

***Philippine Security in the Age of Terror: National, Regional, and Global Challenges in the Post-9/11 World.* By Rommel Banlaoi. Boca Raton, London and New York: CRC Press Taylor and Francis Group, 2010. Hardcover: 357pp.**

This book offers the reader a comprehensive description of the issues that Banlaoi sees as having defined the meaning of security in the Philippines. Although written by a single author, the book is actually a collection of articles, book chapters and conference papers published elsewhere between 2001 and 2007. While several chapters have been updated, the effort is limited to providing new facts or events that occurred after the original publication date.

Banlaoi begins the preface by acknowledging that following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) many longstanding issues that he refers to as “social” and “public” quickly became labelled as “security” and drew the attention of the academic and policy-making communities. He also argues that the primary reason states have focused on the threat of terrorism is to “bandwagon with American strategic priority in the global security agenda” (p. 224).

The premise contained in the title that Philippine security can be usefully defined and understood in terms of 9/11 and global terrorism ultimately serves as a self-imposed constraint on Banlaoi’s ability to fully develop an independent analytical framework for understanding the social issues that he claims actually drive the dynamics of security in Philippine society. In several of the chapters, his argument is that insurgency threats — which in several instances are conflated with terrorist threats — are actually symptoms that have root causes embedded in identity and socioeconomic marginalization of some segments of Philippine society (pp. 17–21). However, the analysis is ultimately truncated to make it fit the framework of terrorism and more specifically 9/11 as a meaningful point of reference rather than to explore those “root causes” in further detail.

The book is organized into three sections. The first seven chapters address issues related to internal Philippine security, with topics including identity politics, nation building, civil-military relations and elections. This is followed by a brief section on bilateral security issues with separate chapters on Philippine bilateral relations with the United States, China and Australia. The last six chapters address an odd mixture of global and regional security issues. This section lacks coherence. For example, Chapter 11, which is supposed to address global security issues after 9/11, includes a section on global

security issues and concerns that contains a few brief paragraphs on terrorism as a “paramount American global agenda” (p. 224), globalization as a concept, the World Trade Organization, weapons of mass destruction and the rise of China. This is followed by a section on regional issues and trends, which includes one paragraph summaries of the three bilateral relationships covered in the previous three chapters. The next two chapters are focused on maritime security issues — with one focused on the implications of non-traditional maritime security in Southeast Asia for the Indian Ocean — followed by three chapters on regionalism in Southeast Asia.

Clearly, Banlaoi is well-versed in Philippine security issues as evidenced by his description of the internal security challenges of the Philippines and institutional framework that has been established to deal with them. The extensively footnoted chapters on “radical Muslim terrorism” and local government responses to terrorist threats provide detailed descriptions of various Mindanao-based terrorist/insurgency groups and the government’s strategy for dealing with them. Although the description necessarily goes well beyond the self-imposed time boundary of September 2001, Banlaoi does describe how both sides adapted their policies and organizations in response to the emphasis placed on international terrorism by the US following 9/11. However, the analysis stops short of exploring issues such as the implications for Philippine security that result from the conflation between global terrorism and counter-insurgency, the impact of external assistance on socioeconomic marginalization, how the newfound attention on “social” and “public” issues influenced perceptions of security among different segments of Philippine society, etc. There is also almost no discussion of the New People’s Army or how the government has responded to this threat.

One major weakness is the lack of an introductory or concluding chapter to outline the arguments presented and provide the rationale for why the specific articles were chosen for inclusion. In fact, several different analytical frameworks are referenced in the book. The first chapter introduces critical security studies and the Copenhagen School as frameworks to better understand Philippine national security and identity politics, although they are not consistently used in subsequent chapters. The chapter on civil-military relations in the Philippines relies on the analytical frameworks of Huntington, Janowitz and Finer. Accordingly, the chapter includes a brief summary of military intervention in Philippine politics over the past century and highlights the importance of civilian control of the military. Oddly, the chapter does not have a single reference to terrorism except in

the title which refers to the military and democracy in the “age of terror” (p. 97). The bilateral relations chapters are essentially realist in perspective and the chapters on Southeast Asian regionalism are written from what is best described as a liberal institutional frame of reference, although Banlaoi does dabble with a constructivist explanation for understanding ASEAN.

In the preface, Banlaoi states that part of his motivation for publishing the book was that “no single book to date has been published that examines the widening and deepening scope of Philippine security” (p. xv) and that the essays are “bound by the common goal to promote Philippine security in the age of global terrorism” (p. xviii). Indeed, the volume is a useful starting point for developing a more rigorous analysis of the securitization process in the Philippines and its boldness lies in the attempt to define the broad framework involved in that process. However, its shortcoming is that it implicitly defines Philippine security in the context of external forces. The next step is to provide a systematic examination of how the conceptualization of security by various segments of Philippine society influences that “deepening scope of Philippine security”.