietnamese aggression from the north. In the case of Malaysia and Singapore, there were less direct and formal links to the U.S. in security terms. Military contacts were largely confined to arms sales and U.S. assistance in military training. On the other hand, Malaysia and Singapore have relied on the participation in the FPDA with the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand--all allies of the U.S. through NATO or ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, U.S. Security Treaty), to provide an indirect link to the U.S. Though not a formal ally of the U.S., Singapore has pressed Washington for a

firmer commitment to the regional security, particularly after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in the early 1980s.

The next turning point in the history of a U.S. military presence occurred in 1992 with the withdrawal of the last U.S. forces from Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines. Factors within the U.S. and the Philippines led both sides not to extend the Military Bases Agreement which expired in September 1991. For the U.S., the timing of the negotiation coincided with a reevaluation by Washington of its strategy priorities. After Operation DESERT STORM, a combination of economic, domestic, and political circumstances brought into question the strength of U.S. commitment to Asia as well as it did in other regions of the world. U.S. Pacific strategy began to examine the viability of the concept of "places not bases" (i.e., securing access rights with no permanent presence).<sup>2</sup> During this time, the Philippine government under President Aquino was dominated by left-wing politicians who were against the continued U.S. presence in the Philippines. Therefore, with the rejection by the Philippines Senate of a proposed "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Security", under which U.S. forces would have remained at the Subic Bay Naval Base for another decade, drew the final curtain to a permanent U.S. military presence in the Philippines.

The reality of U.S. withdrawal from the Philippines cast a shadow of uncertainty over the security of the region. Despite calls by members of ASEAN governments to urge the U.S. to remain closely involved in the region militarily, none of the ASEAN states offered Washington new bases for its military forces. In retrospect, even if any of the ASEAN states did offer a permanent military base to the U.S., it was questionable whether Washington would have accepted it due to the change in strategic outlook and tighter defense budget. Nevertheless, there was still not a total withdrawal of U.S. military presence from the region--it just took a different form. Singapore led the way in

defining a new scope of defense relations with the U.S. by offering in August 1989 to host more substantial deployments of U.S. warships and combat aircraft. This led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 13 November 1990 between Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Vice President Dan Quayle, to allow American air and naval forces to routinely pass through Singapore, and formalized access to facilities in Singapore.<sup>3</sup> The MoU also meant that almost 100 U.S. service personnel would be permanently stationed in Singapore, with seventy-five others supporting temporary Air Force deployments. This bilateral arrangement was further expanded in January 1992 when the Singapore government approved the transfer of the U.S. Navy's logistics headquarters for the western Pacific from the Philippines to Singapore.<sup>4</sup> Singapore's offer was greeted with initial criticism by traditionally non-aligned, Muslim-dominated neighbors, Indonesia and Malaysia. However, over time, the value of a continued U.S. military presence in the region began to take deeper roots in other members of ASEAN. In April 1992, an agreement covering the servicing of U.S. warships at Malaysia's Lumut Shipyard was signed. Indonesian-U.S. military exercises also began in 1990, and Jakarta has offered to allow the U.S. Navy to send ships to the state-owned shipyard at Surabaya for repairs.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Thailand and the Philippines continued their traditionally close military ties with the U.S. while the latter still maintaining the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines.

Hence, the U.S. military continues to maintain a foothold in the SEA region, albeit a much reduced one, since the withdrawal from the military bases in the Philippines in the early 1990s, through the use of port facilities and a multitude of bilateral military exercises with ASEAN states. The offer of these facilities by members of ASEAN has illustrated the fact that the region still views the U.S. military presence as critical to the

security of the region even though during the time of offer, the region was beginning to experience an environment of growing peace in Indochina.

### Benefits of a United States Military Presence to the United States

The U.S. "strategic interest in SEA centers on developing regional and bilateral security and economic relationships that assist in conflict prevention and resolution and expand U.S. participation in the region's economies".<sup>6</sup> The benefits of having a U.S. military presence in ASEAN can be analyzed in the way it could help achieve the three core objectives as articulated in the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS): to enhance America's security; to bolster America's economic prosperity; and to promote democracy and human rights abroad.<sup>7</sup> Maintaining a military presence in SEA also enhances the capability of the U.S. military of force projection in responding to a full spectrum of crises abroad.

### Enhancing Security

Maintaining security in the SEA region is as important as maintaining security in other parts of the world. For the past three decades, one of the main motivations of a U.S. military presence in the region was aimed at balancing the influence and threat of the former Soviet Union. With the latter no longer a global threat to the U.S., there is now a new challenge to the U.S. in the domination of the region. The analysis in chapter 4 has shown that other major powers have the desire to exert their influence on the region. Of particular concern is the future influence of China. If an aggressive China grows in prominence and influence in the Asia-Pacific, it is to U.S. interests that it remains actively engaged in SEA in concert with its emphasis on the more important interest in Northeast Asia. It is also to U.S. interest to see a peaceful settlement to the

South China Sea dispute, which involves China as the main claimant together with four members of ASEAN. A conflict in the South China Sea will greatly disrupt the vital sea LOCs through the region which the U.S. cannot afford. This will have a destabilizing effect particular on Japan, one of the strongest allies of the U.S. in Asia-Pacific, that has substantial trade and investment in the region, and whose economic well-being is closely tied to the security of the region.

### Promoting Prosperity

In the economic arena, SEA provides a lucrative market for U.S. goods and services. Besides the traditional supplies of such key commodities as natural rubber, tin, copper, and petroleum, the ASEAN states have emerged as the location for new and important processing, manufacturing, and service industries. From 1988-1993, American exports to ASEAN rose 120 percent and ASEAN represents the U.S.' third largest market, behind the European Union and Japan.<sup>8</sup> In addition, ASEAN has emerged as an important player in the Asian economy and is specifically important to key U.S. Asian allies--Japan and South Korea. The U.S. strongly supports efforts to sustain and strengthen economic recovery in the ten nations of ASEAN through maintaining an open market for Southeast Asian goods and services, as well as its support for IMF-led recovery programs for several ASEAN nations. In the years ahead, it would also work toward endorsing Normal Trade Relations with Vietnam, as well as the rest of the Indochinese countries. All these cannot be achieved in a vacuum of regional security, and this security is largely dependent on a continued U.S. military presence.

## Promoting Democracy

The third core objective of U.S. national security strategy is to promote democracy, human rights, and respect for the rule of law. There are several emerging democracies in SEA that would involve close attention by the U.S. The 1999 NSS has articulated the U.S. strategy to include “fostering meaningful political dialogue between the ruling authorities in Burma (Myanmar) and the democratic opposition; promoting democracy and encouraging greater respect for human rights in Cambodia; and, in Vietnam, achieving the fullest possible accounting of missing U.S. service members and promoting greater respect for human rights.”<sup>9</sup> Of particular importance is the U.S. interest in ensuring that Indonesia progresses toward a united, prosperous, and a more democratic Indonesia. The presence of the U.S. military is critical in achieving the above objectives. As the militaries in the above countries still hold an influential role in the government decision-making, the use of the military instrument of power by way of close military-to-military contacts plays a vital role in advancing U.S. interests in these countries.

## Supporting Force Projection Strategy

In the twenty-first century, the U.S. must still have the capability to fight and win in two distant theaters of war (MTW) in overlapping time frame.<sup>10</sup> Key to achieving this requirement is the ability to transit to fight major theater wars from a posture of global engagement as well as the ability to transfer forces from one MTW to the other. The region holds the gateway in allowing the projection of forces between its two major theaters of concern in the Middle East and Northeast Asia via the sea route. U.S. Navy (USN) and U.S. Air Force (USAF) units regularly transit this strategic region en route to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea from their bases in Japan and the

continental U.S. (CONUS). The freedom of transit through the maritime straits of Indonesia and Malaysia is central to the U.S.' strategic interests in SEA. The Indonesia archipelago, stretching 3,000 miles from the mainland of SEA to the Southwest Pacific, forms a natural bridge or barrier (depending on one's ability to transit it successfully) from East Asia, through the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf. <sup>11</sup>

#### Benefits of a United States Military Presence to ASEAN

Virtually all Southeast Asian states favor a U.S. military presence, regardless of the differences among themselves, because the U.S. is viewed as the most desirable major power to exert its power in the region in ensuring its security compared to the other major powers. While the U.S. has much to gain from such a presence, the benefits to ASEAN are great as well. First and foremost, it serves as an effective military deterrence against potential threats to the security of the region; prevents the creation of an arms race in SEA; and buys time for ASEAN in search of a common or collective security arrangement. Finally, the confidence generated from the stability of the region as a result of a U.S. military presence will play a critical role in attracting great amounts of foreign investments into ASEAN countries, as it has done in the past three decades. These are elaborated in the ensuing section.

#### Military Deterrence to Potential Threats to Security

Chapter 4 has highlighted three plausible threat scenarios that could confront ASEAN in the twenty-first century. It is clear that ASEAN alone would not be able to solve any one of them alone should they arise. The presence of the U.S. military would serve as a strong deterrent and a means for resolving such conflicts for ASEAN.

An Aggressive and Assertive China. Few countries, if any, in the world would be able to match the power of China should it succeed in its quest for superpower status. In fact only the U.S. is in the position to check the advance of China if it chooses to be aggressive and assertive in the region. The current strong U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia has already served as an effective balance against the growing power of China in its protection for Japan and Korea. A similar rationale can be applied to SEA. With none of the countries in SEA having the military capability that could match that of China, the U.S. is the only power that can balance a growing Chinese blue-water capability, particularly given China's claim to all of the Spratly Islands and the South China Sea.

Conflict in the South China Sea and The Spratly Islands. The threat of China's growing assertiveness is closely related to the conflict in the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands. But checking China's advance over the Spratly Islands is only one side of the story as four other members of ASEAN (Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Vietnam) also lay claims to the islands. It must also be noted that Vietnam is the only ASEAN country to claim all of the Spratlys in addition to China. While current disputes over the islands have been largely between individual ASEAN claimants and China, the potential for conflict among the ASEAN members is a possibility as all sides have currently locked in a situation of an overlapping claim. For example, Malaysia, Brunei, and Vietnam have claimed all or part of the Spratlys claimed by the Philippines. The influence of China aside, ASEAN would benefit to have an external maritime power mediate over these conflicting claims among the four ASEAN members. As an organization, ASEAN is not able to act decisively and authoritatively in restraining the various parties in the use of force and in providing a suitable platform for the peaceful settlement of the dispute, least to say against China. Michael Leifer asserted that the

inability of Southeast Asian nations to adopt a common position over the South China Sea would only serve to encourage Beijing to continue its policy of creeping assertiveness in the area. A U.S. military presence in the region helps ASEAN maintain the status quo of peace and restraint in the South China Sea until such time as a comprehensive agreement is reached over the conflicting claims.

An Unstable Indonesia. The disintegration of Indonesia is a tremendous internal threat to the entire SEA region. Chapter 4 has highlighted the fact that instability in Indonesia has a potential destabilizing effect on other parts of the region, particularly Malaysia and Singapore--two of its closest neighbors. The question to ask is whether ASEAN would be able to deal with a disintegrated Indonesia internally on its own. The answer is doubtful. The way ASEAN dealt with the East Timor conflict is a case in point. Despite global attention and outrage over the atrocities allegedly committed by the Indonesian Armed Forces, ASEAN seemed handicapped in resolving the situation through its internal problem-solving process. None of the members was willing to force the issue on the Indonesian government in bringing about a peaceful settlement to the province. In the end, an external body led by the Australian Defense Force was called on to stabilize the situation. This episode has raised doubts over the ability of ASEAN to resolve a security matter that has gone wrong even within its boundary. What more can be said about the possible event of a more serious national conflict in Indonesia? The presence of the U.S. military in the region will, therefore, greatly benefit ASEAN in preventing the spread of the conflict to other parts of ASEAN.

#### Preventing Arms Race

With the need to protect their economic affluence, countries in SEA have undergone a significant development in modernizing their military capabilities. The

increased national budget has also allowed them to acquire more sophisticated weapon systems. In recent years, countries in ASEAN have stepped up their modernization efforts partly due to the decreasing U.S. military presence in the region following its withdrawal from the military bases in the Philippines in 1991. Faced with a decreasing presence of the traditional mediator of peace and security, it is understandable that the individual countries would go toward the direction of greater self-sufficiency in national security. Furthermore, there is no formal security arrangement within ASEAN that would provide the synergy of the various buildup efforts. The only arrangement that involves two or more ASEAN states is the FPDA that includes Malaysia and Singapore, together with the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand. Worse still, this lack of security arrangement could result in individual members developing a false sense of insecurity. While a growing strength of individual militaries will help in deterring and combating an external threat to the region, one must not forget that there are still long-standing territorial and other historical disputes among members of ASEAN, as highlighted in chapter 4. An unconstrained arms buildup could well result in an arms race that would have a destabilizing effect on the region. The U.S. military presence is needed to provide a security umbrella over the region and prevent the excessive arms buildup of ASEAN countries.

#### Buying Time for ASEAN

Some have argued that the years spent by the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War were critical for ASEAN members to develop and strengthen themselves.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. containment policy and its taking part in the Vietnam War delayed the communization of the three Indochinese states by more than ten years, giving time to ASEAN to work for its survival.<sup>12</sup> There is a parallel situation today. Even though there

is no longer the presence of an immediate threat to the region similar to the threat posed by the expansion of communism, the region still faces the possible threats of an aggressive China, a conflict in the South China Sea, and a disintegrated Indonesia. As highlighted earlier, ASEAN currently does not have the necessary mechanism within the organization for resolving such conflicts internally. Besides, even with the modernization effect of the regional countries, ASEAN still lacks the military capability sufficient to deter a foreign aggression. The continued U.S. military presence in the region buys time for ASEAN to develop its own security arrangement, either internally or with the inclusion of other external powers, and for member-states to acquire the necessary military hardware to protect themselves.

#### Economic Benefits

Finally, and certainly not less importantly, the U.S. military presence brings about a direct economic benefits to ASEAN. The strong U.S. presence in and commitment to the region since the formation of ASEAN has made it possible for ASEAN members to concentrate on economic and social development, and to allocate a lesser portion of their budget on defense than would be necessary if there was no stabilizing U.S. military presence. A continued U.S. presence in the region allows this trend to perpetuate. This is particularly important for most countries in the region, which are currently struggling to steer back the path of economic growth following the Asian economic crisis in 1997.

The U.S. military presence also helps to instill a sense of confidence in the region. Security and investment have always enjoyed a high degree of co-relation especially in regions that consist of developing economies. It is certain that the security provided by the U.S. military presence would attract further investments into the region. This is further attributed by the fact that outsiders to the region still do not see the

Southeast Asian states being able to stand on their own without the presence of an external benign power to hold the security in the region, and this role has traditionally been fulfilled by the U.S. Should there be a loss of confidence in ASEAN as a result of perceived lesser U.S. commitment to the region, the withdrawal of capital by multinational corporations would significantly harm the ASEAN economies. A related benefit to ASEAN is in the area of economic relations with the U.S. Going by the U.S. National Security Strategy, U.S. foreign investment will follow closely where the military presence and commitment are assured. The U.S. is currently the second largest trading partner with the ASEAN countries. A continued U.S. military presence certainly allows the constant influx of U.S. investment into the region.

#### Factors Limiting the Extent of a United States Military Presence

While it is clear that the continued presence of the U.S. military in the region is mutually beneficial to both the U.S. and ASEAN, there are factors that will limit the extent of a U.S. military presence. Both parties have a part to play in this.

#### Lack of a Clear Strategy in U.S. Policy

Clear strategic thinking is the bedrock of effective foreign policy and security policy. Today, U.S. foreign policy toward SEA has suffered a general sense of ambiguity that has been allotted to Asia in general.<sup>14</sup> In the past two to three years, responding to the financial/economic crisis that has afflicted the SEA region has become the mainstay of U.S. strategy. Some have argued that the low-key involvement of the U.S. in East Timor is testimony to the lack of a clear strategic direction. This perception has also been felt by members of ASEAN.<sup>15</sup> Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. The first is the factor that the current roster of key decision-makers in U.S. foreign policy is

bereft of anyone with sustained in-depth expertise on Asia, perhaps with the exception of the incumbent Secretary of Defense. As such, the weight of the policy-making tends to skew toward Europe and the Balkans, Russia, and the Middle East, rather than Asia. Even within Asia, there is an emphasis within the Pacific defense structure on Northeast Asia. Of course, this is not solely by choice, as the loss of the military bases in the Philippines naturally focus the attention of the Pacific Command's area of responsibility on the northern portion. On top of that, the current security emphasis is centered in Northeast Asia, with the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait dominating U.S. strategic thinking. The final factor concerns the ambiguities surrounding the Southeast Asian strategic environment. There are no clear and present threats, no defined adversary, and no specific territorial boundaries to defend and on which to focus the formulation of a viable strategy in the region.

#### Greater U.S. Military Commitment Globally

The end of the Cold War has ironically witnessed an increase in the number of military deployments by the U.S. worldwide for a wide range of operations, from humanitarian assistance in Rwanda to mid-intensity conflict in the Persian Gulf. The operational tempo of the military is at its many years high as it finds itself being called to duty in distant regions of the globe. Faced with this increasing commitment of the military worldwide, the ability of the military to respond to the SEA region will be greatly stretched.

#### Downsizing of U.S. Military

The increase in military commitment is not backed by a corresponding increase in resources. In fact, in the coming years, the total active duty end strength of the U.S.

military will be reduced to 1,360,000 (down 36 percent from 1989), with 835,000 in the Reserve forces (down 29 percent from 1989). Civilian personnel will decline to 640,000 (down 42 percent from 1989).<sup>16</sup> This has a significant bearing on the regions that have traditionally relied heavily on the U.S. military for security. As the U.S. remains the sole superpower in the world, it is expected to be called on to intervene militarily in a wide range of operations spreading to the different corners of the globe. The smaller-size military will be stretched thin in fulfilling all these requirements.

#### Lack of Domestic Support in U.S.

The commitment of U.S. military resources abroad is heavily dependent on the support of the American public. The costly experience during the Vietnam War taught future American leaders the valuable lesson that consideration for domestic support on the commitment of military forces is critical to any decision-making. In the case of SEA, the ability of the U.S. military planners and foreign policy specialists to convince the American public of the value of a significant military presence in SEA may be difficult in an environment which lacks specific and apparent adversaries that threaten the U.S. national interests. Even though this thesis has highlighted three plausible security threats to the region that could have adverse impact on both ASEAN and the U.S., the danger is not immediately felt at the moment. Furthermore, as East Asian countries are seen increasingly to be economic competitors of U.S., the commitment of American blood and treasure to provide for the security of these "free riders" will come under greater questioning by the U.S. Congress and American people.<sup>17</sup>

### Lack of a Strong Common Support among ASEAN

There are hindrances within ASEAN that limit the extent of a U.S. military presence in SEA. ASEAN as a whole has not been able to present a clear desire for a permanent U.S. military presence in the region as much as it is not obvious that everyone desires a dominant role by the U.S. in the region. This polarity of views was already evident back in the days when the closure of the military bases in the Philippines was being discussed. Indonesia and Malaysia are highly sensitive to external influence in the region while Thailand, Singapore, and Brunei are more receptive and supportive of a dominant U.S. role in the region. However, their preference is often tempered by the sensitivities of China, as well as the less enthusiastic Southeast Asian countries.

### Options for Future United States Military Presence

The thesis has established the fact that the presence of U.S. military in the SEA is necessary in the twenty-first century. This presence is necessary to answer the possible threats that could arise in the region as illustrated in the three catalytic events. More importantly, ASEAN itself is not ready and capable of taking on an independent security role without the assistance of a suitable external power. Both the U.S. interest and ASEAN will benefit from the presence as both have done in the past. But at the same time, there are also factors that threaten to limit the extent of a U.S. military presence as highlighted in the previous section. There is, therefore, a need for a range of options available that would satisfy the need for such a presence without over-demanding the resources that the U.S. is able to commit.

The ensuing section will present three possible options for future U.S. military presence, namely status quo, increased presence, and surrogate presence. For each option, the FAS test<sup>18</sup> of feasibility, adequacy, and supportability of it to deal with three

catalytic events identified in the threat analysis in chapter 4 will be evaluated. The criterion of feasibility is to examine whether the options are feasible based on the anticipated resource available to the U.S. military. In terms of adequacy, the ability of the options to deter and defend against the three threat scenarios will be examined. For supportability, the aim is to look at whether the options will be able to gain U.S. domestic support as well as that of the ASEAN states. A comparison will be made of the options.

### Status Quo

The first option is to maintain the current status quo of port access agreements, military training and education programs, and other bilateral and multilateral security-related frameworks. In this option, the current security treaties that the U.S. has with Thailand and the Philippines will be maintained, while efforts will be made to continue the right to port access in the remaining ASEAN states. Of significant development is the future access to a new pier facility at Changi, Singapore, that can accommodate a U.S. aircraft carrier, which will greatly facilitate U.S. carrier operations in the region. Many would argue that this is about the lowest level of military presence that the U.S. should commit in the region in deterring and defending against the possible threats.

Feasibility. The current level of commitment does not require a permanent forward military presence in the region. The military forces would have to come from bases in Northeast Asia or Hawaii, where the Headquarters of the Pacific Command (PACOM) is located. It is reasonable to say that this option will be feasible in terms of resources as it is only tapping on the existing resources that PACOM has already committed in the Asia-Pacific region.

Adequacy. As mentioned earlier, the current level of U.S. military presence is causing some degree of apprehension among some ASEAN states especially when

viewed against the increasing influence of China. Should China decide to extent its influence in the region, the current level of military presence will not be adequate in deterring and defending against it. The same argument can be made in the case of a conflict in the South China Sea involving part or all of the claimants. In particular, the lack of a more prominent U.S. military presence in the area, serving as an effective deterrence or mediator, has seen the gradual encroachment of Chinese presence in the various islands as well as by the other claimants, albeit to a lesser extent. In terms of Indonesia, the recent crisis in East Timor may be an indicator that the current level of U.S. military presence is inadequate to deal with a more serious situation in which a nation-wide unrest should occur in Indonesia.

Supportability. There is no doubt that both the U.S. and ASEAN will support the current level of commitment. For ASEAN, the rhetoric of both supporters of a U.S. military presence and those cautious of it seems to find its balance at the current level of presence. For the U.S., as long as the military presence in Northeast Asia can be justified to the American people, the current level committed to SEA will be supportable, as it is merely a natural extension of the former.

#### Increased Presence

This option proposes an increase in the U.S. military presence in the region, beyond the current level of regular port visits to the various regional countries. It calls for a forward force presence in a permanent base. The intention is to maintain a more prominent footprint in the region during peacetime for greater deterrence effect. However, it does not mean going back to the level of military presence the U.S. had in Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base before 1991. It could comprise a force level of up

to about a carrier battle group or equivalent. The specific details of the force required would be the subject of a separate study.

Feasibility. The U.S. Navy currently has twelve aircraft carrier groups deployed around the face of the earth. The requirement for an additional carrier group represents an increase of almost ten-percent of the current naval resource. With none of the existing commitments likely to be reduced, due to the greater worldwide involvement of the U.S. military, additional defense resources will be needed. In a time of draw-down across the board, this would be difficult to justify to the U.S. Congress, especially in the face of a lack of an immediate threat to the security of the region and that of U.S. national interests in the region.

Adequacy. This option of a strong military presence by the U.S. will serve as an effective deterrence against possible Chinese aggression in the region. Despite the growing naval capability of the PLA, it still has some way to go before it could acquire a blue-water capability to allow it to effectively influence the region. The value of a strong naval presence will also go a long way in maintaining the peace in the conflict over the South China Sea.

Supportability. In terms of supportability, this option will be difficult to sell to both the U.S. public and within ASEAN for reasons that have already been mentioned in this chapter. Unless a conflict breaks out and threatens to sever the LOCs in the region, it would be difficult to convince the American public of the need for a forward presence in SEA. Likewise, such a presence would not go down well with most countries in the region that are wary of the extent of external influence and those that may be mindful of China's sensitivity of the U.S. influence in the region.

## Surrogate Presence

The lessons from the recent crisis in East Timor suggest a possible concept in which the U.S. military presence in the region could be achieved. The active involvement and leadership of Australia in leading the multi-national peacekeeping force in East Timor has created some speculation that Australia was acting as the deputy sheriff of the U.S. in maintaining security in the region. Even though the Australian Prime Minister John Howard was quick to withdraw the suggestion of this idea after creating an outcry from quarters of ASEAN<sup>19</sup>, there is potential for this concept to be further pursued and studied by members of ASEAN and the U.S. alike.

The central question to answer is of course the identification of a suitable candidate to allow a surrogate presence of the U.S. military in SEA to be achieved. This candidate must not only have a close and compatible relation with the U.S. but it needs the support of ASEAN states. Being a surrogate of the U.S. military presence does not mean that it is a pseudo-puppet of the U.S. Far from it, the essence of the candidacy comes from the fact that it shares a common security interest, concern, and strategy of the region with the U.S. It involves the establishment of a strategic partnership between the candidate and U.S. in the area of security. The current military commitment to the region under the PACOM theater engagement plan will still form the baseline of the arrangement. Parenthetically, the existing bilateral military relations with each member of ASEAN will still be maintained and strengthened. For it to have the support of ASEAN, it is presumable that the candidate has to come from within ASEAN, and preferably enjoy a leadership or influential role among members of ASEAN in order to obtain the necessary credibility and not to be seen as a helpless puppet of the U.S. The possible candidates that could fulfill this role are Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore.

It is not the intention of this thesis to propose a possible candidate to fulfill this role of a surrogate presence in SEA. The intention is to put forth this particular concept as a way of maintaining a credible U.S. military presence in the region. The identification of a suitable candidate would require a separate and substantial study of its own right.

Feasibility. The establishment of a surrogate presence may require the commitment of additional resources by the U.S. to assist in training and equipping that particular military of choice. However, it is not expected to be higher than that required in option 2. Furthermore, the candidate country would have a credible and compatible level of military capability with the U.S., except in areas of inter-operability, and hence the additional level of military assistance would be minimal. Therefore, this option would satisfy the feasibility test.

Adequacy. The chosen candidate must possess an indigenous military capability to deter and defend against the three possible threats. None of the countries within ASEAN alone currently has the capability to deal with a threat from China or to resolve a conflict in the South China Sea. Therefore, augmentation by the U.S. is needed for the surrogate presence to be effective as a deterrence against such threats.

Supportability. This concept of surrogate presence is likely to be welcomed by the American public as it supports the idea of regional countries taking greater responsibility of their own security and yet allowing the U.S. to maintain an active involvement in the region to protect its national interests. For ASEAN, this seems to be a good compromise between the need for a continued U.S. military presence in the region and not allowing too much of a presence that would threaten the balance of power in the region, particularly vis-à-vis the influence of China. As mentioned earlier, the chosen candidate would have the support of the members of ASEAN.

## Analysis

Of all the three possible options, the option of a surrogate presence satisfies all the FAS criteria of feasibility, adequacy, and supportability. Even though the maintenance of the current status quo of U.S. military presence in the region is the obvious path of least resistance, it is doubtful that it would be adequate in deterring and countering the three possible threats that have been identified. As for the option of an increased presence, it would fully satisfy the threat requirement. However, it faces the obstacles of feasibility and supportability at this point in time, unless the threat situation in the region has escalated to a level to generate sufficient support from the American public and within ASEAN. The logical solution is to explore the middle ground that is fulfilled by the option of a surrogate presence. Even though this option satisfies the three criteria, it still faces the challenge of identifying a suitable candidate to serve as the surrogate presence for the U.S. military in the region. The validity of its candidacy will come from it having a close and compatible relation with the U.S. as well as support of ASEAN states.

## Conclusion

The security umbrella provided by the U.S. has allowed the countries in the region, the ASEAN states--to sustain high economic growth and develop social and political stability over the past three decades. The thesis has established the fact that the presence of the U.S. military in the SEA is still necessary in the twenty-first century. This presence is necessary to answer the possible threats that could arise in the region as illustrated in the three catalytic events. More importantly, ASEAN itself is not ready or capable of taking on an independent security role without the assistance of a suitable external power. While both the U.S. interest and ASEAN will benefit from the presence

as both have done in the past, there are factors that threaten to limit the extent of U.S. military presence as highlighted in the previous section. There are three different options in which a future U.S. military presence in SEA can be achieved, namely status quo, increase presence, and surrogate presence. An analysis of the each of these three options having the FAS (feasibility, adequacy, and supportability) test suggests that the option of a surrogate presence seems to be the most promising and viable option.

## Endnotes

1. Tim Huxley, *Insecurity in the ASEAN Region* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, Whitehall Paper 23, 1993), 21.
2. Larry M. Wortzel, *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Asian Security without an American Umbrella* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1996), 5.
3. Robert C. McAdams, David S. Hyres and Carey E. Mathews, "Strategic Partnership: The Case for Singapore," *The DISCOM Journal* (spring 1999): 3.
4. Huxley, 23.
5. Ibid., 24-25.
6. The White House, *A National Security Strategy for A New Century* (December 1999): 37.
7. Ibid., iii.
8. Perry Wood, "The U.S. and SEA: Towards a New Era," in "Asian Security to the Year 2000" ed. Dianne L. Smith, *U. S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute* (15 December 1996), 122.
9. The White House, *A National Security Strategy for A New Century* (December 1999): 38.
10. Ibid., 19.
11. Wood, 123.
12. S. Bilveer, "The United States in SEA," *Asian Defense Journal* (April 1989): 54.
13. Chang Yao-chiu, *Communist China's Strategy Towards ASEAN Countries*, World Anti-Communist League, China Chapter, Asian People's Anti-Communist League, Republic of China, 1986, 12.
14. Marvin C. Ott, "SEA and the United States: Policy without Strategy," Professor, National Security Policy, The National War College.
15. Wortzel, 28.
16. Department of Defense, *Quarter Defense Review* (1997).
17. Sheldon Simon, "U.S. Strategy and Southeast Asian Security: Issues of Compatibility," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 14, no. 4 (1993): 307.

18. This is similar to the criteria of feasibility, acceptability, and suitability (FAS) taught in CGSC as a tool for evaluating strategy.

19. Australian Prime Minister John Howard sought to soften the tone of the country's foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region amid a storm of protest at Australia's more assertive stance. Howard had earlier proclaimed the Howard Doctrine of Australia as the deputy sheriff in Asia to the U.S. as global policeman following the active involvement of the Australian Defense Force in East Timor. Extracted from The Straits Times Interactive, Australia softens tone of assertive Asia policy by Trevor Datson, 29 Sep 1999.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary of Findings

For many years, the security umbrella provided by the U.S. military presence in SEA has allowed the countries in the region--the ASEAN states--to sustain high economic growth and develop social and political stability. In the twenty-first century, the larger ASEAN comprising the complete ten countries in SEA will be a stronger regional grouping and will play a more significant role in the larger Asia-Pacific region. Located at a strategic geographical location, which controls vital SLOC between East Asia and the India Ocean, the region will also continue to attract the attention of major powers. All signs point toward a bright future for ASEAN as a whole economically, despite the fact that the growth rates for the various countries will differ. Amid this optimistic forecast, there still exist some elements of uncertainty beneath this surface of economic prosperity. A number of security concerns will confront the region in the twenty-first century. This thesis showed that the three significant threats to the security of the region are an aggressive and assertive China, conflict in the South China Sea, and an unstable Indonesia.

This thesis sought to determine if a U.S. military presence in SEA is still necessary in the twenty-first century. In the course of the analysis, one of the important aims was to examine if there is a (more) suitable major power(s) that could take the place of the U.S. in fulfilling the role of providing the security umbrella in the region in the years ahead. Of all the five countries evaluated, China, Russia, Japan, India, and Australia, none was found to be suitable. While all of these countries have a vital or important interest in the region, their unsuitability ranges from the possible threats they

could pose to the region to the lack of military capability to perform the prominent military role. In the case of China and Japan, even though they may have the economic and military potential, the possible threats that they may pose to the region will not qualify them. This is particularly true for China, which is viewed as posing the greatest threat to the region in the uncertain way it would deal with the region given its accession in power and its claim over the South China Sea, as highlighted in the section on threat analysis. Russia is unlikely to play a significant role in the region. While India's gradual rise in power must be taken into consideration in the interplay of power influence, it still lacks the capability to play a dominant role. Finally, Australia does seem a good candidate from the interest and threat point of view. But it lacks the military power, which is by far the least among the rest of the major powers, to play the role of a dominant military presence in the region. From the perspective of the individual countries of ASEAN, the analysis indicated that only the U.S. and Australia enjoy generally strong support from ASEAN, albeit some bilateral issues that exist with some individual countries.

The thesis also argued the necessity of a continued U.S. military presence from the perspective of the benefits that would be afforded to both the U.S. and ASEAN. For the U.S., it would strongly support the National Security Strategy (NSS) objectives of enhancing America's security, bolstering American's economic prosperity, and promoting democracy and human rights in this part of the world. With regard to the National Military Strategy (NMS), maintaining a military presence in SEA enhances the capability of U.S. military in force projection, particularly in responding to the requirements of the two major theaters of war (MTW).

ASEAN is expected to benefit greatly from the U.S. military presence as well. First and foremost, it serves as an effective military deterrence against potential threats to the security of the region, prevents the creation of an arms race in SEA, and buys

time for ASEAN in search of a common or collective security arrangement. Finally, the confidence generated from the stability of the region as a result of a U.S. military presence will play a critical role in attracting great amounts of foreign investments into ASEAN countries, as it has done in the past three decades.

Therefore, amid the security concerns surrounding the SEA region in the twenty-first century, the lack of a suitable alternative candidate, and the great benefits that would afford to both the U.S. and ASEAN, the study argued that a U.S. military presence in SEA is still necessary in the twenty-first century.

However, the continued presence of the U.S. military in SEA is facing greater challenges in the twenty-first century. The lack of a clear strategy in U.S. policy in the region has been seen as a limiting factor in its military commitment. Added to this are the greater U.S. military commitment globally, the downsizing of the U.S. military, and the lack of domestic support in the U.S. for a strong commitment in the region--all potentially contributing to the pull of resources away from the region. Within ASEAN, there has also been a lack of ability and willingness to present a clear desire and concerted support for a permanent and greater U.S. military presence in the region.

In view of the above, the thesis proposed three possible options in which a continued U.S. military presence in SEA can be maintained in the twenty-first century. They include maintaining the status quo, an increased presence, and a surrogate presence. To facilitate the analysis of the options, the FAS test of feasibility, adequacy, and supportability was applied to each option. Even though the maintenance of the current status quo of U.S. military presence in the region is the obvious path of least resistance, it is doubtful that it would be adequate to deter and counter the three possible threats to the region that have been identified. As for the option of an increased presence, it would fully satisfy the threat requirement. However, it faces the obstacles of

the lack of feasibility and supportability at this point in time, unless the threat situation in the region has escalated to a level to justify a sufficiently stronger support from the American public and within ASEAN. The logical solution is to explore the middle ground that is fulfilled by the option of a surrogate presence. The challenge of this option is to identify a suitable candidate to serve as the surrogate presence for the U.S. military in the region. The suitability of the candidacy will come from it having a close and compatible relation and interest in the region with the U.S. as well as having the strong support of ASEAN states. Hence, maintaining a surrogate presence, by empowering a suitable country within ASEAN, presents the best option for the U.S. to secure its national interests in the region and for ASEAN to maintain lasting peace and security in the region in the twenty-first century.

#### Recommendation for Further Research Questions

The related questions that could be further studied include:

1. Who would be the most suitable candidate to maintain a surrogate presence of the U.S. military in SEA?
2. When would be the opportune time for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to develop a collective security arrangement?

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