

# Politics and the Southeast Asian Armed Forces

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This paper seeks to discuss Southeast Asia's armed forces and their political impact on their respective societies in the light of the deepening transnationalization process in the region. It shall outline the various points of similarity that broadly identify the nature of these military establishments in the regional context. It shall also indicate the distinctions among these armed forces to stress the fact that no armed force is entirely similar to the others.

The study, however, is limited to the military institutions of the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia with most of the data and analyses derived from the papers of the United Nations University Asian Perspectives - Southeast Asian network.<sup>1</sup> It excludes the armed forces of the Indochinese socialist states, Burma and Brunei which were not covered by the studies of the network. While literature abound on the militaries of these countries, by reasons of time and the absence of critical studies by academics and intellectuals from these countries along the line of inquiry laid down by the network preclude their inclusion in this paper.<sup>2</sup>

## General Background

The armed forces of the region occupy fairly major positions in the State apparatuses of the countries concerned. Their political importance lies in the following aspects:

- (a) their being part and parcel of the State leadership and/or the decision-making power bloc of each State (which may not necessarily be in leadership positions);
- (b) the extent of their corporate interests within the State (e.g., budgetary allocations) and the larger society (the important role of military-run State corporations in the formal economy); and,
- (c) the influence they exert on their State's internal

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policies (vis-a-vis revolutionary and popular movements) and external relations (e.g., the politics in the regional and international levels), be they actually or potentially enforced.

Two of the region's governments are headed by military men and have had military governments ruling for most of their post-colonial histories (Thailand and Indonesia). Another (the Philippines) has the armed forces exercising substantial political influence over the civilian leadership's decision-making process. The Malaysian and Singaporean military establishments assumed subordinate positions in relation to their civilian leaderships, yet on issues like foreign policy and regional politics, their views are necessary inputs to efforts policy decision-making.

Military expenditures constitute a substantial part of the over-all State expenditures. In most cases, the military's share from State expenditures exceed other state sectors like health and education (This is especially true in the Philippine case under the Marcos dictatorship). Table 1 illustrates the percentage allotted by the region's States to their armed forces in relation to the country's gross national product, central government expenditures and per capita income. The armed forces also receive first priority over other States sectors when it comes to the modernization of the State apparatus.<sup>3</sup>

Other than State budgetary allocations, the region's armed forces are beneficiaries of military assistance from the major powers like the United States (U.S.). The U.S., in particular, views these military establishments as essential "allies" in the preservation of its politico-economic hegemony and dominance in the region. Table 2 gives a general summary of the types of military assistance given by the US to the military establishments of the countries under study from the immediate post-war period to the eighties. It indicates a substantial amount from whence the region's armed forces derived much of their needs. External assistance has nurtured,

in turn, strong relations of dependency towards the U.S. (and other Western powers) and inextricably tied the directions and perspectives of these armed forces to those directed by the dominant Western powers. And in most cases, superpower influence extends down to the organization, doctrine and ethics of these military establishments. All are generally patterned after their Western donors' military model.

Thus, resources-wise, the armed forces of these countries are the most well-sustained among the various apparatuses of the transnationalized Southeast Asian states.

The military establishments are also sources of employment. In countries with limited employment capacities - of which majority of the countries under study are (with the exception of Singapore) - the armed forces become the outlet, albeit inadequate, by which problems of unemployment and under-employment are relatively resolved (see Table 3). Yet being a stage agency (and thus subject to the limits of budgetary allocation), the armed forces of most of the countries under study are also hampered by constraints like limited wages. In the Philippines and Thailand, for example, soldiers are one of the most poorly-paid sectors in society while in Singapore and Malaysia, officers and men are generally inadequately trained on non-military skills, thus constraining their ability to gain future employment outside of the military.<sup>4</sup>

#### Threat Perceptions

As armies of the Southeast Asian transnationalized states, these military establishments are commonly united in the view that theirs is the responsibility of protecting the *status quo*, i.e., the dependent-capitalist systems adopted by the ruling classes of each country. The system is uncritically accepted as the natural form of political role and social problems are seen as mere deficiencies which can be easily

Table 1. Percentage Share of Military Expenditures (ME) to Gross National Product (GNP), to Central Government Expenditures (CGE) and to Per Capital, Per Country, 1973-83.

Country	ME/GNP	ME/CGE	ME/Per Capital
Indonesia	3.4	14.9	15
Malaysia	4.7	14.0	69
Philippines	2.3	15.9	15
Singapore	5.4	21.1	250
Thailand	3.4	19.9	22

Source: ACDA, 1985, p. 47-48.

Table 2. US Military Assistance to ASEAN Armed Forces, Per Type of Assistance, 1950-1985 (Thousand Dollars)

Country	Types of Assistance/Source			Total
	Foreign Military Sales	Military Assistance Program	International Military Education And Training Program	
Indonesia	373,616	192,511	39,529	605,308
Malaysia	175,230	—	7,278	182,508
Philippines	289,411	632,368	41,529	963,308
Singapore	1,131,926	—	202	1,132,128
Thailand	2,347,741	1,165,143	84,215	3,597,099

Source: Department of Defense Security Assistance Agency, "Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Military Assistance Facts", 1985, pp. 2-3. As cited in Miranda and Ciron, op. cit.

rectified. Given the volatile character of dependent-capitalism in the region, the military's coercive role is enhanced as the preferred form of political governance is generally authoritarian. Moreover, since the military, as an institution, is the prime prototype of discipline, hierarchy and authoritarian relations, the tendency for it to be used to control a volatile civil society is more or less expected and legally ascribed to by State laws.

This conscious role as "defender of the State" is historically enhanced by the fact that all the region's armed forces were involved (or continue to be involved) in counter-insurgency drives against Left-led national liberation movements. At one time or the other, each country under discussion was affected by the political consequences of the volatility of dependent-capitalism generally manifested in the presence and challenge posed by Left-wing revolutionary movements. While most were able to contain, if not eliminate their left-wing threats (with the exception of the Philippines), these States have come to regard the defeated Left as having the capacity to politically revive itself by virtue of the prevailing of socio-political conditions. As such, this fear of potential revolutionary outbreak has given the region's military establishments new or rehashed rationalizations to continuously assert their legally-ascribed coercive functions, even up to point of creating myths through the communist bogey.<sup>5</sup>

What bolsters the armed forces' disposition in the region's dependent societies is the belief that there exist "external threats" to the sovereignty of these countries and to the "stability" of the region at large. The evolution of this external threat idea stemmed from a number of factors. Mainly, it is the pressure generated on these countries by successful national liberation movements in Asia (China in

1949 and the Indochinese states in 1975). These victories are seen by the military establishments as having the capacity to hasten and inspire local revolutionary movements which have viable political presence in each society. The threat from these victories either comes in the form of providing much-needed morale support to local insurgencies or worse (to military eyes), extending military assistance to the local revolutionary movements.

Superpower geo-politics served to strengthen this fear of the external threat. Both the United States and the Soviet Union have undoubtedly given special attention to Southeast Asia; the former by virtue of its economic interests and political hegemony in the area, while the latter, in establishing sea lane access for its Pacific Naval Fleet. China has also expressed its concern over regional developments (particularly over the Kampuchean issue and the US bases in the Philippines), indicating her intentions to enter into the politics of superpower competition in the region, while Japan has begun to make its presence more felt, albeit still as an economic power.

As most of the armed forces of the countries under study are organically linked with the United States and other Western powers, they unavoidably become actors (though secondary and sometimes as proxies) in the superpower rivalry in the region.<sup>6</sup>

In contemporary terms, this "threat" is said to be most visible in the Kampuchean conflict as well as the base access given to the Soviet Pacific Fleet by Vietnam. The region's armed forces have played this alleged Vietnamese threat to maintain their control over their respective societies ostensibly to act as deterrents against the spread of "communism" from the Indochinese states to the other parts of Southeast Asia. This view only shows the persistence of the much-debunked

"domino theory" among the armed forces under study. It has become an effective rationale for the ASEAN military establishments to transcend their strictly defense roles and enter the realm of politics.

### Anti-Communism

Ideological homogeneity among the Southeast Asian armed forces arising from similar threat perceptions has resulted in the perseverance of ideas like the anti-communist hysteria. Anti-communism has come to be a most enduring ideological value/belief among the armed forces of the region. This has helped nurture the military establishments' consciousness of their roles as defenders of the States against the various internal and external "threats".

The strength and influence of what is basically an element of Right-wing ideology varies. It depends on the

for legitimation purposes.<sup>7</sup> At present, the alliance has assumed a qualitatively different form with the active participation of the monarchy in the resolution of military factional conflict.<sup>8</sup>

In the Philippines, there is the identification of anti-communism with American liberal doctrines like "democracy" and a Right-of-Center political leadership to distinguish the State from threats coming from national liberation movements (the "Extreme Left") or right-wing groups (the "Extreme Right"). The Marcos dictatorship adopted this practice, at least in form by warning the people of a threat coming from combined forces of the Left and Right which accordingly prompted him to declare martial law in 1972. In the post-Marcos transition this ideological view has gained ground with the accession to power of the liberal and anti-communist Aquino government and the forced compromises it had to

Table 3. Percentage of Military Force to Population, Per Country, 1985

Country	Population (million)	Military Population	Percentage	Soldier/ 1000 people (1973-83)
Indonesia	168.4	278,100	0.16	1.8
Malaysia	15.7	110,000	0.70	6.2
Philippines	56.8	114,800	0.20	2.9
Singapore	2.6	55,000	2.11	19.0
Thailand	52.7	235,300	0.45	5.4

Sources: ACDA, 1985, pp. 47-48 as cited in Miranda and Ciron, op. cit., *Far Eastern Economic Review 1986 Yearbook*.

unique historical experience each country had undergone, (especially in relation to their respective Left movements) and — in more current times — in their geopolitical location vis-a-vis the socialist states of Indochina.

In Thailand, the military has established a firm alliance successfully attached to national and local belief systems that legitimize the status quo. In Indonesia, anti-communism has been equated with the nationalist ideology of Pancasila, whose evolution had concrete historical bases (particularly the perception that it grew out of the anti-colonial struggles of the Indonesian people) which people could identify with. Pancasila is therefore Indonesian, while Marxism is not.<sup>7</sup>

In Thailand, the military has established a firm alliance with one of the country's most powerful legitimizing institutions: the monarchy. The evolution of this relationship dated back to the 1930s with the installation of the first of a number of military dictatorships in Thailand and the *modus vivendi* the military regimes entered into with the deposed monarchy

make with the Armed Forces of the Philippines.<sup>9</sup>

The phenomenon of anti-communism among the region's armed forces may, therefore, be couched in nationalist rhetorics (e.g., Indonesia and Thailand) or be organically attached to political values and belief-systems inherited from the Western powers during the colonial era (the Philippines, and perhaps Singapore). It may be linked to pre-colonial values and mores that retained their influence in the post-colonial era to instill a constantly hostile popular perception to alternative ideological positions. This is specifically true as regards religious beliefs. Thus, Thai military rulers have constantly emphasized the irreconcilability between "Communism" and Buddhism. And for that matter, the military in the Philippines, with considerable ideological support coming from the influential Catholic Church, has harped on the incompatibility of Catholicism with Marxism to tap a predominant Catholic and Christian tradition against the local revolutionary movement.<sup>10</sup>

## Hostility to Popular Movements

The popular character of most Left-led national liberation movements has engendered deep suspicions among the region's armed forces towards popular organizing and popular movements. They believe that mass-based movements are fundamentally communist-inspired and are established as crucial mechanisms for the gradual erosion of the dependent State and the eventual seizure of power by the Left. Thus, these military institutions are not exactly open to the idea of popular organizing autonomous of or independent from the State. Where they are in complete control of the State apparatus, the military usually seeks to coopt these popular organizations and use them as its "popular base" to reinforce its aspirations for legitimacy.

The classic case of popular movement cooptation is the Indonesian Golkar which integrated, under the threat of political sanctions, the people's organizations of the youth, peasant and women. These "functional groups" are then presented as the substantive mass base of the military-dominated political party and effectively buttressed the military's claim as the legitimate authority over society.<sup>11</sup>

In Thailand, the military established its own right-wing mass organizations to counter those of an ascendant urban-based Left after the downfall of the Thanom dictatorship. These groups became instrumental in eliminating Left-wing student and farmers' organizations during the military-instigated 1976 bloody coup which restored the hegemony of the armed forces in Thai society. They have consequently been integrated into the Thai military apparatus.<sup>12</sup>

In the Philippines, the phenomenon of right-wing vigilante groups has just been initiated by the military as part of its "total war" effort against the National Democratic Front. While having relative success in certain areas, it is doubtful whether the idea can be replicated in other regions of the country or, more importantly, be capable of weakening the armed revolutionary movement.<sup>13</sup>

A mitigating factor to the hostile attitude of most armed forces to popular movements and the formers' desire to coopt them is the inability of the latter to formulate effective counter-strategies against the military to weaken, if not totally render ineffective, the capacity to enforce organized coercion. It appears to be common among popular movements in the region which operate in the legal, above-ground sphere to give more emphasis to "broader national problems" or be narrowly inward-looking and sectorally-oriented in their politics. The reason for these may either be the hostile political climate to popular organizing (e.g., in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand) or the tendency of most movements to simplistically view the military establishment as a monolithic and unbreakable state apparatus.<sup>14</sup>

Military hostility to popular movements is also partly explained by the fact that the Left opposition are mainly

armed struggle movements. There is truth to the fear of most armed forces that it is through mass organizations working on the above-ground level that armed struggle movements achieve successes in the propaganda and political spheres of their revolutionary projects.<sup>15</sup>

## Cracked Monoliths

In spite of public projections of unity, the armed forces of the countries under discussion are monoliths exhibiting cracks brought about by factionalism. Factions proliferate in the military institutions of these dependent capitalist states, although their nature and origins vary from one country to the other. Apart from the normally-expected inter-service rivalries, factionalism in the region's armed forces have other common characteristics.



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There is the phenomenon of conflict and tensions among generations arising from differences in experience and life histories. The conflict becomes pronounced as old generations of generals are in the process of turning over the reins of military and/or political leadership to their younger colleagues.

In Indonesia, the aging "Revolutionary Generation of '45" – the generation bred in the anti-colonial and anti-communist resistance of the 1950s and the 1960's – is being slowly retired in favor of younger officers coming from the "Bridge" and "Magelang" generations of officers. The latter matured during the era of political stability after the ouster of the Partai Komunis Indonesia and Sukarno and are more inclined towards the formation of a professional army detached from politics. This posture radically differs from the revolutionary officers' corps of Suharto's generation and has

caused considerable tensions between these groups in the ABRI (Indonesian Armed Forces) as the old generals are resisting the efforts of the younger officers to ease them out for the sake of professionalism and modernization.<sup>16</sup>

A similar conflict of generations is occurring in Thailand with the organization of the "Young Turks". This association of disgruntled middle-level officers has posed a challenge to the older generals whom they accuse of causing disunity and division in the Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTAF) due to the excessive practice of patronage politics, their involvement in graft and corruption, and the use of political power for personal advances.

Unlike Indonesia, however, the younger Thai officers are demanding a re-definition of the military's political relation to the Thai masses (one can note that this demand does not necessarily depoliticize the RTAF for the sake of "professionalism"). The Young Turks' attempt to overthrow the Prem government in 1981 denoted the extent of dissatisfaction coming from the younger generation of officers. It was only with the intervention of the Monarchy that the Young Turks coup attempt was aborted.<sup>17</sup>

The formation of the Reform the Armed Forces of the Philippines movement (RAM) in the twilight years of the Marcos dictatorship followed closely the process of formation of the Young Turks. Organized by junior officers who had lost faith in the leadership of Marcos' hand-picked generals, RAM became the catalyst in the Philippine military's withdrawal of support to Marcos during the historic February 1986 Revolution. RAM's participation in the uprising set in motion the AFP's new-found political role of which the most dramatic expression is the series of coup d'état that rocked the Aquino government. In these "confrontations" between the Aquino government and its politicized military, RAM officers were to play a major role in the military's challenge to the new government as well as in the inner conflict within the faction-ridden AFP.<sup>18</sup>

The conflict of generations have been exacerbated by the divergent views among officers towards the military's role in politics. In Indonesia, the younger generations appear to be pushing for a more professional and less politicized military, while the Young Turks want a reorientation of the RTAF's role away from the politics of patronage that pervade the institution.<sup>19</sup>

The Philippine military, on the other hand, is in a state of flux. The politicized colonels of the RAM have relatively lost out to the professionalized senior military leadership, even as the entire military establishment have united to protect its corporate interests against a resurgent people's movement and the anti-military and liberal members of the civilian leadership.<sup>20</sup>

Other than the divergent interests and perspectives of generations, the sources of rivalry within some armed forces of the countries under study originate from discordance over issues like race and regionalism. In Singapore, where the

military's formal subordination to the civilian authority is being enforced, tensions within the Armed Forces of Singapore are caused by the preference of Chinese over Malays. Although Singapore officials continue to deny it, racial discontent is said to persist among Malay soldiers but is still believed to be within manageable levels.<sup>21</sup>

Ethnic and communal tensions are equally happening in Malaysia where the conflict between Malays, Chinese and Indians have reflected down to the most basic of social institutions. Notwithstanding the level of professionalism in the Royal Malay Armed Forces, state officials remain very sensitive to the possibilities that the racial conflict that has always been a constant source of social instability may spill over to the military.<sup>22</sup>

In the Philippines, in lieu of ethnic differences, regionalism has been cited by scholars of the military as one source of factional dispute inside the AFP. There is the general belief among military analysts that rivalries among soldiers coming from different parts of the country exist. This loyalty is displayed through arrogant postures vis-a-vis those coming from other regions.<sup>23</sup> The problem however has not reached crisis proportions, although there is the need for deeper research on the regional composition of the *coup* plotters against the Aquino government.

#### Notes on the Politics of Military Domination

As was mentioned in the beginning of this paper, military establishments have maintained substantial footholds over the political leadership in their countries. One can make the proposition that in general, we are witness to a deeply politicized regional military.

The concept politicization is commonly referred to as the involvement of the armed forces in elite politics of their respective countries. There is the departure of the military from its original professional role – i.e., that of merely defending the State militarily – through its conscious involvement and intervention in the political processes normally the sole domain of civilian politicians. When the armed forces join the political fray, it may either be in collaboration with certain civilian elites (either with dominant political parties or powerful blocs like the technocracy, the monarchy or the executive) or as a bloc-in-itself. Military intervention usually signals the advent of repression in society, particularly targeting those individuals, groups or forces that are perceived as the opposition.

Among the five ASEAN states (excluding Brunei) it is Indonesia and Thailand which have the most "politicized" armed forces by virtue of their leadership positions in the governments of these two nations. The Philippines, on the other hand, is less politicized compared to these two countries, although its military had become increasingly involved in the decision-making process of the post-Marcos state, especially



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if it dealt with the insurgency, recalcitrant and erring troops, and the degree of civilian control over the AFP.

Singapore and Malaysia are the least politicized in the sense that there exists no blatant and overt military participation in the politics and civilian control is effectively functioning and respected by the armed forces. This may be due to their relative economic stability either arising from successful integration to the world capitalist system (due to control of essential and high-export earning commodities like rubber and oil) or the absence of internal "threats".

Yet the concept "politicization" has different meanings, depending on the country under discussion. It can range from outright and overwhelming political hegemony, to one where the armed forces remain contented as a pressure group to the civilian leadership.

The Indonesian Armed Forces, ABRI, sees its political domination over civil society as being pre-ordained. ABRI's historical origins as an anti-colonial army and as an army which actively played a part in the nation-building process (especially its defense of a nation under "threat" from the PKI) established the belief that it is, the most effective institution to lead a nation through crisis, stability and progress. This belief was further bolstered as a result of the unstable relationship between civilian leaders and the military, particularly during the Sukarno period.<sup>24</sup> Military domination of politics has been buttressed by the State ideology (Pancasila) which the armed forces views as a strong ideological rationale and source of political legitimation.

The Thai RTAF shares a certain degree of affinity with ABRI, especially after it overthrew the Thai monarchy to become the country's dominant political power. Generals who played major roles in Thailand's 16 coups constantly rationalized their political take-over as resulting from the inability of civilians to lead society towards stability and development.<sup>25</sup>

The emergence of the Young Turks, however, signals a new political perspective among the middle-level RTAF officers corps. Left rhetorics (i.e., mass democracy, anti-capitalism, anti-elite, etc.) are being adopted in their effort to distinguish their political position from that of the older, graft-ridden, corrupt, and more patronage-oriented generals. It was the desire of these officers to clean the RTAF and at the same time reorient its political ideology towards one that is committed more towards popular interests and benefits.<sup>26</sup>

In the Philippines, military politicization became more apparent after the downfall of the dictatorship although it never went to the extent as that of Thailand. This is due to the unique unfolding of events last February 1986 wherein leading representatives and factions of the Marcos regime were ousted from power, though, this fact was diminished of its significance by the new regime's preservation of the substantial structures of the authoritarian State. The AFP, particularly, is still the same intact Marcos apparatus of coercion: huge in size, dominating the instruments of violence, yet ill-trained and looking like just any government bureaucracy in terms of its tremendous inefficiency.

The young officers of RAM had similar views as the Thai Young Turks vis-a-vis the institution of radical reforms inside the AFP. However, they lack the political sophistication that the Young Turks had, thus limiting their political growth and making them easy preys to conflicts between military supporters and opponents of the Aquino government during the middle and late months of 1986. RAM has become divided by itself as a result of these conflicts as its officers prefer a more aggressive military (incidentally, these officers are instrumental in a number of coups attempts) while the younger officers (with the ranks of major, captain and lieutenant) have opted to support the civilian government and the professionalism-oriented AFP leadership.<sup>27</sup>



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Other than the formal positions occupied by the likes of Suharto and Prem Tinsunalonda, military officers are in important political institutions that wield enormous power and influence. ABRI, in particular, maintains its hold over civil society through the *Kopkamtib* (Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order), the overseer of political stability. The powers of *Kopkamtib* are enormous. According to one sympathetic study:

*Kopkamtib* has acquired wide-ranging tasks, asserting it is responsible for destroying elements that endanger integrity of the state, raising the level of national stability, securing the authority of the Government, restraining cultural influences that conflict with Pancasila values, and generating public participation in peace and security matters. Specifically, it has had responsibility for securing national elections, cleansing the government of corrupt officials, suppressing communist rebels in Kalimantan, combatting Papuan separatists, putting down political disturbances in Jakarta, monitoring the activities of former political prisoners and cancelling the publication permits of newspapers and magazines that incite social unrest.<sup>28</sup>

RTAF generals, on the other hand, may not be as powerful as their Indonesian counterparts but the number of

military-instigated coups against civilian regimes (and equally military administrations) indicate that the armed forces is a crucial State institution in Thai society.<sup>29</sup> Aside from the frequent coups that have come to characterize Thai politics, the generals' decisions are also crucial when it comes to so-called "sensitive areas" of State policy, notably, internal defense (e.g., counter-insurgency programs), linkages with the superpowers, especially when military assistance is the issue.<sup>30</sup>

The other Southeast Asian armed forces do not exercise the same powerful political presence as the two military establishments mentioned above, although their possible inclusion into the politics of their respective States cannot be totally ignored. The qualitative change in the Philippine armed forces' political participation since the Marcos dictatorship has been discussed above while changes towards establishing military presence in Singapore politics may be happening with the informal appointment of Gen. Lee Hsien Loong, the son of the prime minister, to a political post in the Social Action Party and the government itself.<sup>31</sup>

#### **A Militarized Southeast Asia: Trends and Dilemmas**

The survival of the dependent capitalist states of



Southeast Asia is extremely dependent on the ability of their respective armed forces to continuously exercise their coercive roles over the rest of society. In the process, the military institutions become more and more integrated into the political leadership, exercising major decision-making initiatives as regards the procedure of State rule over civil society at the same time as State largesse to the armed forces continue to be substantially increased.

Among authoritarian states with economies in crises, military participation and/or intervention in the civilian-dominated political structures become more pronounced as repercussions of the crises engender social tensions which are, in turn, translated into reformists or revolutionary movements seeking a change in mode of political governance or of the entire system itself. In the end, some regimes have become totally servile to their military establishments. The formal distinctions between military and civilian are, therefore, dissolved.

The militarization of politics has also its international dimensions given the region's importance to the politics of superpower rivalry and the hegemony of the leading countries of the "Western bloc" over the non-socialist states of Southeast Asia. Western (particularly American) hostility to both the Soviet Union's initiatives in the region and the existence of indigenous revolutionary movements has served to create more opportunities for the armed forces to get involved in politics given the strong links forged through Western military assistance to the latter.

Given these major factors, the trend in the region appears to point towards greater military presence in politics. As the region's dependent-capitalist states attempt to resolve within their narrow economic framework the crisis brought about by the process of transnationalization, they will have no recourse but to rely more on coercive apparatuses of the State to prevent social tensions from transforming into social revolts.

The militarization of politics, however, also poses dilemmas for the dependent-capitalist states. Military rule has, in most cases, opened the armed forces to the debilitating practices characteristic of some Third World bureaucracies. In the process of exercising power, they become inefficient and faction-ridden. The military establishments — hitherto detached from by virtue of its own world view, social mores and ethics — have come to be just like any other Third World civilian "political" institution. They become corrupted and are transformed into the source of patronage politics.

These undermine the armed forces' so-called "professional" character and weaken their capacity to enforce order. Thus, it is not surprising to observe instances where the armed forces — because of the erosion of their capacity to govern and the inefficiency due to bureaucratization arising from political involvement — had to give way or tolerate opposition groups and movements (e.g., the militant Muslim in Indonesia, the popular movements in the Philippines).

It is also worthwhile to point out that in the conflict of factions, the younger generations of officers can challenge the "old guards" on the need for the armed forces to return to the "basic values of professionalism" without radical sanctions from the latter.<sup>32</sup>

More importantly, overt military rule in a society-in-crisis merely hastens political polarization and erodes further whatever legitimacy is left of these states. The recognition of such dilemmas has forced regimes like Thailand and the Philippines to institute remedial but strategically ineffective measures. These include periodic electoral exercises for parliament of the executive, formal power-sharing with civilians, and even the restoration of civilian-led formal liberal democratic rule. But new tensions are created as a less repressive political atmosphere induces into the open the social tensions which were supposed to have been the subject of repression by military rule.

More liberal forms of governance, however, create fissures within the State as parties and factions compete in the control of the apparatuses and the division of spoils. A "democracy of stalemate", the very thing which dictators, technocrats and the military detest most as it loosens the State's hold over a volatile society, evolves and regenerates, and exacerbates social and class tensions. The very conditions that prompted the State to change to more authoritarian forms are thus restored and in a matter of time a new leader or a military faction rises to power to institute a new dictatorship with the old aims of "installing order" in society.

All these only makes the task of formulating a strategy for the demilitarization of these societies more imperative for committed intellectuals and members of popular movements. **K**

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The materials used as reference in this paper are as follows: Peter Britton, "The Military and State in Indonesia" (1984 Indonesian Report), the author's "The Military and the Marcos Regime" (1985 Philippine Report) and Surachart Bamrungsk, "The Military and the Thai State: Militarization of Politics and Politicization of the Military" (1985 Thai Report). The Malaysian and Singapore team did not include studies on their respective armed forces. Thus the author had to use the limited data provided for by articles from the book *The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies*: Edward A. Olsen and Stephen Jurika, Jr. (eds.), Boulder and London: Western Special Studies in Military Affairs, 1986. Again, due to time and limited literature, a significant portion of a study on the region's armed forces — that of the military's link with the economy — is relatively excluded in the discussion.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert L. Rau, "The Role of the Armed Forces and Police in Malaysia" and Patrick M. Mayerchak, "The Role of the Military in Singapore", in *The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies*, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>As cited by Felipe B. Miranda and Ruben F. Ciron, "Philippine Defense Expenditures and Threat Perceptions: Significance of the US Role", Paper delivered at the Workshop on Defense and Development in Southeast Asia: Defense and Threat Perceptions", 20-22 August 1986, Singapore. p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Mayerchak, op. cit., p. 178-183.

<sup>5</sup>All the countries under study have authoritarian internal policies if they are not outright dictatorships. The exception is the Philippines after February 1986. But as the Aquino government moves towards political consolidation most observers agree that a shift to the Right has occurred despite the regime's liberal beginnings. See Randolph S. David, "Theorizing and Living the Transition: The Aquino Government's First Seven Months", *Kasarinlan: Journal of Third World Studies*, Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines, Vol. 2, No 2, 4th Quarter.

<sup>6</sup>Alexander R. Magno, "Peace and Security Issues in Southeast Asia", background paper prepared for the United Nations University Meeting of Experts on Regional Peace and Security in Asia and the Pacific, Tashkent, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 27 - 29 April 1985. Subsequently published in *Kasarinlan*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2nd Quarter, 1985. pp. 25-34.

<sup>7</sup>Peter Britton, "The Military and the State in Indonesia", op. cit. p. 111.

<sup>8</sup>Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *The Thai Young Turks* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), pp. 62-66. For an excellent critical historical analysis of the evolution of the Thai dictatorship, see David Elliot, *Thailand: Origins of Military Rule* (London: Zed Press, Ltd., 1978).

<sup>9</sup>See Alexander R. Magno, "Developmentalism and the New Society: The Repressive Ideology of Underdevelopment". *The Philippines in the Third World Papers*, Series No. 35. Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines. August 1983. For the persistence of this belief after the downfall of the dictatorship, see Francisco Nemenzo, "A Season of Coups: Reflections on the Military Intervention in Politics", *Kasarinlan*, op. cit. (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup>Rodney Tasker, "The Religion Factor" and James Clad, "The Soldiers of God", *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 January 1987 and 12 March 1987, respectively.

<sup>11</sup>Britton, op. cit., pp. 117-118, see also Harold W. Maynard, "The Role of the Indonesian Armed Forces", *The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies*, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>12</sup>"Thailand Under Military Rule", *Southeast Asian Chronicle*, issue No. 60, January - February 1978.

<sup>13</sup>James Clad, "Losing Leftist Ground", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 January 1987.

<sup>14</sup>Surachart Bamrungsuk's analysis of the politicization of the Thai military reflects the discomfort progressive Thai academics face in studying their military. op. cit. Most popular movements are still caught in the simple view that as part of the State apparatus, the military has to be smashed in order for it to be effectively eliminated as a threat. Nemenzo advocates a less sectarian view towards the military and argues that the AFP can itself become the target of political propaganda of popular movements. See "A Season of Coups", op. cit.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion on the revolutionary and secessionist movement in the region, see the books *Armed Communist Movements in Southeast Asia* and *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia*, Lin Joo-Jock and Vani S. (eds), (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984).

<sup>16</sup>Ben Anderson, "Current Data on the Indonesian Military Elite", photocopy. pp. 131-138. See also Lincoln Kaye, "Fighting-trim Reforms", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 31 October 1985.

<sup>17</sup>Chai-Anan Samudavanija, op. cit., pp. 25-35.

<sup>18</sup>Apart from RAM, which is an organization of officers who graduated from the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), the country's prime military school, other factions rose in the last years of the dictatorship. These included the Guardians, an organization composed mainly of civilian intègrées in the military. See Nemenzo, op. cit. For the origins of RAM, see Abinales, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup>Anderson, op. cit., and Chai-anan, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Nemenzo, op. cit. However, there is yet to be a common position among students of the Philippine military on the basis of factional conflict within the AFP in the Aquino period. Nemenzo avers that RAM itself is divided, but other than citing divided loyalties to Pres. Aquino as the basic, there are no other reasons given. See also Randolph S. David, et. al. "Coup D'Etat in the Philippines: Four Essays". *The Philippines in the ThirdWorld Papers*. Series No. 44, Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines, December 1986.

<sup>21</sup>Mayerchak, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>22</sup>Rau, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>23</sup>Francisco Nemenzo, "Alternatives to Marcos". Paper presented at the Conference on Political Systems and Development, Sponsored by the India Council of Social Science Research, Center for the Study of Developing Societies and Center for Policy Research, India, February 1980.

<sup>24</sup>Britton, op. cit. p. 117.

<sup>25</sup>For the political importance of the Thai military, see David Morell, "Political Dynamics of Military Power in Thailand", in *The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies*, op. cit., pp. 138-152.

<sup>26</sup>Chai-Anan Samudavanija, op. cit. pp. 56-62. Samudavanija qualifies, however, that these radical rhetoric of the Young Turks does not mean their being Left in orientation. Rather their experiences in the anti-insurgency campaign made these disgruntled officers aware of the same problems that the Left was familiar with and thus found themselves condemning these issues as the CPT had been critical of them since its inception.

<sup>27</sup>"Coup D 'Etat in the Philippines: Four Essays", op. cit.

<sup>28</sup>Maynard, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>29</sup>Morell, op. cit., pp. 138-139.

<sup>30</sup>Bamrungsuk, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup>As to whether a trend will be established is still too early to determine. See Rau, op. cit. p. 175.

<sup>32</sup>Chai-Anan Samudavanija, op. cit. pp. 56-62. Abinales, op. cit. and Anderson, op. cit. The "old guards" even would concede this point to the young officers and go through the motions of formally reaffirming their support to the return to professionalism.