



From Konfrontasi to Disintegrasi : ASEAN and the Rise of Islamism in Southeast Asia

David Martin Jones & Mike Lawrence Smith

To cite this article: David Martin Jones & Mike Lawrence Smith (2002) From Konfrontasi to Disintegrasi : ASEAN and the Rise of Islamism in Southeast Asia, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 25:6, 343-356, DOI: [10.1080/10576100290101250](https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100290101250)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100290101250>



Published online: 07 Jan 2011.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 337



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)



From *Konfrontasi* to *Disintegrasi*: ASEAN and the Rise of Islamism in Southeast Asia

DAVID MARTIN JONES

University of Tasmania
Hobart, Tasmania, Australia

MIKE LAWRENCE SMITH

King's College
University of London
London, UK

This article evaluates the development of militant Islamic threats in Southeast Asia from the early 1990s onwards and its security implications for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The analysis contends that the extent of extremist Islamic infiltration of the region was obscured by governmental rhetoric, along with much Western opinion, which argued erroneously that ASEAN was following a unique developmental path based on shared regional values that had resulted in economic growth and political stability. However, by ignoring underlying religiously motivated tensions within and among its membership, and by refusing to countenance mature debate about them within their societies, ASEAN has succeeded only in incubating its potential nemesis.

Those who argued that history had not ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union felt sadly vindicated by September 11 and its aftermath. Opinion-formers who once assumed that both economic globalization and liberal democracy were dialectically entwined now concluded that Al Qaeda and its network of global terror might represent Western civilization's potential apocalypse. Despite the new revisionist mood, relatively little academic and media attention has been devoted to the rise of militant Islam in Southeast Asia and the challenge it poses to the once fashionable Asian way of development and the shared Asian values it celebrated.

Although international attention during the 1990s focused on the explosion of ethnic wars in the Balkans, Transcaucasia, and Rwanda, Southeast Asia was, in the minds of regional observers, following a developmental road less traveled. For it was a region registering prodigious growth rates while experiencing political stability.¹ Indeed, the

Received 9 April 2002; accepted 28 May 2002.

Address correspondence to Dr. Mike L. Smith, Department of War Studies, King's College, University of London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, U.K. E-mail: mike.smith@kcl.ac.uk

states of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) appeared to be forging their own distinctive regional identity,² blissfully insulated from the atavistic passions of ethno-nationalism gripping other parts of the world.³ In the view of commentators ASEAN provided a “hub of confidence-building activities and preventive diplomacy,”⁴ which had, in turn, facilitated “increased domestic tranquillity and regional order.”⁵

However, despite 20 years of economic growth and the self-promoting rhetoric of regional harmony, Southeast Asia has always been beset by long-standing intramural disputes that ASEAN managed rather than addressed. Meanwhile, internally, the concert of multi-ethnic states that compose ASEAN never fully dissolved traditional ethnic and religious attachment regardless of their preoccupation with nation-building. In particular, from the early 1990s, it was evident that both ethnic separatist activity and the attraction of Islamic radicalism to a new generation of educated Southeast Asians was on the rise in the ASEAN region.

In this respect, Southeast Asia represents one of the curiously neglected theaters of instability and terror networking during the 1990s and forms the core of this study. This analysis will not directly concern itself with the unresolved Islamic insurgencies in Southeast Asia. These conflicts began to receive greater attention in the academic literature as the twentieth century drew to a close,⁶ as did the region’s wider susceptibility to what some writers have termed “grey area” challenges in the fields of transnational crime that increasingly came to the fore in the wake of the economic crisis of 1997-98.⁷ The specific focus of this study, therefore, will be on the largely unexamined development of a militant Islamic threat from the 1990s onward and the implications this has for ASEAN security. As recent events in the region suggest, the challenge militant Islam represents to stability and security in Pacific Asia is far more potent than any asymmetrical threat Al Qaeda and its affiliates may pose to the West.

The ASEAN Way to Multicultural Complacency

For much of the 1990s, the leaders of Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia—the founding members of ASEAN—complimented themselves on their unique developmental formula.⁸ ASEAN’s distinctive brand of diplomacy conducted through informal mechanisms of good interpersonal relations had apparently generated rapid economic growth while sustaining regional stability among its members.⁹ For its many international admirers it represented a uniquely Asian way in international diplomacy, not to be discountenanced or modified in favor of “Western” preoccupations with rule-based governance.¹⁰ Moreover, the ASEAN formula of blending supposedly distinctive values of harmony and consensus had afforded, it seemed, a prophylactic against the vagaries of the Cold War.

Yet, so well entrenched was its style of consensus diplomacy that ASEAN demonstrated little capacity to react to the economic crisis of 1997. The Association failed to take any meaningful action to deal with either the economic or political fallout from the crisis, maintained a studied indifference to the growing Balkanization of Indonesia and conspicuously ignored the plight of East Timor. The mounting levels of regional instability failed to stir any real desire to reform its Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (1976), which sanctified the fundamental ASEAN precept of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states. Although in 1998 Thailand, supported by the Philippines, did argue for a mild watering down of the non-interference clause (prompted by ASEAN’s evident shortcomings in the wake of the 1997 economic crash) even these modest pro-

posals were voted down by the majority in the organization.¹¹ After July 2000 the Thais gave up hope of reforming the Association and there was no further pressure to end the non-interference clause.¹² Accordingly, ASEAN continues to adhere rigidly to the somewhat contradictory doctrine of non-interference in the internal politics of member states as the basis for regional cooperation.¹³

If the attachment to the “ASEAN way” seemed complacent prior to September 11, its maintenance in the wake of the “war on terror” and the exposure of a previously unknown Islamist terror network spanning across Southern Mindanao, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia has bordered on delusion. Prior to September 11, it was evident to those not in thrall to the official ASEAN philosophy, that a form of Islam deployed as an all embracing ideological program of social and political change, or Islamism, was on the rise in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, for example, a younger generation of educated radicals inspired by events in Afghanistan challenged the largely apolitical, moderate Islam of Abdurrahman Wahid’s *Nahdlatul Ulama* government, which fitfully ruled the vast archipelago between 1999 and 2001. Ironically, these Islamist groups, like *Laskar Jihad* (Jihad Troopers),¹⁴ the *Masaryakat Mujahideen Indonesia* (MMI; Mujahideen Council of Indonesia)¹⁵ and the *Front Pembela Islamiya* (Islamic Defender’s Front), only came to prominence during Wahid’s ineffectual presidency.¹⁶

Elsewhere in federal Malaysia, the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), which forms the main opposition to Mahathir Mohamad’s ruling United Malay National Organization (UMNO)–dominated coalition, has adopted an increasingly Islamist line and imposed Sharia style discipline in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu, which it governs.¹⁷ Significantly, the PAS leadership expressed sympathy with the ends, if not the means, of Al Qaeda, while the son of the Kelantan chief minister, Nik Adli Nik Aziz, is a prominent figure in the *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia* (KMM),¹⁸ formed in 1998 with the aim of creating, by *jihad* if necessary, a *darulah Islamiah* (Islamic republic) embracing Southern Mindanao, Malaysia, and Indonesia. In order to advance its cause this group established links both with Islamic separatist groups in Southern Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and with Al Qaeda itself. Meanwhile, in the Southern Philippines, *Abu Sayyaf* (Father of the Sword), a violent Tausug ethnic splinter group of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), has aggravated long-standing claims to autonomy advanced by Moro (Muslim) separatists in Mindanao.¹⁹ In the course of the 1990s, *Abu Sayyaf* not only established links with Al Qaeda²⁰ but also developed a highly profitable line in the kidnapping of unwitting Western tourists.²¹

A conspicuous feature of this increasingly violent separatism is that it ignored the ASEAN injunction to confine political activity within state boundaries. Traditionally, Moro separatists have looked both for support to sympathizers in Southern Thailand and the more Islamic federated states of Northeast Malaysia, where the popular leader of the renegade Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Nur Misuari, was recently arrested. The growing appeal of operating transnationally through globalized networks to undermine the infidel notion of the secular nation state,²² constitutes the essential ideological link between militant Islam in Southeast Asia and the franchising terror operations of Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network. The notion of a *darul Islam* (sphere of faith) that transcends national boundaries, and the call to *jihad* (holy war) to achieve it, has long been promulgated by radical critics of failed postcolonial states in the Middle East. In Southeast Asia, however, evidence of this phenomenon has only recently come to light, despite the fact that it now seems clear that Islamic cells had been organizing in the region since the early 1990s.²³ Why was this the case?

Caught in the Headlamps of the Pacific Century

Partly, it is a result of the failure of ASEAN's governing elites to recognize that the region that once seemed set fair to exploit the opportunities of a globalized market place had rapidly mutated after the meltdown of 1997 into a darkling plain where ignorant armies clashed by night.²⁴ One army that emerged after 1997 was jihadist fueled somewhat paradoxically by the very forces of globalization it sought to deny.²⁵ Thus, a new generation of Malay and Indonesian middle class radicals alienated from the process of postcolonial nation-building in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, turned instead to a purified Islam learned either in Middle Eastern universities or at Western mosques while ostensibly pursuing the bourgeois qualifications that would contribute to the next GDP growth spurt.²⁶

The development of middle class illiberalism in Southeast Asia has been evident since the 1990s but was largely overlooked by academic writers, the media, and the region's security services. Mesmerized by the "spectacularly successful"²⁷ economic growth in the region, the media and scholarly communities assumed the evolution of "shared norms" of diplomatic behavior in ASEAN had "operationalized into a framework of regional interaction."²⁸ Consequently, official orthodoxy held that Islam in Southeast Asia—unlike its Middle Eastern equivalent—was capital friendly and well disposed both to economic modernization and regional multilateralism. For those commentators absorbed by the prospect of Indonesian democratization after 1998, this benign "civil" Islam offered the Panglossian possibility of a tolerant and pluralist Islamized democracy.²⁹

The Incoherence of ASEAN Consensualism and Its Implications for Member State Security

Officially, then, "Aseanthink" maintained that little had changed in the fabric of the regional order, despite the economic crisis that ravaged Southeast Asia from 1997 onward that generated rising instability both in Mindanao and across the Indonesian periphery. Only after September 11 and the exposure of a hitherto unsuspected level of Islamist cooperation stretching from Solo in Java, through Singapore, Malaysia, and extending to the Southern Philippines and ultimately Kabul, has the superficial illusion of regional harmony been stripped away. In its place emerges a disturbing picture of non-cooperation between ASEAN security services that contrasts strikingly with the illicit, transnational, often sophisticated, networks of collaboration developed by Islamist organizations dedicated to recasting entirely the sorry states of Southeast Asia.

Official, academic, and media obeisance to a shared regional vision,³⁰ therefore, obfuscated the lack of cooperation between the ASEAN members' military and security services.³¹ In the end, this official discourse disguised the fact that ASEAN operated primarily as a realist concert of powers, rather than a harmonious multilateral community.³² The *raison d'être* of ASEAN lay in two simple goals: a pact to stop the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia after 1967, and to devise a diplomatic framework "to lock Indonesia into a structure of multilateral partnership and constraint that would be seen as a rejection of hegemonic pretensions."³³ Through these means, Southeast Asian regimes could simultaneously consolidate themselves internally while pursuing economic growth.³⁴

However, as the Communist threat diminished from the late 1980s an ideology of "shared" non-Western values arose to take its place. Yet, at no time did this evolving ideological justification undermine the fact that member states actually conducted their internal and external relations in terms of a "realist" appreciation of national interests. In

security and political terms this meant that countries such as Singapore and Malaysia dramatically extended the remit of internal security legislation dating from the colonial era. Indeed, across the wider region, states evolved extensive mechanisms for the surveillance of society conducted via the ostensibly civilian internal security apparatus as in Singapore, or through the development of regional military commands invested with extensive powers to control the civil populace as in Indonesia. Thus, the official ASEAN rhetoric proclaiming the spirit of friendly cooperation on regional affairs belied the actual practice of the member states, which relied completely on internally policing their own civilian populations.

Nevertheless, despite the obsessive preoccupation with internal security, states like Malaysia and Singapore signally failed to recognize the emergence of a politically radicalized Islam within their borders. Furthermore, the largest state in the regional grouping, Indonesia, developed after 1998 a notable tolerance for Islamic radicals like Shiekh Abu Bakar Ba'asyir,³⁵ the leading figure in the pan-Islamist MMI based in Jakarta as well as the *eminence grise* behind both the KMM and *Jemaah Islamiya* (Islamic Group), currently thought to be operating across Southeast Asia. Indonesia's apparent insouciance has, moreover, caused friction with its neighbors. Both Malaysian and Singaporean diplomats now consider Indonesia as the "weakest link" in the fight against terrorism.³⁶

More particularly, the arrest of 15 members of *Jemaah Islamiya* in Singapore³⁷ and a further 13 members of the KMM in Kuala Lumpur between mid- and late December 2001 gave credence both to the lack of regional bonding and shared response to a perceived common danger.³⁸ According to investigators, members of the *Jemaah Islamiya* had begun infiltrating Singapore as long ago as 1993. The group had established sleeper cells to attack "western establishments" in Singapore that included the American, Australian, British, and Israeli embassies.³⁹ One cell had already taken video footage of the American Embassy and Australian High Commission. The plan was to pack 21 tons of ammonium nitrate, imported via Malaysia, into trucks and explode them either near or inside the diplomatic compounds, which are next door to each other.⁴⁰ An equally audacious attack, planned since 1997, and apparently "ready for activation," was to bomb the Yishun subway station in Northern Singapore.⁴¹ The station is used by U.S. personnel who take a shuttle bus service to the recently built naval base at Changi.⁴² Subsequent revelations suggested that the group's intentions also included a plan to crash a jet into Singapore's main civilian airport also at Changi.⁴³

Thus, despite their extensive internal security instruments and their official promotion of a collective identity with "shared values," ASEAN members appear ill equipped to address the emergence of militant Islam within their societies. This failure clearly exposes serious flaws in state security mechanisms in the region that will now be further explored with particular reference to Singapore, the most developed and hypervigilant state in the regional grouping.

Total Defense—the Weakness of the Singapore Grip

The failure to detect an Al Qaeda regional franchise was especially notable in Singapore, the rich ethnically Chinese city located in what Lee Kuan Yew described as "a sea of Malay peoples." This was highlighted by the fact that the disruption of *Jemmah Islamyia* had little to do with Singapore's feared Internal Security Department (ISD). Instead, the arrests occurred as a result of a tip-off from MI6, the British intelligence service, following the fortuitous discovery of *Jemmah Islamyia's* video application for funding found in the Kabul rubble that once housed the jihadist equivalent of the Ford Foundation.⁴⁴

The failing was all the more acute given the government's preoccupation with a "total defense" strategy intended to sensitize the population at all levels to the need to retain vigilance. The ideological precepts supporting total defense merit examination because, paradoxically, they reveal the source of the intelligence failure.

Singapore's MinDef (Ministry of Defence) considers total defense the "cornerstone of Singapore's defence policy."⁴⁵ It embraces not only military defense, but also economic defense to maintain a strong economy "that will not break down under threat of war," and civil defense to ensure the continuing functioning of society in times of national emergency. It also encompasses the intangible factors of "social defence," to ensure that "our people work together in harmony,"⁴⁶ along with "psychological defence," which aims to secure the "individual citizen's commitment to the nation and the confidence in the future of our country."⁴⁷

The government dedicates much energy to inculcating the values of total defense within the wider population through national education programs, the state-managed media, and endless campaigns that reinforce public identification with "One Nation, One People, One Singapore."⁴⁸ Total defense demands not only political stability, but the individual citizen's formal political commitment to the state. A feature of the total defense mind-set is a large domestic counterintelligence organization, the ISD, credited by most Singaporeans with an almost limitless capacity for surveillance.⁴⁹

Paradoxically, however, officially inspired hypervigilance has produced unintended and unsatisfactory security outcomes, as the failure to identify the *Jemmah Islamiya* cells demonstrates. The paradox is, though, easily resolved. The obsession with total defense reflects the ruling People's Action Party's (PAP) more general preoccupation with "total administration" to ensure the mobilization of the population toward national goals.⁵⁰ Consequently, the axioms of total defense compound the *kiasu* (scared to lose) mentality nurtured by the ruling PAP over three decades of uninterrupted rule.⁵¹ The result has engendered in the media, academe, and across the public sector an uncritical propensity to follow state directives, and a bureaucratic mind-set unable to think beyond self-censoring boundaries.⁵²

Overall, the total defense mentality has distorted threat assessment in ways that have actually undermined Singapore's capacity for national resilience. Since the end of the Cold War, this all-pervasive governing ideology, which stresses national unity above all else, erroneously assumed that the West's pluralist blandishments represented the main threat to internal cohesiveness. As a consequence of such anti-Western prejudices, those that the state security apparatus trailed, denounced, and punished with large fines were nonviolent liberal democrats like Chee Soon Juan or James Gomez with limited constituencies, who would, if they had ever encountered it, have considered ammonium nitrate a designer drug rather than the key ingredient of a car bomb.⁵³

By accentuating the dangers of Western-style democracy, the government machinery swept away problems of a religious and communal nature by promoting "Shared Values,"⁵⁴ that provided a spurious façade to interracial harmony in Singapore.⁵⁵ Accepting the official ideological truth, the security apparatus ignored the increasingly alienated Malay-Islamic minority community, which constitutes 15 percent of the population, as too indolent to constitute a threat to the nation-building vision. The government's single-minded pursuit of secular developmental goals merely exacerbated Malay disadvantage and political marginalization.⁵⁶ Over the years such alienation has succeeded in radicalizing a younger generation of Malays who, unlike their elders, reject the official process of depoliticized co-option that denies them an effective political voice.⁵⁷

The ruling PAP further aggravates the problem by treating young Malay activists, like those contributing to the *Fateha.com* website, who wanted to question government policy toward religious and ethnic minorities, as indistinguishable from those who wished to advance their cause by violent means. Thus, when *Fateha's* founder, Zulfikar Mohamad Shariff, criticized both Singapore's foreign policy alignment toward the United States and Israel, and its domestic education policy that forbids Muslim girls wearing head scarves to school, the government and the officially controlled media reacted with predictable vehemence.⁵⁸ Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean considered such views "slow poisoning," calculated to turn Singapore into a new Afghanistan.⁵⁹ After a week of hysterical denunciation in the state-owned media Zulfikar quit *Fateha* in late January 2002. The *Fateha* case demonstrates, in other words, that the practice of total defense represses the problem of minority alienation, it does not begin to address it politically.⁶⁰ This point illuminates the fact that the total defense posture actually intensifies Singapore's security dilemmas.

In this context of the failure of total defense, it is interesting to observe that Singapore borrowed its defensive posture not from an Asian sage but from modern Israel, with whom the government enjoys close relations. Despite the tendency of such close ties to alienate even moderate Islamic opinion in the region,⁶¹ Israeli advisors have promulgated much of the thinking and doctrine of the Singapore Armed Forces since the late 1960s.⁶² The mutual bond between the two countries is easily explained. They share the same strategic predicament. Both are small (in Singapore's case minute) in terms of territorial size, lacking strategic depth to resist an invader. Equally, they possess relatively small populations, few natural resources, compounded by the fact that both are surrounded by potentially, or, in the case of Israel, real, hostile forces. Both states have, as a consequence, built up well-equipped, technically accomplished military forces along with indigenous arms industries. The armed forces of each nation integrate extended national service personnel with regular armed forces, while adhering to operational doctrines that emphasize preemptive strike.⁶³

There is, however, a fatal flaw in this total defense posture. It is primarily configured to address external threats.⁶⁴ Few doubt the proficiency of such military forces and their capability to hold their own against the armed forces of neighboring states. But as the current Israeli experience attests, the practice of total defense has a poor record of withstanding low level challenges from within. For all their sophistication and experience, Israel's armed forces cannot adequately deal with asymmetrical threats like stone throwing, rioting and, most provocatively, determined suicide bombers. As Martin van Creveld argues, the attempt to combat weaker Palestinian opponents with the current level of military confrontation is in danger of eroding the professional ethos of the Israeli Defence Forces.⁶⁵

Extending Professor van Creveld's thesis, such strategies can be envisaged as eroding the moral fiber of society as a whole. Historically, states that adopt forms of total defense have a propensity to internal corrosion, and ultimately disintegration, as apartheid South Africa, Rhodesia, and the U.S.S.R. have demonstrated. Not only are the associated costs of total defense prohibitive but the emphasis, as in Singapore, on an officially endorsed and enforced worldview undermines autonomous analysis of clear and present dangers as analysts subordinate themselves to predetermined orthodoxies about defense and security matters. Singapore's defense ministry's own educational material (provided for dissemination in state schools), nicely illustrates the problem. As the MinDef booklet explains, "at the national level are the big plans, policies, programmes put in place by the government, organisations and agencies. At the individual

level are the attitudes, actions and responsibilities each of us has toward those plans and programmes.”⁶⁶

The Problem of Shared Values in an Era of Identity Politics

The overall impact of these totalizing visions, shared and implemented to varying degrees in all the member states of ASEAN, has caused state security agencies to disregard the burgeoning problem of Islamist discontent in both the wider region and on their own doorsteps, despite the existence of draconian internal security legislation. This failing was a direct result of official government insistence in states like Singapore that Confucianism and Islam harmoniously blended into “shared values.” In other words, Singapore, in particular, bought its own Asia bonding propaganda, despite the increasing evidence after the economic meltdown of 1997 that Singapore itself represented the only good house in a rapidly declining neighborhood.⁶⁷ Accordingly, it ignored growing indications that a new generation of radicals in the region animated by the vision of an Islamic *internationale* resent Singapore’s wealth and its alignment with both Israel and the United States whose business (but not its values) it remorselessly courts.

Not surprisingly, the fiercest condemnation of Singapore’s infidel connections comes from mosques across the causeway in Johore Baru, a city whose third worldness contrasts starkly with the postmodern chic of contemporary Singapore. It is out of this swelling resentment of the achievements of modern Singapore that Islamist groups within the city-state as well as Malaysia, and coordinated through madrassas in Solo, East Java, via the peripatetic and elusive cleric Sheikh Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, evolved the lineaments of an effective terror network. Interestingly, the 63-year-old Sheikh spent four years in an Indonesian jail courtesy of Suharto’s New Order after 1978 for his role in the protean fundamentalist group *Komando Jihad*.⁶⁸ Subsequently, the Sheikh moved to more congenial Malaysia after 1982 before returning to Indonesia after the fall of Suharto in 1998. On his return, he apparently wrote an open letter to his fellow Muslims inviting them to prepare for *jihad* against the United States. Significantly, Al Qaeda provided monetary backing for Bakar’s deputy in the MMI, the enigmatic Nurjaman Riduan (also known as Hambali), to establish militant groups in Malaysia from the late 1980s onward.

It was during Bakar’s and Hambali’s exile in Malaysia, then, that Al Qaeda afforded the finance and training for the militant groups they formed, like *Jemaah Islamiya* and *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia*.⁶⁹ From 1995 onward they tended to use charitable and business organizations as fronts to coordinate their increasingly transnational operations. While Hambali coordinated groups in Malaysia, in the Philippines, Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law, Mohammad Khalifa, established both a charity organization and a furniture company through which he channelled funds to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and *Abu Sayyaf*.⁷⁰

Members recruited to these groups tend to be middle class professionals, often science graduates of either regional or Western universities. They include businessmen like Yazid Sufaat, a biochemistry graduate of a U.S. university, whose Green Laboratories imported ammonium nitrate and who, in October 2000, hosted both Zacarias Moussaoui and two of the September 11 Pentagon bombers at his Kuala Lumpur apartment. Moussaoui, currently on trial for his alleged role in the events of September 11, also acted as U.S. agent for Infocus Computers, a company in which Yazid’s wife is a major shareholder.⁷¹ Despite the disruption of the *Jemaah Islamiya* and the KMM in Singapore and Malaysia, and the arrest of *Jemaah Islamiya*’s chief bomb maker, Fathur Rahman al Ghazi (a

graduate of Bakar's East Javan Mukumin training school) in the Philippines in January 2002,⁷² both Bakar and Hambali remain at liberty. Today, the Indonesian government remains unconvinced of Bakar's or the MMI's "wrongdoing."⁷³ Indeed, since the collapse of the New Order, Indonesia under both Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri have given comfort to Islamist radicals on the grounds that disrupting their networks would further undermine internal stability.⁷⁴

As a result, Al Qaeda has a foothold in Southeast Asia, while ASEAN has become increasingly irrelevant to the evolving disorder engulfing the region. ASEAN, of course, has a distinguished history of ignoring the causes of inter-state disputes among its members, only to see them find expression in periodic diplomatic rows.⁷⁵ A further consequence of this culture of non-interference is that there is little prospect for more realistic threat-assessment both within and among Southeast Asian states. Inside states like Singapore, the discovery of Islamic sleeper cells appears merely to have reinforced the desire to retreat further into the artificial cocoon of total defense.⁷⁶ Seemingly, any discussion of the security situation and the country's appropriate response remain off-limits. Meanwhile, Indonesia plays host to rising Islamic militancy and Islamism increases its appeal to a new generation of educated Muslims in Malaysia, Pattani, and Mindanao.

Interestingly, the threat posed by regional Islamism belatedly prompted ASEAN into holding a ministerial meeting in May 2002 to discuss the issue.⁷⁷ However, ASEAN's understanding of the threat and the character of its response remained worryingly unclear. Curiously, the Association considered that "defining terrorism is not crucial, fighting it is."⁷⁸ Thus, ASEAN's deputy secretary-general, Datuk Mokhtar Selat, declared that terrorism is "like you have a car. You don't define what is a car, but how the car moves. The focus is not on definition, the focus is on how we work together."⁷⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that most people can indeed distinguish a car from, for example, a durian, such definitional inexactitude obscures the crucial issue as to whether the phenomenon of "terrorism" can be said to exist in any meaningful sense in Southeast Asia. Consequently, ASEAN's stance appears to be that it doesn't know what it is fighting, but has decided to fight it anyway.

Conclusion: The ASEAN Way to Disintegration

During the 1980s and 1990s a strange doctrine emerged in both the study and practice of Southeast Asian international relations as ASEAN sought to internalize civil and political Islam into its official philosophy of harmoniously blended and shared values. In the end, this understanding obscured a series of contradictions that have become apparent in the wake of the economic crisis of 1997. On the one hand, official discourse presented Islamic values as part of the region's shared culture, which could assist the process of Asian development. On the other, Islam's "traditional values" were also seen as a prophylactic against the dissemination of what Mahathir Mohamad termed the more "fanatical" aspects of liberal democracy and human rights. Simultaneously, Western political science increasingly treated the syncretic Islam of Southeast Asia as conducive to the inexorable democratization of developing Southeast Asian states like Malaysia and Indonesia.⁸⁰ Ironically, this convergence ultimately promoted a contradictory intellectual edifice of mutually supporting indifference toward the spread of an Islamic challenge to both the authority of the Southeast Asian states and the doctrine of shared Asian values.

However, it is the avowed intention of groups like both *Jemaah Islamiya* and the KMM to destroy the precarious work of postcolonial nation-building in Southeast Asia,

and its once self-proclaimed regional harmony and balance, and replace it, instead, with an Islamic arrangement encompassing Southern Thailand, Malaysia, Mindanao, Singapore, and the Indonesian archipelago. If achieved, moreover, this arrangement would be governed, not by shared Asian values, but according to a rigid interpretation of Sharia law. Interestingly, the notion of a regional supranational arrangement revives, under an Islamic dispensation, the vision initially dreamt up by non-aligned nationalists like Sukarno in the 1960s of a monolithic, non-Chinese, radically anticapitalist bloc dominating Southeast Asia. Sukarno envisaged an *Indonesia Raya* (greater Indonesia) and pursued a strategy of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) with neighboring states like Malaysia between 1962 and 1965 in order to realize it. Now, a new generation of Southeast Asian revolutionaries anticipate the imminent possibility of a utopian *darulah Islamayah nusantara* (an Islamic realm).

The supreme irony is that ASEAN was created precisely to avoid such threats to the nation-states that compose it. One of the key aims of ASEAN's founders was to wean Indonesia away from its inclination to *Konfrontasi* and to restrain it in a concert of sovereign states that formally acceded to the precept of the inviolability of national frontiers. By ignoring the underlying religiously motivated tensions within and among its membership, and by refusing to countenance mature debate about them within their societies, the Association has succeeded only in incubating its potential nemesis. ASEAN is now paying the price for its neglect, moving from the period of post-*Konfrontasi* hubris (1967–97) into a new era of *Disintegrasi*.

Notes

1. By the late 1970s a 32 percent growth in trade by the ASEAN states between 1970 and 1974 made Southeast Asia the "world's fastest growing developing region." See Bernard Gordon, "Japan, the United States and Southeast Asia," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1978), p. 586. For a more detailed survey see John Wong, *The ASEAN Economies* (Singapore: Economic Research Centre, 1977).

2. Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000).

3. See, *inter alia*, Richard Robison, "Looking North: Myths and Strategies," and Stephanie Lawson, "Cultural Relativism and Democracy: Political Myths about 'Asia' and the 'West,'" in Richard Robison, ed., *Pathways to Asia: The Politics of Engagement* (St. Leonards NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996); John Naisbett, *Megatrends Asia: The Eight Asian Megatrends that are Changing the World* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 1995); and World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

4. Jose T. Almonte, "Ensuring the 'ASEAN Way,'" *Survival* 39(4) (Winter 1997–98), p. 80.

5. Amitav Acharya, "The Periphery as the Core: The Third World and Security Studies," in Keith Krause and Michael Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies* (London: UCL Press, 1997), p. 310.

6. See for example, Andrew Tan, "Armed Muslim Separatist Rebellion in Southeast Asia: Persistence, Prospects and Implications," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 23(4) (October–December 2000), pp. 267–288 and Peter Chalk, "Separatism and Southeast Asia: The Islamic Factor in Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Aceh," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24(4) (July–August 2001), pp. 241–269.

7. Peter Chalk, *Grey Area Phenomena in Southeast Asia*, Canberra Papers on Defence and Strategy, No. 123 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1997), pp. 41–54 and Peter Chalk, "Southeast Asia and the Golden Triangle's Heroin Trade," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 23(2) (April–June 2000), pp. 89–106.

8. Kishore Mahbubani, "The Pacific Impulse," *Survival* 37(1) (Spring 1995), pp. 105–110; Kishore Mahbubani, "The Pacific Way," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 1995); Fareed Zakaria, "Culture is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1994), pp. 109–113.

9. Amitav Acharya, "Ideas, Identity and Institution-Building: From the 'ASEAN Way' to the 'Asia-Pacific Way,'" *Pacific Review* 10(3) (1997), p. 329.

10. See Kishore Mahbubani, "The United States: Go East Young Man," *The Washington Quarterly* 17 (2) (1994), pp. 6–7; Mahathir Mohamad and Shintaro Ishihara, *The Voice of Asia* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1995); and Kishore Mahbubani, "You May Not Like it Europe, but this Asian Medicine Could Help," *International Herald Tribune*, 1 October 1994; and Bilhari Kausikan, "Asia's Different Standard," *Foreign Policy* (92) (Fall 1993), p. 34.

11. The Thai proposals considered giving ASEAN members the right to comment on each other. However, even this limited consultative role was too much for members like Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. The proposal was thus rejected in late 1998 with ASEAN reiterating its commitment to the "cardinal principles of mutual respect, non-interference, consensus, dialogue and consultation." See "ASEAN Makes Bold Moves for Recovery," *Straits Times*, 17 December 1998.

12. A second attempt by Thailand to reform the non-interference principle ended with the Bangkok Ministerial Meeting in July 2000. To save face, the mechanism of a "troika" was accepted. This "ad hoc ministerial body" comprising the current, preceding and succeeding ASEAN chairmen, was designed to form a "rapid response team" to address issues of regional peace and security. However, because the "troika" had to work according to the rules of consensus and non-interference this undermined the initiative. Predictably, the troika has been completely ineffectual in affecting any issues of concern in the region. See "ASEAN Creates New Rapid Response Team," *Straits Times*, 26 July 2000.

13. See for example, Tommy Koh, "Grouping Will Emerge Victorious," *Straits Times*, 20 December 1998.

14. *Laskar Jihad Ahlus Sunnah wal Jammah*, available at (<http://www.laskarjihad.or.id>). The *Laskar Jihad* homepage informs readers that "Jihad as a holy ibadah for Muslims is the only answer to the . . . many oppressions borne by the Muslims in different areas of this country." Visitors to the website will be greeted with a professional-looking header featuring a picture of a bullet with the accompanying exhortation: "Victory or Martyrdom in Ambon." Ambon is the capital of the Maluku Islands where *Laskar Jihad* has been helping to sponsor the murderous communal feud between Christians and Muslims in these once peaceful territories, also known as the Spice Islands. This conflict has claimed an estimated 5,000 lives since 1998.

15. See "Is There an Al-Qaeda Connection in Indonesia?" *Sunday Times* (Singapore), 20 January 2002.

16. Chris Wilson, "Indonesia and Transnational Terrorism," *Current Issues Brief* 6, Canberra: Department of the Parliamentary Library, 11 October 2001, available at (<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/cib/2002-02/02cib06/.htm>).

17. "Terror Investigations Strain Malaysian Politics," BBC News, 22 January 2002 available at (http://www.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/asia-pacific/newsid_1775000/1775718.stm).

18. See "Johor Madrasah was Preaching Jihad," *Straits Times*, 25 January 2002.

19. Peter Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos* (Manila: Solidaridad, 1974), p. 28 and W. K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Chapter 1.

20. Evidence of cooperation between *Abu Sayyaf* and *al-Qaeda* came to light in 1994 when *Abu Sayyaf* claimed to have planted a bomb under a passenger seat of a Philippine Airlines plane that killed a Japanese businessman. It is thought that this was a precursor to a wider conspiracy in conjunction with *al-Qaeda* intended to culminate the following year in the blowing up of 11 airliners over the Pacific Ocean. See Council on Foreign Relations, "Abu Sayyaf Group," available at (<http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups.abusayyaf2.html>), accessed 19 April 2002.

21. "The Moro Jihad," *Nida'ul Islam* (23 (April–May 1998)).

22. See Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, "America and the New Terrorism," *Survival* 42(1) (Spring 2000), p. 59.
23. Raymond Bonner and Seth Mydans, "'Sleepers Cells' in Singapore Show *Al Qaeda's* Long Reach," *New York Times*, 26 January 2002.
24. See Benjamin Barber, *Jihad versus McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World Order* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), esp. Chapter 19.
25. See Oliver Roy, "Islam, Iran and the New Terrorism," *Survival* 42(2) (Summer 2000), p. 156.
26. See for example, "The Pakistan Connection," *Sunday Times* (Singapore), 7 April 2002.
27. Stephen Krasner, "The Accomplishments of Political Economy," in Ken Booth, Steve Smith, and Marysia Zalewski, eds., *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 123.
28. Acharya, "Ideas, Identity and Institution-Building," p. 329.
29. See for example, Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. Chapter 1.
30. See, inter alia, Malcolm Chalmers, *Confidence Building in Southeast Asia* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996) and Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2001), *passim*.
31. Amitav Acharya, "The Association of Southeast Asian Nations: Security Community or Defence Community," *Pacific Affairs* 64(2) (Summer 1991), p. 176.
32. Michael Leifer, "The ASEAN Peace Process: A Category Mistake," *Pacific Review* 12(1) (1999), p. 25.
33. Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South East Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 13.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
35. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir is a radical teacher who runs a boarding school in Sukoharjo in central Java. He is also known to operate under the pseudonym of Abdus Samad.
36. This comment was attributed to a Malaysian official. Quoted in Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Indonesia a 'Big Disappointment' in Terror War," *Washington Post*, 24 March 2002.
37. Dominic Nathan, "15 Nabbed Here for Terror Plans," *Straits Times*, 6 January 2002.
38. Reme Ahmad, "KL Arrests 23 Islamic Militants in Swoop," *Straits Times*, 5 January 2002.
39. *Straits Times*, 14 January 2002.
40. Bonner and Mydans, "'Sleepers Cells' in Singapore Show *Al Qaeda's* Long Reach."
41. *Straits Times*, 14 January 2002.
42. Bonner and Mydans, "'Sleepers Cells' in Singapore Show *Al Qaeda's* Long Reach."
43. "PM Reveals Plan to Crash Jet into Changi," *Sunday Times* (Singapore), 7 April 2002.
44. See "Al-Qaeda Plot to Bomb US Ships Foiled by MI6," *Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 2002
45. Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), "Total Defence," available at: (http://mindef.gov.sg/td/introduction/c_intro.htm).
46. MINDEF, "Social Defence," available at (http://mindef.gov.sg/td/aspects/o_c_psychology.htm).
47. MINDEF, "Psychological Defence," available at (http://mindef.gov.sg/td/aspects/o_c_psychology.htm).
48. A patriotic slogan developed by the Psychological Defence Unit of the Ministry of Defence. See Jonah David, "Don't Count on Me, Singapore," *The National Review*, 16 May 1994, p. 59.
49. See Cherian George, *Singapore: The Air Conditioned Nation—Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control, 1999–2000* (Singapore: Landmark, 2000). The title of George's book is a play on Lee Kuan Yew's straight-faced suggestion in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1999 that someone should invent refrigerated underpants in order that "everyone can work at his optimum temperature and civilisation can spread across all climates." The *Straits Times* proceeded to run a serious story in order to prove that the Senior Minister's idea was a feasible engineering possibility. The notion of an air-conditioned nation thus became a metaphor for the government's extensive efforts to control the political climate in Singapore. See Eric Ellis, "Climate Control in the Singapore Press," *The Australian*, 21 June 2001.

50. See James Gomez, *Internet Politics: Surveillance and Intimidation in Singapore* (Singapore: ThinkCentre, 2002).
51. Joshua Kurlantzick, "Love My Nanny: Singapore's Tongue Tied Populace," *World Policy Journal* (Winter 2000/01), pp. 72–73.
52. For a survey see James Gomez, *Self-Censorship: Singapore's Shame* (Singapore: ThinkCentre, 2000).
53. See Chee Soon Juan, *Your Future, My Faith, Our Freedom: A Democratic Blueprint for Singapore* (Singapore: Open Singapore Centre, 2001).
54. Shared Values constitutes a formal state ideology. When it was officially adopted in 1993, five "Shared Values" were stipulated: nation before community and society above self; the family as the basic unit of society; community support and respect for the individual; consensus not conflict; and racial and religious harmony. "Shared Values," Singapore Infomap: The National Website, available at (<http://www.sg/flavour/values-bg.html>).
55. In this way Shared Values assumes that "the different communities" are "living harmoniously together." Official rhetoric further declares: "Racial and religious harmony have been the distinguishing trait of Singaporean society since Independence. This is not because our social fabric is inherently stronger than other multi-racial societies, or that we are immune to such problems. It is because a great deal of hard work and care has gone into tending and strengthening it. It should not be taken for granted." It might be argued that recent experience suggests that "taken for granted" is exactly what it has been. See "The Five Shared Values," Singapore Infomap: The National Website, available at (<http://www.sg/flavour/values-5.html>).
56. Lily Rahim, *The Malay Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 242–243.
57. See for example, "Malay MPs Call for 'Careful Approach' to Tudung Issue," *Straits Times*, 27 January 2001 and Asad Latif, "Who Will Lead Muslim S'poreans," *Straits Times*, 28 January 2002.
58. "Ex-Fateha Chief Gets Out of Headscarf Debate," *Straits Times*, 28 January 2001.
59. *Straits Times*, 21 January 2002; "Fateha Pol," *Berita Harian*, 23 January 2002 and "Muslims Here Reject Fateha Chief's Remarks," *Straits Times*, 24 January 2002.
60. For an illustration of this belief see "Fateha Break Up Shows Extremism Not Supported," *Straits Times*, 27 January 2001.
61. In 1986, Israel's President Chaim Herzog even paid an official visit to Singapore, which occasioned much vituperation from its neighbors, with Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia claiming that the visit offended Muslim sensibilities in the region.
62. For a general survey of Singapore's defense policy see Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City: The Armed Forces of Singapore* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000).
63. Tim Huxley, "Singapore and Malaysia: A Precarious Balance," *Pacific Review* 4(3) (1991), p. 204.
64. According to official Ministry of Defence information, the role of the total defense posture is to "make it very costly for any aggressor to move against Singapore." MINDEF, *Total Defence: Making it Relevant* (Singapore: Ministry of Defence, 2002), p. 1.
65. Martin van Creveld, "Only a Wall Will Keep Them From Each Other's Throats," *Daily Telegraph*, 17 March 2002.
66. MINDEF, *Total Defence: Making it Relevant*, p. 1.
67. Tom Holland, "Asia's New Fissure," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 June 2000.
68. The *Komando Jihad* was an organization with shadowy origins. Seemingly, *Komando Jihad* was manufactured by elements within Indonesian army intelligence in 1977 in order to discredit the Muslim-based political party, *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (PPP) (United Development Party), which posed a serious electoral threat to President Suharto's secular Golkar party. The conspiracy was the alleged brainchild of General Ali Moertopo, Suharto's right hand man and devised from within the Jakarta-based Center for International and Strategic Studies, which functioned as a front group for the intelligence services. The intention was to covertly encourage Islamic militants to wage a violent campaign for the creation of an Islamic state in a way that

would reflect badly on the PPP. It is not clear whether the *Komando Jihad* was a conspiracy that got out of hand or a pretext for a more general round-up of opponents of the regime. See Asia Watch, *Human Rights in Indonesia and East Timor* (New York: Asia Watch, 1989), pp. 76–85.

69. *Straits Times*, 24 January 2002. It was reported that 8 of the 15 arrested members of the *Jemmah Islamiya* had undergone extensive military training in *al-Qaeda* camps in Afghanistan since 1993.

70. “Manila Sees al-Qaeda Money Link Across the Region,” *Straits Times*, 26 April 2002.

71. Other examples of the ostensibly respectable professions adopted by the Islamic militants include the leader of the *Jemmah Islamiya* cell in Singapore, Ibrahim Maidin, who was a condominium manager. Another unidentified member worked for the government-owned defense company Singapore Technologies Aerospace, and was alleged to have taken digital photographs of U.S. military aircraft and armed services personnel at the Paya Lebar airbase. See Bonner and Mydans, “‘ Sleeper Cells’ in Singapore Show *Al Qaeda’s* Long Reach,” Barbara Star, “Intelligence from Afghanistan Breaks Singapore Plot,” CNN.com, 11 January 2002.

72. Al Ghazi, who operated under the codename of “Mike,” was thought to have been one of two individuals who traveled to Singapore with orders to delay an imminent attack on the American Embassy. It is not clear whether the order came directly from the *al-Qaeda* leadership. See “‘ Sleeper Cells’ in Singapore Show *Al Qaeda’s* Long Reach.”

73. Abu Bakar Ba’asyir was summoned for questioning by the Indonesian authorities in late January 2002, in order, according to National Police Spokesman, Inspector General Saleh Saaf, “to clarify accusations that he is linked to the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia militants,” adding that the “police do not yet have any evidence that indicates connections between Ba’asyir and the al-Qaeda network.” Quoted in “Jakarta Takes Terrorist Link Claims Seriously,” *The Indonesian Observer*, 23 January 2002.

74. See, for example, Chandrasekaran, “Indonesia a ‘Big Disappointment’ in Terror War,” and Diarmid O’Sullivan, “Indonesia’s Radicals Have Home Grown Causes,” *International Herald Tribune*, 26 December 2001.

75. See Andrew Tan, *Intra-ASEAN Tensions*, Discussion Paper No. 84 (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000).

76. See Asad Latif, “When Total Defence Becomes a Way of Life,” *Straits Times*, 21 November 2001.

77. The two day ASEAN ministers meeting was pitched as having agreed on a “slew of measures to face up to the threat of regional terrorism.” On closer examination this “slew” revealed itself to be little more than non-specific aspirations to establish “contact points” for the exchange of information and various forms of low level logistical support (Indonesia said it would host a workshop on international terrorism). See Reme Ahmed, “Asean Adopts Plan to Fight Terrorism,” *Straits Times*, 21 May 2002. Earlier in May 2002, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines entered into a trilateral agreement officially billed as an “anti-terrorism pact.” However, the terms of the agreement obliged its members to exchange information on a wide variety of illicit activities, ranging from money laundering and piracy to the theft of marine resources and marine pollution. These items could not be said necessarily to fall under the rubric of “anti-terrorism.” Moreover, they provoked suspicion that the pact was merely a covert vehicle for advancing various territorial claims in the South China Sea and elsewhere, not least against other ASEAN members. Further, the terminological vagueness with which various forms of unlawful activity were couched led to predictions that the agreement would increase political disputes. Indeed, Singaporean commentators speculated that the provisions on money laundering would, for example, simply enable some member states to pursue local tycoons who moved funds out of their domicile countries through Singapore’s banking system. See Lee Kim Chew, “More to Anti-Terrorism Pact than Meets the Eye,” *Straits Times*, 25 May 2002.

78. Reme Ahmed, “Asean Ministers Acknowledge Defining Terrorism is Not Crucial, Fighting It Is,” *Straits Times*, 21 May 2002.

79. *Ibid.*

80. See Hefner, *Civil Islam*, Chapter 1.