

## BOOK REVIEWS

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***Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror.* By Zachary Abuza.** Boulder, Colorado, USA & London: Lynne Rienner, 2002. 279pp.

The terrorist attacks on the Indonesian island resort of Bali on 12 October 2002 confirmed that Southeast Asia had become an important front in the war on terror. While Al-Qaeda absorbed the attention and energies of American and Western security and intelligence agencies globally in the wake of the horrifying terrorist attacks on September 11 2001, for many analysts Bali heralded the lethal emergence of militant Islam in Southeast Asia, as exemplified by Jemaah Islamiyah. Since the Bali attacks, a number of articles and books have been published examining the nature and extent of the militant Islamic threat in the region, and Zachary Abuza's *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia* falls within this category. Abuza actually started out studying Vietnamese politics, and in fact has a previous book on the subject, entitled *Renovating Politics in Contemporary Vietnam* (Lynne Rienner, 2001). Nevertheless, driven evidently by a burning desire to come to grips with the question of how militancy could emerge amongst regional Islamic communities well known for their tolerance and openness, Abuza has extensively researched the issue to produce *Militant Islam*.

Abuza unpacks his argument in a well-structured, systematic fashion. In the first chapter he summarizes the origins and structure of Al-Qaeda and shows how the network was able to exploit regional governance weaknesses and penetrate Southeast Asia ideologically, logistically and financially. The next chapter then makes the very important point that even before Al-Qaeda arrived, Southeast Asian

countries “each had vast socioeconomic disparities, historical animosities, lingering insurgencies, bouts of sectarian conflict, and political disenfranchisement”. Hence Al-Qaeda “did not simply arrive in the region and establish a network from scratch”. Rather, existing indigenous grievances were exploited. Abuza puts it pithily when he argues that the “historical roots of militant Islam are not new in the region, but their links to international terrorist groups are” (p. 81). Chapter Three traces in helpful detail how Al-Qaeda established an enduring presence in the Philippines. Indeed, Abuza’s view is that the Abu Sayyaf and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are less dangerous than “the continued presence of independent cells of Al-Qaeda operatives networking with counterparts throughout the region” (p. 114). Abuza even castigates Washington’s apparent obsession with wiping out the Abu Sayyaf while apparently ignoring the greater threat emanating from Al-Qaeda’s continued penetration of the Philippines.

The following chapter then provides the reader with a detailed survey of the origins, evolution and development of Jemaah Islamiyah (Al-Qaeda’s regional arm according to Abuza) across the region, especially in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. Abuza shows how JI evolved, under Al-Qaeda tutelage, into a terrorist network espousing a similar virulent anti-American, anti-Western global jihad mindset, and traces the events culminating in the Bali attacks of October 2002. The chapter is also interesting for the light it sheds on the ideological motivations of JI militants such as Imam Samudra, recently sentenced to death for his role in the Bali bombing, as well as the analysis of the role of the little-known Rabitatul Mujahidin (League of Mujahidin) in acting as a “focal point for co-ordinating activities between Al-Qaeda, JI/MMI, and Al-Qaeda cells in Myanmar, Aceh, and Thailand” (p. 176). Abuza next turns to an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) governments in combating the militant Islamic threat. He is not encouraged. He concludes that the response of the governments of Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand has been uneven, and that there have been two main problems hindering a more uniform, aggressive thrust: first, “every country in the region has responded to the war on terror in ways that serve their immediate political objectives” (p. 224). Second and more fundamentally, Muslims in Southeast Asia, especially since the Iraq war, “in general, believe that the war on terror is patently anti-Muslim” (p. 190).

In his sixth and final chapter, Abuza stresses six key points: first, despite a great deal of success in disrupting Al-Qaeda, the network

remains far from neutralized. It is after all a “fluid organization with an uncanny ability to recruit, indoctrinate, and reconstitute itself”. Abuza adds that Southeast Asia will be “an important theater of operation for it in the coming years” (p. 231). Second, Southeast Asian governments will continue to be hindered from mounting a more aggressive assault on militant Islam because of a lack of resources, intra-state bureaucratic rivalries and a tendency to take a short-term view of counter-terrorism cooperation. Third, while ASEAN remains the appropriate venue for a “multilateral effort to fight terrorism” (pp. 231–32), it has, ever since the 1997/98 financial crisis and the expansion of membership, been a weakened, less nimble organization and this fact is bound to impact on counter-terrorism efforts. Fourth, the war on terror has had the very important effect of U.S. re-engagement with Southeast Asia. Abuza observes a “growing sense in the United States that it could not afford to lose sight of a region that is very dynamic and increasingly volatile again” (p. 253). Fifth, because terrorism, according to Abuza, “results from a lack of political freedom” (p. 232), it is critical that regional governments, despite patchy human rights records, strive to fight terrorism without further restricting political space in their societies. In this respect, Abuza avers that the United States unfortunately “lost the moral high ground with regards to human rights” after it established the Guantanamo Bay internment camp where “Al-Qaeda suspects have been detained without due process, any legal rights, or trial in sight” (p. 255). Finally, political space is important not merely as an end in itself but also as the means by which moderate Muslims and secular nationalists can take the ideological battle to the militant Islamists. In order for the long-term threat of militant Islam to be nullified, moderate Muslims must be able to provide a definite answer to the burning question: “Can one be an Islamist without becoming a jihadist?” (p. 27).

The fact that the author is approaching the subject of militant Islam in Southeast Asia from a counter-terrorism perspective rather than a pure area studies lens is evident. According to some observers such as the Indonesian journalist Solahudin, *Militant Islam* is weakened considerably by Abuza’s lack of familiarity with Islam, Arabic, Indonesian and Malay. It may be too harsh, however, as Solahudin does, to call the entire thesis of *Militant Islam* into question because of these shortcomings. Abuza’s study, as long as read not in isolation but in tandem with other works, will still prove useful to counter-terrorism analysts and practitioners. Having said that, there remains considerable scope — and some urgency — for Southeast Asian area studies scholars conversant with the fine nuances of regional politics and Islam to work hand-in-hand with counter-terrorism specialists, if only to bring analyses

like Abuza's to the next level of detail and sophistication. The war on terror in Southeast Asia can only benefit from such a long overdue strategic partnership.

KUMAR RAMAKRISHNA  
*Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies*  
*Nanyang Technological University*  
*Singapore*

***Globalisation, Domestic Politics and Regionalism: The ASEAN Free Trade Area.*** By Helen E.S. Nesadurai. London and New York: Routledge, 2003. 226 pp.

Published as a doctoral dissertation completed in 2001, this book is not only unique in its conceptual insights as noted in the Preface, but timely as a well-researched and authoritative contribution to the literature on ASEAN in general, and the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in particular. Conceptually, the book plugs the gap between extant literature on ASEAN and AFTA written mainly by economists and somewhat atheoretical as noted by the author (p. 5). It is also conceptually innovative in the book's explicit consideration of domestic-owned capital as a key analytical variable in explaining the globalization-regionalism relationship in the context of ASEAN regionalism (Preface, p. viii).

The aim of the book posed as research questions clarifies the reasons for AFTA's birth and origins, why AFTA is discriminatory to foreign investors relative to ASEAN national investors, and assesses the complicated political economy of the implementation process (pp. 3–5). The book has accomplished its primary purpose to provide a coherent account of AFTA between 1991 and 2001 under the international political economy and globalization–regionalism framework.

Organized in six chapters with a Conclusion, the book starts with a succinct survey of approaches to regionalism, from neoclassical to political economy, even drawing on comparative regionalism as in the North American Free Trade Agreement and European Union. Chapter 1 on the theoretical relationship between globalization and economic regionalism is clear about the primacy of globalization, but provides the liberal political economy approach of open regionalism realistically modified by the legitimacy of domestic politics in terms of domestic