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# **SOUTHEAST ASIAN AFFAIRS 2015**

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# **SOUTHEAST ASIAN AFFAIRS 2015**

**Edited by  
Daljit Singh**



**INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES**  
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# Contents

Foreword <i>Tan Chin Tiong</i>	vii
Introduction <i>Daljit Singh and Veena Nair</i>	ix
Acknowledgements	xxii
<b>THE REGION</b>	
Seeking Stability in Turbulent Times: Southeast Asia's New Normal? <i>See Seng Tan and Oleg Korovin</i>	3
China's Two Silk Roads Initiative: What It Means for Southeast Asia <i>David Arase</i>	25
Southeast Asian Economies: Striving for Growth <i>Arief Ramayandi and Megananda Suryana</i>	46
<b>BRUNEI DARUSSALAM</b>	
Brunei Darussalam: A Time for Stock Taking <i>Pushpa Thambipillai</i>	67
<b>CAMBODIA</b>	
Cambodia in 2014: The Beginning of Concrete Reforms <i>Vannarith Chheang</i>	89
The Cambodian People Have Spoken: Has the Cambodian People's Party Heard? <i>Kheang Un</i>	102
<b>INDONESIA</b>	
Indonesia in 2014: Jokowi and the Repolarization of Post-Soeharto Politics <i>Marcus Mietzner</i>	119
Junctures of the Old and New: The 2014 Indonesian Elections <i>Ulla Fionna and Gwenael Njoto-Feillard</i>	139
ISIS in Indonesia <i>Sidney Jones and Solahudin</i>	154
<b>LAOS</b>	
Laos: The Dangers of Developmentalism? <i>Brendan M. Howe and Seo Hyun Rachele Park</i>	167

**MALAYSIA**

Malaysia in 2014: A Year of Political and Social Ferment 189  
*Faisal S. Hazis*

The *Hudud* Controversy in Malaysia: Religious Probity or Political Expediency? 205  
*Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid*

**MYANMAR**

Myanmar in 2014: ‘Tacking Against the Wind’ 223  
*Morten B. Pedersen*

Ongoing Conflict in the Kachin State 246  
*Mandy Sadan*

**THE PHILIPPINES**

The Philippines in 2014: The More Things Stay the Same 263  
*Malcolm Cook*

Typhoon Yolanda: The Politics of Disaster Response and Management 277  
*Lorraine Carlos Salazar*

**SINGAPORE**

Singapore in 2014: Managing Domestic and Regional Concerns and Signalling  
 a New Regional Role 305  
*N. Ganesan*

Managing Cyberspace: State Regulation versus Self-Regulation 321  
*Carol Soon*

**THAILAND**

Thailand in 2014: The Trouble with Magic Swords 337  
*Duncan McCargo*

What Went Wrong with the Thai Democracy? 359  
*Suchit Bunbongkarn*

**TIMOR-LESTE**

Timor-Leste: The Two Sides of Success 371  
*Rui Graça Feijo*

**VIETNAM**

Vietnam in 2014: Crisis with China Makes Headlines 387  
*Ramses Amer*

Vietnam’s Online Petition Movement 402  
*Jason Morris-Jung*

# Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the forty-second edition of *Southeast Asian Affairs*. This annual review is an important source of information and analysis for all those interested in developments in Southeast Asia.

The year 2014 was a challenging one for Southeast Asia. Economic growth was lower than what many had expected at the beginning of the year. This was due to the sluggish economic recovery in the advanced industrial economies, a slowdown in China, and decline in domestic private consumption and investment in key Southeast Asian economies.

On the political front, there was more uncertainty in Thailand, following a military coup during the year. In Malaysia, the government of Prime Minister Najib Razak continued to face severe domestic challenges. In Indonesia, the election of a new president from outside the traditional elites posed questions about what his domestic and foreign policies would be like. The Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) was a matter of growing concern, especially to Indonesia and Malaysia, as it attracted recruits from the region for the *jihadi* cause. Major power competition in the region was more palpable, posing a challenge to ASEAN and its centrality. Tensions in the South China Sea still remained by and large contained but China's huge reclamation projects were causing concerns in Southeast Asia and beyond.

I would like to thank the authors and the editor as well as others who have helped to make this publication possible. The chapters in the volume contain a wide variety of views and perspectives. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute. The authors alone are responsible for the facts and opinions presented in their contributions.

Tan Chin Tiong  
Director  
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
April 2015





# Introduction

Daljit Singh and Veena Nair

Southeast Asia in 2014 presented a very mixed picture. The economies on the whole were more sluggish; political uncertainty in two key countries, Thailand and Malaysia, was higher; Islamic conservatism appeared to be on the rise in Malaysia and Brunei; the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was a growing security concern, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia; geopolitical trends, particularly China's quest for leadership, were causing unease; and questions were raised about whether ASEAN would be able to rise up to the challenges it faced. On the other hand, more engagement with major powers also presented economic opportunities, foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia was increasing, Indonesia saw a successful transfer of power in democratic elections to a reformist President, and Myanmar continued on the path of reform and democratization, even though the rise of Buddhist nationalism and its implications for community relations was a matter of concern.

This Introduction highlights some of the salient themes in this volume.

## Economic Trends

At an estimated aggregate growth rate of 4.6 per cent, Southeast Asia's economic performance was below the 5 per cent average of 2013, marking the second consecutive year of slowdown since 2012, though Malaysia and Myanmar had higher growth than in 2013. The sluggish recoveries in the advanced industrial countries, the slowdown in China and declines in growth of domestic consumption and investment contributed to the more anaemic growth. Arief Ramayandi and Megananda Suryana, in their economic survey of the region in

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this volume, argue that since these factors will not improve anytime soon, the short-term growth prospects for the Southeast Asian economies were not rosy. They also point to the risks of financial market volatilities when the U.S. Federal Reserve raises interest rates later in 2015 as asset prices in some of the large economies were inflated.

On the other hand, lower commodity prices were on balance positive for Southeast Asian economies and inward foreign direct investment (FDI) to the five largest regional economies had been increasing steadily. But to ensure that this trend continued, Southeast Asian countries needed to maintain their level of economic competitiveness. Ramayandi and Suryana note that while in China rising wages were accompanied by healthy growth in labour productivity, in three major Southeast Asian countries — Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand — wages have been outstripping productivity, thereby reducing labour productivity substantially. They stress the necessity of continued investment in human capital and, over the longer term, a reorientation from the export-led model of growth to more reliance on domestic demand.

## **The Major Powers and Southeast Asia**

See Seng Tan and Oleg Korovin observe in the opening chapter of this volume that judging by the high profile initiatives it undertook, 2014 was the year of China. President Xi Jinping floated his New Asian Security Concept at the summit of the Conference on Interactions and Cooperation (CICA) in Shanghai. It portrays cooperative Asian development as the core security mantra and calls for Asians to manage Asian security, meaning without the involvement of the United States. China signed an agreement to set up the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). It vigorously promoted its “one belt and one road” initiative, the Eurasian Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road. All involve Southeast Asia, with the latter being announced in 2013 during President Xi’s high profile visit to Indonesia. In November, China hosted an APEC summit with much fanfare, at which President Xi proposed another mega-project, the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific.

On the other hand, while these developments possibly made more media headlines, other aspects of China’s international and regional relations did not go unnoticed. In Southeast Asia, these centred on the South China Sea where China was carrying out massive reclamation projects. The deployment in May of a Chinese oil rig in waters disputed with Vietnam drew much international attention and criticism and damaged relations with Vietnam. There was no concession, even

clarification, of the nine-dash line which encompasses much of the South China Sea. Meanwhile China's double digit increases in defence expenditure continued in 2014 and its navy continued to expand its capabilities.

David Arase, in his chapter on "China's Two Silk Roads Initiative: What It Means for Southeast Asia", argues that the Initiative is designed to promote China's great power status and bring the countries around China into its economic and geopolitical orbit. If successfully established, it would be a form of regional cooperation in which each country would have an asymmetrical economic and political bilateral relationship with China characterized by dependence on China and no recourse to international arbitration in the event of a dispute with China. Arase argues that while China faces many serious obstacles and uncertainties, "it is quickly advancing this agenda both across the (Eurasian) heartland and around the margins of the Eurasian land mass ... the impact of its Eurasian strategy could be lasting, and is today certainly changing the existing Eurasian order."

The U.S. actions in the Asia-Pacific in 2014 were comparatively low profile. It was quietly strengthening its alliances and pushing for a successful conclusion of the high quality Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal. The latter, an important part of the U.S. pivot to Asia, remained an unfinished business at the end of the year. Meanwhile U.S. attention was increasingly focused on the various crises in the Middle East and on Ukraine. This, together with sharp cuts, even if sequestration was avoided, in the defence budget and an inward-looking mood in the country, reinforced some perceptions in the region of relative U.S. decline. While few doubted U.S. commitment to South Korea and Japan, many wondered to what extent the U.S. would be prepared to stand up to China in Southeast Asia to maintain a balance of power in this subregion.

Yet, China's rising power and its mega-initiatives were not creating any discernible bandwagoning effect though membership in the AIIB has expanded. Beijing had yet to win any loyal follower in the Indo-Pacific region, except Pakistan. Some countries are U.S. allies or security partners, while several others were hedging their bets by having closer security ties with the U.S. or with America's two most significant allies, Japan and Australia, even as they continue to have expanding economic relations with China. In much of Southeast Asia, suspicions of China still ran deep, especially over its actions and posture in the South China Sea. China's FDI flows into the region especially to the five major Southeast Asian countries were still far behind those of the U.S. and Japan.

The U.S. and its allies Japan and Australia, on their part, were expanding their own network of economic, political and security ties with Southeast Asian

countries. Japan and Australia would be contributing more to share the military burden that the U.S. bears in preserving the Asia-Pacific security order. A major development of 2014 was the re-interpretation by the administration of Prime Minister Abe of Article 9 of Japan's 1947 constitution to enable the country to take part in collective security with the U.S. and with others important to the security of Japan. Japan was also moving to strengthen its armed forces and was proactive in enhancing security ties with key Southeast Asian states, at this stage mainly for capacity building. Likewise Australia, the southern anchor of the U.S. alliance system in the western Pacific, is providing more access and base facilities to U.S. forces, while significantly enhancing defence cooperation with Japan. Japan's air force and ground troops will soon be exercising with Australian and American counterparts on the ground and in the skies of Australia.

Further, India, under the Modi Government, has indicated more strategic interest in East and Southeast Asia under its new "Act East" policy. Although it is not expected to be a major strategic factor in Southeast Asia for some time to come, India's economic and security links with the region will continue to expand. And it too will be bolstering its security ties with America's two staunchest allies in the Western Pacific, Japan and Australia.

## **ASEAN in the Midst of Strategic Change**

See Seng Tan and Oleg Korovin argue that Southeast Asia and ASEAN are trying to adjust and adapt to the "new normal" of a changing strategic environment in the broader Asia-Pacific characterized by keener big power competition and possibly increased pressures on ASEAN. ASEAN seemed slow in responding to the new strategic dynamics. At a time when its unity and cohesiveness were more needed than perhaps ever before, its pace of change appeared relatively glacial. Its Economic Community, due to be established at the end of 2015, would be incomplete because political leaders lack the political will to address thorny issues like non-tariff barriers to trade and impediments to investments. The organization is hobbled in dealing effectively with major power pressures because of different national interests and preoccupation with domestic problems.

Yet, without ASEAN, Southeast Asia would be much worse off in terms of its capacity to deal with major power pressures. The grouping is likely to face testy times in the next few years because China may strongly assert its interests in Southeast Asia before a new U.S. Administration takes over in Washington

in 2017. Beijing feels entitled to paramount influence for reasons of history, geography and power. It is left to be seen how ASEAN's traditional strategy, which See Seng Tan and Oleg Korovin aptly describe as "strategic hedging, institutional engagement through the ASEAN-based regional architecture and maintaining a balance of major powers in the region" will fare under new pressures.

## **Domestic Political Stability and Change**

### ***Thailand and Malaysia***

There was more uncertainty in the domestic politics of two major countries, Thailand and Malaysia, than has been the case for some time.

In Thailand the elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra was ousted by a military coup. It was not clear how long the military-installed government would stay in power or even what its longer term intentions were, though some analysts believed that the coup leaders would want to be in charge during the delicate transition period to the installation of a new monarch after King Bhumibol, eighty-seven, passes away, whenever that occurs. All supporters of the coup agreed though they wanted to ensure that no future government is led by a pro-Thaksin leader or political party (something that the 2006 coup had failed to achieve). They were planning to do this through new constitutional arrangements with more checks and balances to prevent abuse of power by top office holders.

Duncan McCargo, in his review chapter on Thailand, argues that the Thai traditional elite and its supporters are "structurally outnumbered" in a country where the rural masses have been politically awakened — as demonstrated by the fact that Thaksin or pro-Thaksin parties had won every election since 2001. Hence the goals of the military leaders would be difficult to achieve and efforts to do so are likely to cause significant instability. McCargo points to the possibility of an even darker scenario: that the military harbours a deep distrust of all elected politicians, whether pro-Thaksin or not, and wants to "depoliticize" the country.

A different perspective is offered by Suchit Bunbongkarn in his chapter "What Went Wrong with Thai Democracy?" His message is this: democratic consolidation takes a long time and it has not happened in Thailand yet for historical, cultural and other reasons. The experience of recent years has shown that the leaders of a democratically elected government too can abuse power in the absence of the sorts of checks and balances that exist in mature democracies, not just formal

but also informal like an educated, informed and discerning public. Further, he argues, it was time to end the instability of the past decade and chart a new course. Suchit is aware of the risks but sees no other viable alternative. He does not think that the Yingluck government enjoyed legitimacy simply because it had won elections. To him, the fact that Yingluck incurred the wrath of a large and important part of the Thai electorate, the middle class, even if not its numerical majority, by seeking amnesty for Thaksin; and the fact that she could not maintain law and order in the months leading up to the coup, gravely compromised her legitimacy. Suchit advocates reforms, not just to the political system but also for “the strengthening of the people’s sector and civil society”, and hopes that the reforms undertaken would ensure that a more stable, effective and democratic government emerges in the not too distant future. But he thinks this is a “very formidable task ... which cannot be completed easily within a few years.”

Malaysia seemed to be moving towards more fractured and more racialized politics — and a weakened Prime Minister.

In his review of Malaysia, Faisal S. Hazis argues that the Barisan National (BN) government’s continued insecurity over its ability to hold on to power after the losses in the 2013 general election has led to an increase in racial politics and authoritarianism. Pressures from right-wing Malay groups linked to the main component party of the BN, the Malay-based United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), forced Prime Minister Najib Razak to backtrack on his relatively liberal and inclusive agenda before the 2013 general election. Inflammatory racial and religious rhetoric by Malay right wing groups continued in 2014. Meanwhile moves in the Islamic party, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), to introduce *hudud* laws in the state of Kelantan, where the party has a large majority in the State Assembly, received encouragement from some officials in UMNO as a tactic to break up the opposition PR coalition before the next general election — given the fact that the mainly Chinese-based Democratic Action Party will not accept the implementation of *hudud* by its PR coalition partner. These developments were causing anxiety, especially among non-Muslims in peninsular Malaysia and strengthening centrifugal tendencies in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak where non-Muslims, especially Christians, who constitute a significant part of the population, feel these trends violate the letter and spirit of the agreement in 1963 on the basis of which they joined Malaysia.

While there was no immediate threat to Najib’s premiership, his position had weakened since the 2013 elections and could be further undermined, depending on how the scandal involving government investment agency 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB) develops.

## ***Indonesia***

In Indonesia, the largest and most populous country of Southeast Asia, the change of political leadership through keenly contested but peaceful elections was certainly a big plus for the young democracy. Yet the strong support for the losing presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto also revealed that there is still substantial constituency for rolling back democratic reforms in favour of a “strong” central government. The uncertainties confronting Indonesia were of a different kind from those in Thailand and Malaysia as they revolved more around the kind of policies newly-elected President Joko Widodo, a leader of a different mould from the old elite from which Indonesian leaders had traditionally been drawn, would adopt and how effective he would be in implementing his reform agenda. The President was hobbled by a lack of majority of his Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) in parliament and pressures to make compromises with established elites, especially from the PDI-P and its leader former President Megawati Sukarnoputri, including over the appointment of ministers. However, as Marcus Mietzner notes in his Indonesia review chapter, unlike his predecessor, he did not shy away from conflict with Parliament and made bold decisions to fulfil his campaign promises on health, education and welfare issues.

Mietzner argues that the divisive 2014 elections would return Indonesia to its more “normal” state of politics in which the country’s long standing tensions, between democracy and authoritarianism, Islam and Pancasila, would be played out more openly again after being bottled up under Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s policies of inclusiveness and stability above all else.

In foreign policy, the initial indications were of a learning process at work, but clearly, as Mietzner notes, there is departure from Yudhoyono’s consensus seeking approach to maintain calm to a more self-interested and nationalistic stance which was manifest on issues like foreign vessels fishing in Indonesian waters and Indonesian women employed as domestic workers in other countries. It was not clear if ASEAN would be accorded the same importance as before. Rizal Sukman, a foreign policy advisor of the President, said it would remain one of the key pillars of Indonesia’s foreign policy, but not the only one, suggesting that Indonesia would be more likely to act outside the perceived constraints of ASEAN, if its national interests required it to do so.

## ***Myanmar***

In Myanmar, there was much domestic and international criticism of alleged backsliding in democratization and the reform process, including by democracy icon

Aung San Suu Kyi. However, as Morten Pederson demonstrates in his Myanmar review chapter, much of the criticism was ill-founded. For a country that had just emerged from half a century of authoritarian rule and internal conflicts, there were bound to be difficulties on the road to democratization. As the International Crisis Group said, “Bad news stories about Myanmar’s transition are easy to find. But the good news stories reflect the broader trend.” President Obama endorsed the progress, saying, “Myanmar’s democratization process is real.” Parliament performed well, the press remained vibrant, and there was growing civil space. While the military was unlikely to accept any constitutional amendment that diminishes its role, at least for the present, existing democratic institutions had continued to perform robustly, according to Pederson, “and the prospects for a freely elected government emerging in 2015 looked good.”

However, the critically important peace talks with the two dozen or so ethnic minority groups that have fought the government on and off for nearly three quarters of a century, did not bear fruit by the end of the year despite the government’s keenness to achieve a breakthrough. Pederson warns that unless an agreement can be reached early in 2015, the risk of more armed clashes and ethnic communities being denied participation in the coming elections would darken the future prospects for peace. In her chapter on the conflict in the Kachin State, Mandy Sadan provides illuminating insights into why it has been so difficult to reach an agreement with one particular ethnic group, the Kachins.

A particularly troubling feature of the Myanmar situation was the conflict between the country’s Buddhist and Muslim communities, although there were no major outbreaks of communal violence in 2014. The situation in the Rakhine State remained tense and dangerous. Elsewhere in the country, “2014 will be remembered as the year when extremist Buddhist nationalism became a mainstream political force with potentially major negative implications for future community relations”, Pederson contends. The authorities remained reluctant to take action against senior monks some of whom openly engaged in anti-Muslim “hate speech” which is forbidden by the country’s new laws. The government (and Aung San Suu Kyi) regards the domestic political costs of ruffling Buddhist nationalist sensitivities as far greater than the costs of ignoring the rights of small Muslim minorities.

### ***The Rest of Southeast Asia***

The other countries of Southeast Asia saw no major political change in 2014 and were grappling with the familiar issues of economic growth and governance and in the case of Vietnam and the Philippines, also the South China Sea disputes.



After the shock election results of 2013 which saw the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) drop significantly in voter support after twenty years of virtually unchallenged rule, Prime Minister Hun Sen's government faced strong political pressures to be more accountable to the people. An important preoccupation of the government was to recover some of the lost popular support.

In the Philippines, the economy continued to look up with growth well above the Southeast Asian average for the year as reforms were being implemented and prospects for foreign direct investment looked healthy. In the arena of politics it was by and large more of the same. One troubling feature of the year was the slow progress in turning the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro which was concluded with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front on 27 March into a draft law and having it passed and ratified. The delays allowed vested interests more scope to find fault with the agreement with the result that by the end of the year the initial high expectations gave way to concerns.

In Singapore, an important focus of the government was to address issues which had caused a decline in the votes for the ruling People's Action Party in the 2013 elections, including health care, housing and transport, and to better address the needs of the poor and the aged.

Timor Leste was relatively stable as it sought to build the institutions and the human resources to stand on its own feet after the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers and the Australian-led International Stabilisation Force in late 2012. Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão indicated that he would step down to pave the way for a new generation leader, but no leadership change took place in 2014.

In Vietnam, economic growth (estimated at 5.5 per cent) remained below its performance in the previous decade and the needed reforms were slow to materialize. Foreign direct investment continued to flow in but skills development was lacking and this could constrain future investments. In the political sphere, the Vietnam Communist Party was preparing for the next Party Congress due in early 2016. The most dramatic event of the year was the crisis in relations with China over the deployment of a giant Chinese oil rig in waters disputed with Vietnam.

## **Political Islam and the Trend Towards Islamic Conservatism**

Islamic conservatism was gaining ground in Malaysia and Brunei, two of the three Muslim majority states in Southeast Asia. In Malaysia this has been noticeable since the 1980s, partly because of influences from the Middle East, including from Malaysian students returning from Islamic and other studies there, and partly because of the expansion of the Islamic bureaucracy at the state and federal

levels from the Mahathir era to demonstrate that UMNO was no less than PAS in Islamic probity. The electoral setbacks of the BN in 2008 and 2013 made significant sections of the Malay community more insecure, resulting in more racialized politics, a turn to religion, and growing intolerance of other faiths.

Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid in his chapter on “The *Hudud* Controversy in Malaysia: Religious Probity or Political Expediency?” sees the support by some UMNO officials to PAS implementing *hudud* laws in Kelantan as part of an UMNO design to win the crucially important next general election by capturing some of the rural Malay support from PAS and by splitting the opposition PR coalition, as discussed earlier. *Hudud* has become a political tool in the hands of UMNO and PAS, according to Fauzi, who does not think that in the final analysis UMNO will allow PAS to establish *hudud* in Kelantan.

Still, the controversies around *hudud* were disquieting to many. Islamic conservatism in Malaysia in recent years has been caused in significant measure by this competition between UMNO and PAS, each seeking to project itself as more pious than the other. In view of the hundreds, even thousands of *ulama* (religious teachers) trained in the Middle East in puritanical strands of Islam by the government, many in the Islamic bureaucracy of the BN government today may not be much different in their religious ideology from conservative elements in PAS who seek to impose *hudud* laws. This obviously has negative implications for Malaysia’s multi-religious and multi-ethnic society and for the international image the government has been cultivating of Malaysia as a model of moderate Islam. It may also be providing more fertile ground for ISIS recruitment.

The conservatives in Malaysia no doubt also found encouragement from the new legislation on the Syariah Penal Code passed in Brunei in October 2013 which among other things prescribes punishments for criminal offences or *hudud* that include theft, sexual offences, apostasy and acting against Islamic beliefs. It came into force on 1 May 2014. Pushpa Thambipillai in her review chapter on Brunei says that implementation would be in stages. A greater part of 2014 was spent by the Sultan and religious experts explaining the new Syariah law. It was not yet clear to what extent the new elements would apply to non-Muslims, though it has been pointed out that non-Muslims can be punished under the system if they are party to an offence by a Muslim.

In Indonesia, as Ulla Fionna and Gwenael Njoto-Feillard show, the Islamic parties did slightly better in the 2014 legislative elections in terms of percentage of the popular vote they garnered than they did in the previous elections, thereby arresting their downward trajectory, but “the appeal of ‘Islamism’ as an all-encompassing political solution to societal problems is declining. ... The

relatively good results of these parties illustrates not so much the hold of an Islamic ideal in the electorate but rather the consolidation of their traditional patronage and clientelistic networks”, say Ulla and Gwenael. In any case the ideologies and social bases of the Islamic parties are very different and they cannot be viewed as a monolithic whole.

President Widodo is heading a secular nationalist coalition, and according to Marcus Mietzner, a number of factors are likely to make the secular–Islamic divide in Indonesia’s politics, papered over by former President Yudhoyono’s accommodationist policies, sharper during Widodo’s term of office. These include the appointment of secular nationalist and liberal figures to key positions in the Cabinet, and the fact that for the first time since 2001 the PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) is now outside the government and therefore free to push more strongly for Islamic interests.

## **Religious Extremism and Terrorism**

Sidney Jones and Solahudin note a sharp decline in terrorist incidents in Indonesia in 2014. There had not been a successful bombing in five years and the three attempts at suicide bombings had killed only the would-be bombers. This was due to a number of factors, among them the decision by some extremist groups, including the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), to refrain from violent attacks in Indonesia; weak capacity; and the diversion of interest to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). But Jones and Solahudin caution that the lull could be temporary as extremist groups in the country cooperate, compete, divide, reunite, and change strategy and tactics. There were indications towards the end of the year that the JI, which Jones and Solahudin describe as having “the most resilient membership and the best capacity for thinking long term”, was undertaking a systematic rebuilding in Indonesia, with emphasis on recruiting professionals from universities.

However, the more immediate concern of the authorities was the impact on Indonesian security of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). By the end of 2014, at least 100 Indonesians were believed to have left for Syria, most to fight for ISIS, a smaller number for Al Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda affiliate fighting the Syrian government. For a variety of reasons ISIS held the greater fascination for extremist groups and some ordinary Indonesians, though JI was allied with the al-Nusra Front. The extremists groups that had sworn allegiance to ISIS were active in promoting the ISIS cause and engaging in recruitment for ISIS. They were also prepared to use violence against the Indonesian state. The worry was that Indonesians fighting with ISIS would eventually return to Indonesia

battle-hardened and with weapons skills to give a boost to local extremists opposed to the Indonesian government. Further, Indonesians and Malaysians who had fought together in Syria could retain their bonds on return to their home countries and try to form a new transborder *jihadi* organization. On 4 August 2014, the government declared ISIS a banned organization. It is a problem that will not go away any time soon and may get worse.

## Disaster Management

Southeast Asia is known to be prone to natural disasters like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, typhoons or cyclones, and flooding. The massive 2004 Boxing Day earthquake and the resultant tsunami claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The 2013 super-typhoon Haiyan, called Yolanda in the Philippines, which hit that island nation in November 2013 caused an estimated 6,300 deaths, over a thousand people missing, and about 7.5 million people displaced. In 2014, people in the affected areas, especially Tacloban city, which was the most severely hit, were still struggling to recover.

Lorraine Carlos Salazar, in her chapter on “Typhoon Yolanda: The Politics of Disaster Response and Management”, describes the response to the typhoon as fraught with mismanagement and political tension. She highlights the issues and bottlenecks, both administrative and political, at national and local level, that blighted delivery of aid and start of reconstruction, especially in Tacloban City, whose mayor is from the same clan as Imelda Marcos and viewed as an archenemy by the Aquinos and the Roxases. Salazar underlines the importance of advance preparation and timely mitigation efforts in disaster management.

In an effort to be better prepared for natural disasters, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) deployed an Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) to the Philippines ahead of Typhoon Hagupit in early December. Still, many worry whether the region has successfully digested the lessons from Typhoon Yolanda. Although some ASEAN states furnished crisis relief in response to Yolanda, they did so on their own national accord. The conspicuous lack of an ASEAN-led response revealed the dearth of collective capability or will, notwithstanding the availability of the AHA Centre and protocols like the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), as well as the participation by the respective militaries of ASEAN members in joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) exercises.

Meanwhile, in April 2014, Singapore announced the setting up of a Regional Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) coordination centre to be based at the Changi Command and Control Centre. The offer by Singapore was first made during an ASEAN–U.S. Defence Ministers’ informal meeting. The hope is that the new centre will allow for a coordinated regional military response to natural disasters.

## **Conclusion**

During 2014 many Southeast Asian states faced serious domestic trials as well as more demanding major power attention. These domestic challenges combined with growing strategic tensions and an expanding ASEAN agenda stretched all states and ASEAN.

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