

***Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia.* By Aurel Croissant.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Softcover: 82pp.**

Due to the diverse characteristics of Southeast Asia's armed forces, as well as the complexities of political systems and levels of democratization, deciphering civil-military relations in the region is not an easy task. Aurel Croissant's monograph, *Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia*, attempts to examine the subject. The author provides cogent insights and a timely analysis of the region's civil-military relations. The monograph provides empirical discussion on the topic as well as an alternative framework to western-based civil-military relations models. In addition, his analysis provides meaningful insights into the history of Southeast Asian militaries and their political adventurism. He also highlights existing problems in the study of Southeast Asian civil-military relations, such as a preoccupation with the role of the military in democratization processes, and an overemphasis on Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand (pp. 2–3). However, his analysis of regional trends elides important details, such as the influence of the Japanese wartime occupation on the political behaviour of Southeast Asian militaries, and the impact of democratization on the business interests of regional militaries.

Rather than discussing each Southeast Asian country separately, the author adopts a thematic approach. Croissant uses historical origins, types of civil-military relations and the roles of regional militaries as points of analysis that also serve as foundations for his main argument. He argues that four factors have caused civil-military relations in the region to diverge: first, the legacies of colonial rule and Japanese occupation during the Second World War; second, the transition from colonial rule to independence and the role of coercion; third, threat perceptions during the early post-independence period; and fourth, the type of civilian elite structure and the strength of political parties (pp. 8–11). While these explanations help the reader understand the dynamics of regional civil-military relations, they have already been utilized by other scholars working on single case study civil-military relations research. Nevertheless, the absence of these elaborations will leave the reader with an incomplete understanding of Southeast Asia's civil military relations.

Among the four abovementioned causal factors, the discussion on the influence of the threat perceptions during the early post-

independence period contains some quandaries. Croissant argues that the challenges posed by ethnic and communist insurgencies in this period contributed to the emergence of soldiers who wielded strong political influence (p. 10). On the one hand, the examination of threat perceptions brings useful insights into the different trajectories of civil-military relations in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, it is important to note that not all regional states shared the same experience. For example, Thailand did not face a significant threat of state disintegration from secessionist movements compared to Indonesia and Myanmar. The Thai military nevertheless displayed the same symptoms of praetorian behaviours like their Indonesian and Burmese counterparts. Moreover, the monograph shows an inconsistency in describing the issue of Thailand's southern insurgency. While Table 3 (p. 20) acknowledges the existence of class-based insurgencies, Table 7 (p. 62) describes the opposite. There is, however, no explanation for this discrepancy. The monograph's attempt to cover many possible elements of civil-military relations severely restricts detailed discussion of each one. For instance, the section on "The Impact of Japanese Occupation" only provides a description of how Japan's invasion of Southeast Asia during the Second World War altered Southeast Asia militaries organizationally, but does not elaborate on how this shaped their political behaviours (pp. 15–17).

In terms of differentiating Southeast Asia militaries, unlike other authors, Croissant does not classify them based on their origins e.g. revolutionary, formed by civilian administrations, etc. Instead, he classifies them based on those militaries relations with their civilian counterparts—praetorian, revolutionary, professional and patrimonial (pp. 26–45). This classification also acknowledges variations in civil-military relations during different periods in each country. For example, Croissant puts pre-socialist Laos in the praetorian category but socialist Laos in the revolutionary group. Although this identification gives a clearer picture of civil-military relations in Southeast Asia, Croissant's classification may not be able to explain the vibrant elements surrounding military engagement in the political arena, notably the need to protect their corporate interests. The current status of the Indonesian armed forces is a good example of how this categorization fails to provide a comprehensive explanation. While showing a commitment towards professionalism, the Indonesian military is also attempting to preserve its past privileges, notably its heavy involvement in internal security issues.

Croissant goes on to discuss the divergent roles of Southeast Asian militaries compared to their Western counterparts, primarily the way militaries in the region perceive their primary threats (p. 45). The region's militaries largely perceive safeguarding internal and regime security as their primary focus, unlike Western armed forces which see defeating threats from foreign adversaries as their basic mission. The author looks at the armed forces' contributions to nation building, organizational types, political influence, their role in political transitions and business activities (pp. 45–60). Acknowledging both continuities and changes in regional civil-military relations, Croissant concludes by arguing that despite the fact that there are fewer military regimes in Southeast Asia, this has not necessarily been accompanied by improved civilian oversight: “democratic reform processes in Southeast Asia did *not* create democratic civil-military relations in which the armed forces are fully under political control of democratically legitimized authorities” (pp. 67–69).

The short length of this monograph (82 pages) comes at the cost of detailed analysis. Nevertheless, this book makes an important contribution to the literature on civil-military relations in Southeast Asia, especially as the author treats the issue thematically rather than by adopting the usual country-by-country approach. The monograph thus serves as a crucial backgrounder for those wishing to learn about the dynamics of civil-military relations in Southeast Asia.

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