

***Southeast Asian Security in the New Millennium*. Edited by Richard J. Ellings and Sheldon W. Simon. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996. 234pp.**

Little in this volume, despite the implication in the title, is substantially “new”. This is partly due to the origins of the volume lying in an NBR (National Bureau of Asian Research) study in which “many” of the authors were involved in 1991–92 as a contribution to the development of the United States’ East Asian Strategic Initiative. Indeed, significant sections of many of the contributions have a rather “dated” feel: they tend to discuss elements of the transition to the post-Cold War era, rather than seek to project forward (difficult though this might be).

More fundamentally, it is also due to the increasingly evident limitations of this form of study. Regional security specialists are now more or less aware of the overall nature and main characteristics of the post-Cold War regional security environment (unnamed though it still is), and of the main influences which have the potential to promote stability or generate conflict. The scope for future work in the field of regional security seems to lie either in detailed case studies of defence developments in individual states (and groups of states), or in analysis of the ongoing practical steps to promote regional stability in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and its associated “Track-2” process. There is no need for more of these general, collective, overviews of security issues.

The aim of *Southeast Asian Security in the New Millennium* is to analyse “Southeast Asian” security at a number of levels: “domestic politics and economics; traditional state-to-state relations and balance-of-power considerations; the new multilateralism; and transnational forces” (p. 6). Following the introduction, there is a chapter on “Asian multilateralism” and then a series of country studies, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore; China; Japan; Thailand and the Philippines; and Vietnam.

There is, perhaps surprisingly, no specific chapter on American security policy, only a brief postscript consisting of the interview responses of security specialists in Asia to questions about the three central elements of U.S. foreign and security policy in Asia: security, prosperity, and democracy (the three “good things”, as Donald Emmerson, one of the contributors, refers to them).

This does not mean that the role of the United States, and its policy approaches, is entirely absent, however, as it is frequently interwoven into the other chapters. It is interwoven not only as a relevant factor in the particular analysis, but also in the discussion of the implications of various developments for U.S. policy, and recommendations on what

policy approach the United States should adopt with regard to certain countries (notably Vietnam).

Indeed, this would partially fit in with the NBR (under whose auspices the volume has been compiled) and its aim of providing information to facilitate policy-making; there is an underlying feel to the volume that it is meant to be read by people in the U.S. policy-making arena, no doubt as part of the ongoing debate about whether or not the United States should remain “engaged” in Asia. Taken as a whole, the volume could be seen in terms of its promotion of the need for U.S. “engagement”.

In his chapter on “The Parallel Tracks of Asian Multilateralism”, Sheldon Simon seeks to address the growth of “economic” and “political-security” multilateralism, mainly through a limited consideration of the development of those organizations and fora which are its manifestations (for example, the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation or APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum, or ARF). He contends that the growth in multilateralism has been encouraged by U.S. “decline”: in terms of its importance as a market (and its attendant leverage) and, significantly, in terms of its relevance to regional security. He argues that a U.S. presence alone “is no longer a sufficient guarantee of security” (p. 21) nor is the traditional pattern of bilateral security relations which America has pursued applicable for many regional security problems, notably territorial disputes. In the concluding comments to the chapter, however, he points out that because multilateralism (on both tracks) is still in its “infancy ... US involvement as a trade and investment partner as well as a security backer continues to be essential” (p. 31). The security role continues to be crucial in Northeast, but not Southeast Asia. The clear implication here is that the emerging pattern of multilateralism, in the security field especially, is not yet sufficiently developed to replace the traditional, Cold War, framework.

The theme of regional security is continued in Emerson’s lengthy chapter on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The thrust of his argument is that by the mid-1990s these three states “have begun to resemble, although they do not solidly constitute, a regional security core” (p. 36). Such a “regional security core”, he contends, is made up of “one or more adjacent states that display centrality, stability, and activity, on security matters relative to other states belonging to the same regime” (p. 40), in this case ASEAN.

The idea of these three states constituting the “core” of ASEAN is, of course, a long-standing one and it is hard to see why this status should still be described as “emerging” in the 1990s. This is particularly so when part of his analysis assessing their core status focuses on developments which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. The “core”

status of these three states since the Association's formation almost thirty years ago (and ASEAN has had everything to do with regional security in those thirty years) would suggest that the status is fairly solid and may not be as "fragile", or "flexible" as Emerson implies when he considers the implications of ASEAN expansion to include Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar for Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore's "geographic" and "political" centrality.

The idea of a "mainland-maritime" division within ASEAN, which is contained in his postulation that ASEAN could have more than one security "core", would seem to ignore the fact that increasingly ASEAN security thinking (affecting all members almost equally) may be beginning to crystallize around a single overriding issue: the centrality of China to the regional security equation.

It is the theme of China's challenge to regional stability which is the subject of Eikenberry's well-written chapter, as he addresses the question of whether or not China poses "a threat to the peace of the Asia-Pacific region through the first decade of the next century?" (p. 90). Indeed, Eikenberry's chapter is one of the few in this volume which actually attempts to project forward into the "new millennium". Basing his analysis on sound theoretical underpinnings, he analyses the nature of the "threat" China poses through a sober examination of "capabilities" (both "absolute capabilities" and "relative power", p. 91) and "intentions" (China's military doctrine and its attitude towards the status quo).

With regard to China's "absolute capabilities", he discusses China's force structure and contends that its power projection capability is still limited and that any improvements will be protracted. This view is given greater weight by his assessment of China's military doctrine, which concludes that "in the main, the doctrinal literature and training regimens of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) conventional forces simply do not seem to support assertions that China is intent on fundamentally contesting the regional security order in the near term" (p. 106). Taken together, they certainly fit in with, and contribute to, his assessment of China's overall attitude towards the status quo.

China, he contends, has been following a policy of seeking to integrate itself more closely into the international economic order whilst, in tandem, it has shown some support for a putative "international society", making it less willing to "unilaterally project its military power" (p. 109). The obvious exception to this, which he duly notes, will be the issue of Taiwan, although his chapter was obviously written before the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. Overall then, he concludes that "neither in terms of capabilities nor of probable intentions can the PRC

be regarded as a serious threat in the mid-term to Asia-Pacific stability” (p. 110).

China, of course, is not the only major Asian power which must be factored into the regional security equation. Japan, too, is important, and its “emerging strategy” in the region is the subject of Pyle’s chapter. Much of this strategy has now “emerged”, and this chapter is still firmly rooted in the period around the end of the Cold War. It was evidently written before the accord in 1996 between U.S. President Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto, which has seen the United States and Japan embark on a review of the guidelines governing their security co-operation. This review could ultimately see Japan playing a greater role in support of U.S. security policy throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Given the possibilities for potential conflict over Taiwan and the Spratly Islands, one of Pyle’s concluding comments — “The Japan-US alliance remains of the greatest consequence to Japan’s future. Asia alone is no substitute” (p. 146) — could be given a rather different meaning.

If Pyle’s chapter on Japan suffers somewhat from being dated, then Neher’s on Thailand and the Philippines suffers even more, a problem made worse by some seemingly poor editing after revision. In discussing the prospects for political stability in the Philippines, for example, he states that “in the short-run, Ramos will undoubtedly complete his six-year term as President” (p. 164), whilst a few pages later, he notes improvements made by Ramos and refers to the May 1995 elections. By this time Ramos was already halfway through his presidency and clearly past the immediate short-run following his election in 1992. Furthermore, in discussing the importance of the Spratly Islands for Philippine security, there is no mention of the Mischief Reef episode of early 1995. Significantly, all the footnotes refer to sources dated 1991 and 1992.

The final chapter, by Turley, raises a number of contemporary issues which will be pertinent to Vietnam’s security in the future. In particular, he notes the need to establish patterns of “stability and accountability” in the political system at a time when the Vietnamese Communist Party faces “reform dilemmas” that arise from the move towards a market economy and a greater degree of political openness. These dilemmas are “how to liberalize the economy without restoring capitalism and how to separate the party and state society without inviting instability” (p. 194), and they are manifested in a number of issues: corruption, inequalities, and the North–South divide. The lack of any “alternative framework” for change, he concludes, means that the present regime is likely to survive in the short-to-medium term as long as “it delivers steady economic growth, an equitable distribution

of social welfare, and suitable professional opportunities for the intelligentsia” (p. 204). The challenge for the United States, he contends, is to let Vietnam’s internal “modernization” work — moving it in the direction of the “Asian model of ‘soft authoritarianism’ and state economic intervention” (p. 213) — rather than seeking to impose “conditions” upon it for any increased “development of bilateral relations” (p. 214).

Overall, this volume adds little to the debate, especially for those already familiar with regional security issues. Its utility would lie in providing the non-specialist with a background of some issues pertinent to the post-Cold War period, although the odd basic error (for example, the Introduction attributes Southeast Asia as having initiated APEC) is a drawback in this respect. Its point of reference, “Southeast Asia” may also be a drawback. There is an argument that Southeast Asia can no longer be seen as a distinct regional security system, or complex, and that it has to be considered as part of a wider East Asian whole — an argument which is, in fact, implicit in the book as it frequently makes reference to the wider Asian region and not just Southeast Asia.

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