

***No Man's Land: Globalization, Territory, and Clandestine Groups in Southeast Asia.* By Justin V. Hastings. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010. Softcover: 256pp.**

In his bestselling paean to globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999) the well-known *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman discussed how the so-called “Three Democratizations” of information, finance and technology were transforming the way businesses and governments and even peoples were interacting with one another. Not too long after the book was published Al Qaeda terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City and attacked the Pentagon in Washington D.C. As the shell-shocked Bush administration launched the “war on terror”, observers began decrying how the very same globalizing technologies that were “flattening” the world — the World Wide Web, email, Global Positioning Systems, satellites and cell phones — were perversely also being exploited by transnational terrorists and criminals to advance their nefarious ends.

In this respect, Justin V. Hastings in his recent book offers a long-overdue and much more nuanced analysis of the relationship between globalization and the so-called Clandestine Transnational Organizations (CTOs): transnational terrorists, violent separatists, as well as “small-time smugglers” and “big-time pirates” who operate covertly across international boundaries. Hastings adopts the interesting perspective of political geography and focuses his analysis on Southeast Asia. He cautions that the ability of CTOs to effectively carry out their actual activities on the ground — whether “blowing things up”; hijacking a vessel and disposing of its cargo; or smuggling everything from guns to drugs and cigarettes across international borders — is not always aided by globalizing forces and technologies. He argues instead that globalization can well be a “mixed blessing” (p. 145) and “does not always make illicit transnational organizations stronger” (p. 169).

Hastings’ thesis is that what determines the operational success of CTOs is the “iterative interplay” of several elements: the “ideas” a CTO has about territory; the scope and nature of its “transnational activities”; and the “political conditions” as well as the geographical and infrastructural configuration of the “territory” which is the target of CTO interest (pp. 6, 42). All CTOs, be they terrorists, insurgents, pirates or smugglers, in carrying out “illicit transnational activities

by moving people, weapons and information across international borders”, have their work cut out for them in ways that are not always recognized. In essence, if the CTO encounters “extreme political hostility” and the absence of an “advantageous physical topography and transportation infrastructure” (p. 6), “modern technology abandons them” (p. 155) and operational failure remains a “real possibility” (p. 6). The key benefit of Hastings’ perspective is that it enables analysts to employ “[t]erritory and ideas about territory” on the part of CTOs (p. 11), along with an awareness of prevailing state attitudes towards CTO activity (p. 198), as the “basis for the systematic comparison” of CTOs with “wildly differing goals” (p. 11). This approach enables Hastings to meaningfully compare and contrast otherwise motivationally disparate Southeast Asian CTOs. Hence after laying out his thesis, Hastings devotes three informative chapters — the core of the book essentially — to an analysis of the evolution and operations of the Al Qaeda-influenced, Indonesian-based terrorist network Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), responsible for several bombings across the region since 2000.

A subsequent chapter is similarly devoted to the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) or Free Aceh Movement that engaged the Indonesian government in a separatist campaign from 1976 to 2005, while a further substantive chapter examines in detail the modus operandi of small-time smugglers operating out of the Indonesian Riau islands and bigger maritime piracy hijacking syndicates preying on vessels in Southeast Asian waters. The penultimate chapter brings the analysis together, explaining why although “Jemaah Islamiyah, GAM, pirates and smugglers all reacted differently to success and failure”, the “logic of adaptation was the same” (p. 177). Such logic compelled JI to transform its original Indonesia-centric focus into a “larger, more dangerous organization because it was not focused on governing specific pieces of territory”, while its “replicable cells made expansion a realistic option once it encountered pan-Islamist ideology in Afghanistan”. Following the massive regional security crackdowns after the first Bali bombings in 2002, moreover, JI “contracted again when it began to lose its support structures in country after country” (p. 177). On the other hand, GAM “did not metastasize” as it “wanted to govern Aceh”, and its international support network was always geared towards this end. Finally, “the flexibility of maritime pirate syndicates” demonstrates that they can “fail in one country and then reconfigure their support networks”, whereas the effort to build a new support network in a hostile

country may be “too much to bear” for many “small-time smugglers” (p. 177).

Throughout the analysis, Hastings takes pains to reiterate a central theme: while CTO planning “can certainly be done across the world via email, phones, and faxes” — globalizing technologies that as Hastings shows, were very familiar to JI, GAM and the other Southeast Asian CTOs — “all the email access in the world will not get the guns, explosives or drugs to the desired target” (p. 197). If extreme state hostility imposes severe restrictions on CTO movement, there is little evidence that such “impositions” can be “ameliorated by the technologies of globalization” (p. 197). In the final chapter, Hastings briefly extends the analysis outside Southeast Asia, showing that the logic of his thesis generally applies to the evolution and operations of CTOs as diverse as Al Qaeda, the Tamil Tigers and Somali pirate gangs.

This reviewer and See Seng Tan, in *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (2003) have analysed the importance of “functional” and “political space” to the capacity of illicit Southeast Asian networks to engage in their clandestine activities. Paul J. Smith’s conception of the “enabling environment” in *Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability* (2005) adopts a similar tack. Juxtaposing Hastings’ argument against such previous analyses suggests that his conception of political constraints on CTO activities in the region is perhaps too state-centric. While he acknowledges for instance that JI “overestimated” the degree of support it enjoyed with the Muslim communities in Singapore post-9/11 (p. 182), this comes across almost as a side comment. On the whole he arguably does not sufficiently recognize the very important role of popular support as an integral aspect of the overall political constraints on CTO activity. Nevertheless, Hastings’ political geography viewpoint generates genuine insights and clear policy relevance: for instance, armed with the “knowledge of a CTO’s goals and ideas about territory”, practitioners should be able to “assess whether the CTO is likely to be open to changes in its territorial aspirations”, as well as “identify countries that might be at risk for infiltration and entrenchment” (p. 209). Some readers may also question the large number of anonymous sources Hastings cites in his references. The reality is that identifying informants is regrettably not always possible due to the various constraints facing this type of research, an issue that Hastings is, to be fair, sensitive to and addresses (pp. x–xi). In the final analysis, *No Man’s Land*

is an original, accessible and useful read, and a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on terrorism and transnational crime in Southeast Asia and beyond.

KUMAR RAMAKRISHNA is Associate Professor and Head of the Centre of Excellence for National Security, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.