

## Book Reviews

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***Indonesia's Transformation and the Stability of Southeast Asia.* By Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk.** Santa Monica, California, USA: Rand, 2001. 115pp.

This little book, just over a hundred pages, published earlier in 2001 before the events of 11 September, seeks to draw the attention of American policy-makers to the importance of Indonesia, and Southeast Asia, to American interests. It is also an excellent introduction, especially for the non-specialist reader, to recent developments in Indonesia.

In the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, Indonesia and Southeast Asia were relegated to relatively minor importance in the American scheme of things. For instance, during the 1998-99 economic and political meltdown of Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country and the key player in ASEAN, official Washington seemed interested only in the democratization of the country and the observance of human rights. It is not that these were not important. They were and still are, but it was almost a unidimensional perspective, so much so that one got the impression that the Clinton Administration would not consider vital U.S. interests threatened if Indonesia disintegrated or descended into chaos. In this context, *Indonesia's Transformation and the Stability of Southeast Asia* is most welcome in that it looks at the importance of Indonesia — and Southeast Asia — in geopolitical terms. Events since 11 September 2001 only reinforce this importance, given the enhanced need to move military forces between the Indian and Pacific Oceans through the sea-lanes of Southeast Asia in support of operations in Central and South Asia. At a time when China looms large in the geoeconomics and geopolitics of the region, it is good to be reminded

that Southeast Asia has a population of over 500 million, almost half that of China.

The book explains the weakening of ASEAN's ability, from the second half of the 1990s, to manage and counter security threats in Southeast Asia even as threats such as political instability, ethnic and religious conflict, separatist movements, illegal migration, narcotics, and environmental degradation have grown. The key role of Indonesia in ASEAN is appropriately highlighted. However, there may be oversimplification in the claim that, "Over the last three decades, Southeast Asia evolved as a loose security community under Indonesian leadership" (p. 3). ASEAN was a loose security community consisting of most, but not all, of Southeast Asia — Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, comprising over 120 million people, were not part of ASEAN until the latter half of the nineties. Furthermore, Indonesian "leadership" was more implicit than explicit — it being regarded more as the first among equals. Indeed, several important ideas and initiatives in ASEAN in the 1980s and 1990s originated with other members, especially Thailand and Singapore, though it would be true that none of them would probably have gone through without Indonesia's prior assent.

The book argues that a weak, unstable Indonesia unable to deal with its multifaceted problems could slide into one of a number of downside scenarios which will be against U.S. interests, including disintegration or the emergence of a regime with radical Islamic and anti-Western orientation. However, it may be worth noting here that at present Islam in Indonesia is still mostly moderate, as exemplified by the Nahdatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah, the two largest Muslim organizations in the country. Democratization and economic-cum-social distress may offer opportunities for the more radical groups to advance their cause. Still, the coming into power of a more Islam-oriented government will not necessarily be the beginning of a slide towards a radical anti-Western government. The United States and Southeast Asia will have to learn to live with the former possibility as one outcome of democratization.

The authors also argue that an unstable Indonesia and Southeast Asia would provide opportunities for the rising power in Asia, China, to expand its influence into the region and upset the regional status quo, making it more difficult for the United States to maintain a security balance in the region. Taking a long-term view, beyond this decade, this proposition is probably valid. However, for the short and medium terms, a qualification may be in order. During the first decade of this century, China is likely to be so preoccupied with domestic developments and modernization, that it may well prefer the maintenance of

the status quo in Southeast Asia. It would probably want to avoid new tensions with the United States, not to mention, from Beijing's perspective, that instability in the region may provide the United States with fresh opportunities to strengthen its own position, including possible acquisition of new military base facilities.

On the other hand, according to the authors, a strong, stable and democratic Indonesia could "resume its leadership role in ASEAN, further regional integration on democratic principles, contribute to maintaining stability in Southeast Asia and deter potential Chinese adventurism" (p. 99). Such an Indonesia would also make it easier for Washington, in the context of domestic U.S. politics, to provide Jakarta with substantial economic, political, and military support. However, the authors assess that, despite some hopeful signs, the prospects of democratic consolidation being achieved under Abdurrahman Wahid, or under a Megawati government, are not bright: "Indonesia's prospects for the short to medium term (one to three years) are for a continuation of weak governments and worsening of security conditions in provinces experiencing separatist or communal violence. Over the longer term, barring a lasting upturn in the economy or a workable agreement with disaffected provinces, the odds may be better than even for one or more of the downside scenarios ... to come to pass" (pp. 75–76).

These downside scenarios include variants of military rule; return to authoritarian civilian rule (not likely to be stable in the post-Soeharto environment); a regime with a greater Islamic orientation; and disintegration. It is a dismal menu for the authors, except for one of the three variants of military rule, namely the so-called Turkish model of military rule of limited duration and goals, presumably to restore some stability and economic growth, with eventual return to civilian government. The other two variants would be the Pakistani model (that is, before President Pervez Musharraf changed it into something more akin to the Turkish model) where the military formed an alliance with radical Muslim forces, and the Myanmar model of repressive open-ended military rule — both of which would be unsustainable, leading to Islamism or disintegration scenarios.

The Turkish model is described as a "military-technocratic government that preserves the balance between the secular and the Islamic factions in the TNI" (p. 72), with economic policy-making in the hands of non-political technocrats. This type of government could become more attractive to Indonesians if the present democratic order does not succeed in improving stability or reviving the economy, though, to the authors of this book, it would be the second best alternative to democratic consolidation. They are concerned that likely adverse U.S. and Western reactions to such a development, including

pressures on Indonesia to return to democracy, could produce a backlash against the United States not only in Indonesia but also in other states of Southeast Asia for whom the restoration of stability and the revival of the economy in Indonesia are clearly the foremost priorities. While this might have been a worry in 2000 and early 2001, one wonders how serious a concern it would be today in view of the changed mood in the U.S. political establishment after 11 September 2001. Support, or lack of it, for the U.S.-led anti-terrorist campaign has now become the most important factor in gauging U.S. relations with other countries. The point is well illustrated by the contrast between Washington's current impatience with Indonesia's lack of action against Indonesian extremists linked to international terrorism and its satisfaction with the actions of Malaysia and Singapore, which used the Internal Security Act to detain without trial their own extremists linked to the al-Qaeda network.

Having argued the case for Indonesia's importance to U.S. interests in Asia, the authors advance suggestions for American policy-makers in the last chapter. These include working with Japan, regional allies, and international financial institutions to provide Indonesia with the resources needed to help overcome its many crises; engaging the Indonesian military and building up Indonesia's defence capabilities, especially in the field of air transport; building a constructive Indonesian role in regional security and establishing a closer U.S.-Indonesia defence relationship including eventual access and basing arrangements for U.S. military forces.

Arguably, all the above measures would be in the interest of the region in so far as they help stabilize Indonesia and Southeast Asia, consolidate a U.S. presence in the region and enhance regional security co-operation without alienating or isolating China with whom Southeast Asia seeks co-operative engagement within the framework of a balance of power underpinned by the American presence. The problem will be to make it work, given the unhealthy mixture in Indonesia of effete institutions, poor governance, strong nationalism, the proclivity of its armed forces to human rights violations, and a persistent sense of a proprietary role in Southeast Asia.

Where does one even begin? Perhaps the first priority should be to help the Indonesians put their own house in order by not only reviving the economy but also improving national institutions and governance, including the conduct of the armed forces.

*Indonesia's Transformation and the Stability of Southeast Asia* also provides a balanced, well-researched and succinct analysis of political developments from the fall of Soeharto to the later part of the Wahid government; events leading to the East Timor crisis and its

consequences; the separatist challenges in Aceh and Irian Jaya; and ethnic and religious violence in Eastern and Central Indonesia and in Kalimantan; the changes within the Indonesian military since the fall of Soeharto; and the challenges of decentralization. There is also a useful chapter on the Muslim separatist movements in the Philippines and Thailand. The value of much of this writing is unaffected by the events since 11 September 2001. The authors must be commended for putting so much useful information and analysis into so few pages.

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***Malaysia: Mahathirism, Hegemony and the New Opposition.* By John Hilley. London & New York: Zed Books, 2001. 305pp.**

John Hilley's book on Mahathir and the Malaysian leader's construction of a number of hegemonic identities in the course of his leadership of the country and the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) is a theoretically sophisticated and articulate rendition of Malaysian politics in the last two decades from a Gramscian perspective. The book is thoughtful, meticulously researched, and coherently delivered.

Divided into nine chapters and an appendix that clarifies the Gramscian terms used, the book takes the reader through the various forces that shaped Mahathir's early thinking on Malay motivations and inadequacies, including the early challenges that he had posed to Tunku Abdul Rahman (Malaysia's first prime minister) and UMNO. It then traces how Mahathir assumed political power in 1981 and set about the task of fashioning an all-inclusive Gramscian-styled hegemony that covered the political, ideological, and economic spheres. There is also a sophisticated treatment of what social forces and agencies were utilized to shape this hegemonic discourse and the challenges that the hegemony faced.

Mahathir's early motivations and vision are described as a "... reformist, growth-driven agenda conducive to modern Islamic thinking; one that would give impetus to bumiputera competitiveness and lift Malays out of their 'dependent' socio-economic condition" (p.50). The very early engines of *bumiputera* economic upliftment that had obtained from the New Economic Policy (NEP) "... was now being constrained by the reluctance of Malays and Malay capital to compete in a more open-market environment" (p.50). In response to this ethnic