Southeast Asian Perspectives on the War against Terror (2003)[1]

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Abstract

One can surmise from the above discussion that a common ASEAN position on terrorism stands only on unfirm ground at this point, although there is a strong common interest in minimizing challenges from Islamic militants and much justification for cooperation along this line. Moreover, the attitudes of various Southeast Asian governments and peoples towards the US-led anti-terror coalition are shaped not only by the common interest in fighting terrorism, but have to take into consideration (1) the negative perceptions and mistrust of the United States that lingers in the region (including resentment against its double standards of defining terrorist groups and against its unilateralist proclivities); (2) domestic political sensitivities to Islamic and nationalist constituents; and (3) the actual level of threat represented by the homegrown militants to the present government in comparison to other, possibly more important threats to security.

Islam and Terrorism in Southeast Asia

Terrorism in Southeast Asia is certainly not a new phenomenon and neither is it necessarily associated with Islamic extremism. Many organizations of various colors and ideological persuasions have expressed political dissent through the use of violence whether directed against the state, rival communities or innocent civilians. The anti-colonial struggles of the past as well as movements for self-determination, autonomy and national liberation have at one time or another been labeled terrorist by the authorities and regimes they challenged. However, in the current context of the world after September 11, there seems to be an association of the concept of terrorism in Southeast Asia with Islamic militancy, radicalism or "Political Islam."

One reason is that Islam is not just a personal faith or religion but a comprehensive moral and ethical philosophy with prescriptions regarding law and the functions of a state. Thus, Muslim peoples the world over tend to have a keen sense of politics and of international brotherhood that can unite them for common causes or against perceived common enemies or challenges. A more important reason for this association is that one of the few remaining sources of ideological challenge to the hegemony of Western liberal democratic ideology comes from Islamic resurgence.

Southeast Asia's Muslims are known to be more moderate politically than counterparts in other places, partly because the region's Islamic faith emerged from the Sunni sect but also because of other conditions in the predominantly Muslim countries that militate against more radical religious regimes. For example, both Malaysia and Indonesia are ethnically and culturally divided societies, where exclusionary policies will prejudice national integration and security.

Nonetheless, no matter how moderate Southeast Asian Islam is, compared to the more militant and fundamentalist strains in the Middle East and elsewhere, there are minorities of fundamentalists within the moderate majorities who would wish to see Islamic states established in

place of the current secular regimes. In Muslim-majority Malaysia, Indonesia, as well as in some Southern Philippine provinces, such groups have reportedly established transnational links with each other, with the aim of setting up a single Islamic state uniting their respective territories. This in itself does not make them terrorist.

There are, however, additional factors driving solidarity among some radical Muslim organizations and individuals in Southeast Asia. These include common education in certain religious schools in the Middle East or Pakistan, experience serving in Afghanistan against Soviet invasion where they obtained military training, and support from other Islamic organizations or governments. These are where the supposed nexus between Southeast Asia's militant Muslims and the terrorist networks of Al Qaeda are alleged to lie.

Among the small number of radical Islamic groups that have, rightly or wrongly, been labeled terrorist, and which are being associated in one way or another with international terrorism are the following:

- In Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiah GI) and Laskar Jihad. Both groups have sent adherents to train in Afghanistan and have fought against Soviets, Laskar Jihad also reportedly sent 700 fighters to train in Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) camps in the Philippines.
- In the Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf is considered a nonideological bandit group by the Philippine government but was recently linked to Osama bin Laden through his brother in-law who has a Filipino wife. At one time, the Abu Sayyaf demanded the release of Ramzi Yousef (one of the masterminds of the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, who lived in the Philippines sometime in 1994-95) in exchange for hostages but otherwise, Philippine authorities have dismissed reports of strong links to Osama bin Laden.[2] On the other hand, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the (non-Islamic) Communist New People's Army have been engaged in political revolution and armed rebellion for many years. Most people in the Philippines would not place them in the category

of terrorists, even if their tactics of struggle include what may be considered by some as terroristic activities.

- Malaysia's Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia, Al Maunah, and Jihad: According to Malaysian sources, these groups have little capacity to operate on a large scale. KMM has 84 members, and most members of all three groups are reportedly currently serving prison sentences or are in detention (Hassan 2002).
- In Thailand, during the 1960s and 1970s the Pattani United Liberation Organization staged bombings in Bangkok. The movement was inactive until recently, but Thai authorities continue to be concerned, enough to join the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia in efforts to develop a regional anti-terrorist initiative.

As a whole, there are few terrorist incidents in Southeast Asia, compared to Europe or the Middle East. Terrorist activity has mainly taken place in the form of bombing incidents, kidnapping for ransom activities, or raids into civilian communities, and were often indistinguishable from ordinary criminal acts because whatever political orientation was carried by such groups were not clearly or consistently articulated. ASEAN has never had to organize a working group against terrorism prior to 9-11, despite its large number of committees and working groups on diverse functional areas (Kurlantzik 2001). But the Association was well aware of the threat from militant Muslims even before 9-11. In August 2001 the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore met to consider ways of dealing with their home-grown extremists (Gershman 2002). Of special concern was the need to control the numbers of Muslim adherents attending overseas religious schools where they were being subjected to influence by hardline teachers.

In the wake of 9-11, there were reports of links between Muslim militants from these countries with the Al Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden. Mentioned as evidence were sightings of suspected Middle Eastern

terrorists in Southeast Asian capitals, the presence of Arab-looking persons in Muslim rebel strongholds in southern Philippines, reports of foreigners holding meetings to plan acts of terror, computer files and documents from such groups confiscated by local police, and enrolment of Middle Eastern students in flight training schools. Jemaah Islamiah members are believed to have helped book accommodations in Malaysia for two of the Al Qaeda terrorists who hijacked the airliner that crashed into the Pentagon on September 11 (Wain 2012). Militants with suspected ties to Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network have also been arrested in Singapore and Malaysia.

However, while the US government and some American commentators look at Southeast Asia as the second front in the war against terrorism following their overthrow of the Taliban, there has been no definitive proof of financial or logistical support for these movements from Osama bin Laden or the Al Qaeda network (Christian Science Monitor 2001). Thus far, the feeling in the region is that such evidence has been too scanty to warrant classifying Southeast Asia as a second front.

Jawhar Hassan of Malaysia argues that the terrorist groups are essentially home-grown and are not part of an international or regional terrorist network (Hassan 2002). There is certainly more evidence of links among Southeast Asian groups rather than between them and international networks–e.g. an Indonesian member of Jemaah Islamiah implicated in a commuter train bombing in the Philippines in December 2000, JI involvement in the assassination of a Malaysian politician in November 2000, the Philippine embassy bombing in Jakarta, Indonesian passports found in MILF camps in the Philippines, and Malaysian fighters joining Laskar Jihad in Indonesia. This led Malaysia's deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi to say that that there were Islamic groups out to create a "regional cellular structure with franchised terror operatives and groups stationed within different countries in ASEAN" (Agence France Presse 2002).

Because the problem of terrorism in Southeast Asia stems from largely home-grown movements, whose objectives are rooted in local problems of social injustice and economic as well as political alienation, the feeling is that the solutions must likewise be home-grown and more nuanced towards the origins and characteristics of these groups. The US-led international campaign against terrorists, a poorly-defined concept to date that for some American officials includes all rabid opponents of US foreign policy, hardly seems an appropriate framework for addressing the problem.

Southeast Asian Responses to the US-led War Against Terror

Defining terrorism is as difficult for Southeast Asia as it is for the rest of the world. A two-day conference on terrorism that was held in May 2002 among 10 ASEAN interior ministers attempted to articulate a common understanding of the concept but the ministers failed to agree on a definition. Instead they pointed out the apparently different origins and root causes of "terrorism" in each country–e.g. poverty in the Philippines, attraction to religious teachings and techniques of warfare brought back by religious teachers in the case of Singapore.[3] They agreed that governments should be free to address the root causes of terrorism as they saw fit in each country, and that the world should refrain from identifying terrorism with any race, religion, culture and nationality.

The ministers nonetheless agreed that the lack of agreement on a definition should not hamper their efforts to develop a common program of action. Significantly, it was Malaysia that had wanted a common definition of terrorism in order to boost cooperation, which it also attempted but failed to do during the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in April 2002. At the OIC meeting, Mahathir Mohamad upset some Islamic countries by proposing that terrorism encompass all violence targeted at civilians, lumping together September 11's attacks on New York's World

Trade Center, Palestinian suicide bombings and Israel's West Bank assaults (Chalmers 2002). On the other hand, Singapore's Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng expressed the view that the task of defining terrorism should be left to global bodies such as the United Nations (Agence France Presse 2002).

At the unofficial level, a definition of terrorism was drafted by the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, a regional Track 2 network in which Southeast Asian security specialists actively participate. Terrorism was defined, to wit, as: *The use of violence, alien against people not directly involved in a conflict, by parties which generally claim to have high political or religious purposes, and which believe that creating a climate of terror will assist attainment of their objectives. Terrorism of this kind almost always appears to be non-governmental, but terrorism can also be conducted by states. Movements engaging in terrorism may also have a degree of clandestine support from governments.*[4]

At the practical level, defining terrorism would raise the need for classification of existing armed groups and movements into terrorist or non-terrorist. The exercise runs the risk of undermining long-standing political positions of some ASEAN countries such as support for the cause of Palestinian self-determination. It would also be a domestically divisive issue, given the proliferation of a wide spectrum of politically important Muslim organizations in Southeast Asia, including radical and militant ones that manage to draw popular support.

In the absence of conceptual and ideological clarity in the understanding of what constitutes terrorism, the positions of various Southeast Asian governments vis-à-vis the US-led war against terrorism has had to be crafted on the basis of domestic pragmatic concerns. It is a process that to this day governments have to negotiate among members of their political elites as well as various social and religious constituencies.

In the immediate aftermath of 9-11, all the Southeast Asian countries supported UN Security Council Resolution 1368 of Sept. 12, 2001 and Resolution 1373 of Sept. 28, 2001. During its November 2001 Summit,

ASEAN issued a declaration on joint action to counter terrorism, but this was largely limited to intelligence and information exchange. ASEAN later proposed the establishment of joint training programs on such areas as bomb detection and airport security (CNN 2002). In May 2002, there were further agreements to introduce national anti-terror laws to govern the arrest, investigation, prosecution and extradition of suspects. Under such an arrangement, each nation would recognize and respect the other nations' laws.

ASEAN cooperation with the US was also pledged in terms of intelligence sharing, coordination in law enforcement, and the holding of training workshops on counter-terrorism measures (Channel News Asia 2002). Cooperation with the United States was mainly undertaken at the bilateral level, and with well-publicized results. In Singapore, terrorist elements with supposed links to Al Qaeda were arrested and interrogated by Singapore police. Philippine authorities in April 2002 seized two Muslim militants they said had been trained in bomb-making in Malaysia. From mid-2001 to mid-2002, Malaysia claimed to have detained dozens of militant suspects, although the government had in fact used the threat of militant Islam to crack down on the primary opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) even before the attacks on the U.S. In December 2001, Singapore again arrested members of a cell which it said had planned to attack U.S. targets on the island.

In contrast, Indonesia has been criticized by the United States and Singapore for its lack of action; in light of information from the Singapore arrests that ringleaders of a suspected regional network are based there (Chalmers 2002). In November 2001, Indonesia after a long delay agreed to freeze bank accounts of terrorist suspects upon the request of the United States.

Although the fight against terrorism is of common interest to ASEAN and the United States (and presumably the entire international community) and while ASEAN would benefit from US success in minimizing the challenge from this new faceless enemy, US military actions in Afghanistan

and the subsequent handling of the anti-terror campaign drew mixed reactions from Southeast Asia.

In Malaysia, Prime Minister Mahathir opposed having any ASEAN resolution that would back U.S. military action in Afghanistan and argued that the group should only endorse a UN General Assembly resolution condemning terrorism. But during the November 2001 leaders' meeting, ASEAN also reportedly rejected Mahathir's attempt to go on record against U.S. actions in Afghanistan and instead issued a statement condemning terrorism and the attacks on the U.S. as "an attack against humanity and an assault on all of us" (Simon 2001).

Sentiment against the war in Afghanistan ran high in Malaysia. At one point 4000 demonstrators gathered in Kuala Lumpur to protest the US air strikes. Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar also issued a warning that prolonged military attacks on Afghanistan could destabilize the Islamic world (Simon 2001).

Moreover, there also emerged some resistance to the idea of the United States enlarging the scope of its anti-terror activities into areas that would interfere in other states' internal affairs and infringe on their sovereignty. Since 9-11, the U.S. media reported that Washington had been asking Kuala Lumpur to hand over suspected terrorists, to which Mahathir reportedly replied by saying that although extremist groups exist in Malaysia, they "are directing their attacks at us, and we can take care of them. They are not attacking the United States."[5] In addition, Malaysia and Indonesia condemned new U.S. visa restrictions imposed on the nationals of 25 Muslim countries including them.

Mahathir has stated his position that the biggest challenge in overcoming Islamic militancy is not the role the United States would play, but for moderate Muslims to initiate reforms that would ensure good governance, at the same time addressing corruption and human rights abuses. Calling on scholars and thinkers of the Islamic faith to rise to the challenge, he warned that "continuing U.S. belligerence and aggression

would severely limit the credibility and legitimacy of religious and political reformers who advocate a liberal democratic future for Muslim nations. Let's not throw away this valuable opportunity to reintegrate the Islamic world into the international system" (Raslan 2001).

This may be the reason why Malaysia has been taking the initiative within ASEAN and the OIC to focus multilateral attention on the issue, which is however being interpreted by other quarters as increasing support for the international coalition. But subsequent events on the Israeli Palestinian front will likely add pressure on the government of Malaysia to justify any forthcoming support for US anti-terrorist policy.

Thailand's leaders also demonstrated somewhat qualified support for US actions in Afghanistan, which may have been influenced by remaining negative sentiments towards the US as a result of the poor American response to the 1997 Asian crisis and non-support for Thai leadership of the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is also a product of sensitivity toward Muslim communities in the south (Simon 2001). The Council of Muslim Organizations of Thailand had called for a boycott of U.S. products while the war in Afghanistan continued (Simon 2001).

Leaders in Thailand spoke of the need to ascertain guilt before taking any military action against the Taliban government presumed to be harboring Bin Laden (Christian Science Monitor 2001). Bangkok also refused a U.S. request to station supply ships in the Gulf of Thailand. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, however, had a more ambivalent position. Initially he insisted that Thailand would wait for a joint ASEAN resolution and that any use of Thai bases by U.S. forces would require ASEAN approval. Eventually, he offered a guarded endorsement of the U.S. air strikes on Afghanistan on the grounds that U.S. action "was a result of the UN's decision to dismantle and end the networks of terrorism."

The Indonesian public expressed the strongest opposition to US actions in Afghanistan, so much that the government was held immobile by strong public opinion. Street demonstrations in four major Indonesian cities stoked fears of an impending anti-US campaign in Indonesia. The

Indonesian Ulemas Council, a group of top Islamic leaders, called on Muslims to prepare for *jihad* if Afghanistan were attacked. Militant organizations declared that a war against Afghanistan would be considered a war against Islam, giving them cause to fight back against American "terrorism" (Guerin 2001).

Although Islamic radicals account for only a small portion of the population in the world's largest Islamic country (their influence balanced by the broadly-based moderate organizations Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama), they have upset domestic stability in a number of locations. Protesters and politicians alike warned Megawati about being carried along by US interests (Christian Science Monitor 2001). Vice President Hamzah Haz was quoted as saying in the weeks following 9-11 that "hopefully, this tragedy (of 9-11) will cleanse the sins of the United States," indicating a perception that the US had brought such a disaster upon itself (Guerin 2001). Reacting to the US decision to go after Bin Laden and his allies in the Taliban, Amien Rais called attention to the fact that the US had previously made a mistake when Arabs were made the initial suspects in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 (Guerin 2001). Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri also urged the U.S. to halt military attacks on Afghanistan during Ramadan.

In contrast to the other countries already mentioned, in the Philippines the exercise of US military retaliatory force was swiftly and strongly supported by the Arroyo government, which allowed the use of Philippine airspace and military facilities during the campaign in Afghanistan. Manila even volunteered to send combat troops to Afghanistan if requested by the United Nations. Subsequently, Manila and Washington agreed to expand the scope of the regular bilateral military exercises to cover anti-terrorist training.

The Philippines also solicited ASEAN's endorsement for a regional anti-terrorist campaign as well as the creation of a core anti-terrorist group composed of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Singapore and Thailand subsequently decided to participate). Arroyo then offered to hold

anti-terrorist simulation exercises among the five, all of whom have agreed to participate.

This however stoked domestic opposition to the renewed US presence in the Philippines, reviving the anti-military bases arguments of the early 1990s that had led to the closure of the American facilities in Clark and Subic. Pressure from leftists and nationalist politicians led Manila to require the US to seek permission for overflights going to the Middle East (Simon 2001).

The US as of June 2002 had between 600 to 1,500 US troops undertaking training and advisory roles in the Philippine military campaign against the Abu Sayyaf. Because of strong opposition from small but vocal nationalist groups in the Philippines, both the US and Philippine governments have needed to give assurances that what was happening in the Philippines was a "Philippine operation" rather than an American one, and that the American troops were going to be there "for months and not years" (Blair 2002). One issue was that Philippine participation in the US campaign against terrorism and the possibility of US participation in the Philippines' own campaign against Muslim insurgents would complicate peace negotiations between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). There was also concern that this might lead to government reversing its move away from the previous administration's militarist approach to a more developmental approach to the Mindanao conflict.

Adjustments in US Policy towards Southeast Asia after 9/11

The US Council for Foreign Relations described US relations with Southeast Asia prior to 9-11 as one where American influence had waned considerably "as a result of a mix of inattentiveness and imperious hectoring; and the perception if not reality of a belated and inadequate response to the traumatic 1997 financial crisis." For specific countries in

the region, the United States government had shown itself insensitive to the needs and pressures faced by governments. Preoccupation with developments in East Timor "distorted its overall approach to Indonesia and may have distracted policy makers from focusing on broader regional concerns." Indeed, Southeast Asians generally believe that the United States policy towards their region is one of "benign neglect" or "indifference." Other Southeast Asian concerns that were seen to be inadequately addressed by the US were the destabilizing effects of globalization in the region and the challenges emerging from a changing Asian balance of power.

The perceived importance of Southeast Asia in the US war against terrorism may thus herald a more attentive American attitude towards Southeast Asia and greater sensitivity to the region's own security concerns and perceptions. There is increasing evidence of this.

A case in point is in relation to revitalized security ties with the Philippines and the holding of joint military exercises dubbed Balikatan 02-1.While it is Indonesia's cooperation that may be most vital to the US campaign against Islamic militants, it is the Philippines that has shown itself most cooperative. This is because of the damage the country's image and credibility suffers from the high-profile kidnap activities of the Abu Sayyaf and similar groups, and the overwhelming desire of the Filipino people to rid the country of these small-scale but relentless criminal gangs.

Following September 11, the regular joint Balikatan exercises were expanded in scope to include anti-terrorist training, involving more US troops and for longer duration than in the past. US troops were also allowed for the first time to join Philippine troops in actual field operations against the Abu Sayyaf, although supposedly in training and advisory roles. For this reason, the Philippines began to be called in Western media the second front of the US anti-terror war, after Afghanistan.

The Philippines is keen on obtaining U.S. arms and technical assistance to enhance its ability to suppress the Abu Sayyaf, which operates from the southern Philippines but has also conducted a kidnapping raid in

Malaysia's Sipadan Island. But it is also interested in generally upgrading the capabilities of its armed forces for the type of operations that can be useful against other rebel groups or even foreign intrusions. As part of cooperation with the Philippines, the U.S. State Department announced a five-fold increase in military financing to the Philippines from $2 million to $19 million in its 2003 budget. At a White House meeting, President Bush pledged to Arroyo up to $100 million in security assistance over the next five years, with another $150 million under negotiation, and a further $1 billion in trade benefits. The military assistance package included a C-130 transport plane, UH-1 helicopters, trucks, 78-foot fast patrol craft, armored personnel carriers, 30,000 M-16 rifles, and anti-terrorist training (State Department International Security 2002). The U.S. Senate and House moreover passed separate resolutions thanking the Philippines for its support and sympathy since the September 11 terrorist attacks (Simon 2001).

The United States also seems to be re-evaluating the strategic role of Indonesia. When Megawati proceeded with her scheduled state visit to Washington a mere two weeks after September 11, the fact that she was representing the world's largest Muslim nation was not lost on Washington. Bush took the opportunity of her visit to demonstrate that US reactions to 9-11 did not mean a war against Islam. The visit led to a promise to lift the long-standing United States military embargo on arms and spare parts sales to Indonesia that had been imposed since 1999 to censure Jakarta over abuses in East Timor. Washington also pledged to extend a substantial economic support package.

In October 2001, at the height of popular protests in Indonesia against the US strikes in Afghanistan, U.S. Ambassador Robert Gelbard rebuked Jakarta for not doing enough to provide proper protection to Americans who were being threatened by radical groups. Indonesia was also heavily criticized for not acting more swiftly against its militant groups, compared to Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines where over a hundred people had been arrested on charges related to terrorist activity. Subsequently, however, realizing the already tenuous hold on power of moderates like Megawati and the potential backlash of harsh US criticism on her rule,

Washington began to soften its line and seek quiet cooperation with Jakarta instead (CNN 2002). The effects of the new approach remain to be seen.

In comparison to Arroyo's and Megawati's fruitful visits to the United States in the wake of 9/11, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin's visit did not produce much visible political or economic benefit to Thailand, attributed by some analysts to Thailand's rather tentative support of the U.S. antiterrorist campaign (Simon 2001). Both Washington and Bangkok are exploring ways of utilizing the annual Cobra Gold military exercises to help address the need for counter-terrorist skills. According to former CINCPAC Admiral Dennis Blair, the scenarios being developed are adapted to the situation in the region, where terrorist groups operate in smaller cells (Bangkok Press Roundtable 2001).

Related to this is the continued interest of the United States in pursuing multilateral military exercises, initially by linking Balikatan in the Philippines with Cobra Gold in Thailand and inviting Singapore's participation once more, but eventually bringing on board other countries such as Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, China, India, Russia, and others. The original concept of the exercise, dubbed Team Challenge, was to develop skills to be used in a wide spectrum of missions such as dealing with complex emergencies or humanitarian assistance. If there was hesitation by some target countries in the past, it remains to be seen whether the events of 9-11 shall have persuaded them that multilateral anti-terrorist actions are after all necessary and useful.

Even the most reticent government of Malaysia won praises from Washington for supporting the US war on terrorism. There has however been a tendency for US official sources to exaggerate the importance of Southeast Asia in general and Malaysia in particular, as the second front in the war against terror. A secret FBI report leaked in February said Malaysia had been a "primary operational launch pad" for the 9-11 attacks, but this was subsequently dismissed by Western intelligence sources (Gershman 2002).

Conclusion

One can surmise from the above discussion that a common ASEAN position on terrorism stands only on unfirm ground at this point, although there is a strong common interest in minimizing challenges from Islamic militants and much justification for cooperation along this line. Moreover, the attitudes of various Southeast Asian governments and peoples towards the US-led anti-terror coalition are shaped not only by the common interest in fighting terrorism, but have to take into consideration (1) the negative perceptions and mistrust of the United States that lingers in the region (including resentment against its double standards of defining terrorist groups and against its unilateralist proclivities); (2) domestic political sensitivities to Islamic and nationalist constituents; and (3) the actual level of threat represented by the homegrown militants to the present government, in comparison to other, possibly more important threats to security.

Not enough actual links to international terrorism have been uncovered for Southeast Asia to be comfortable with being considered the second front in the war against terrorism, at least at the time of this writing. On the other hand, there is a very strong fear of backlash, that the more you crack down on local Muslim militants, especially with external intervention from US and given the ongoing events in the Israeli-Palestinian front, the more they will draw support and sympathy. Former Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, himself a Muslim, expressed concern that US tactics would further radicalize the mostly moderate Muslims in Southeast Asia. "An open war would certainly let loose a suppressed sense of bitterness and frustration in a magnitude that would threaten everything standing in terms of social, political and economic institutions in the region" (Wain 2002).

There are many others in Southeast Asia who, fearful of the long term repercussions of focusing anti-terror efforts on a particular religious group, would call for a return to a Dialogue of Civilizations as the alternative to the endless spiral of violence that campaigns of terror and anti-terror promise.

There are two high imperatives in the international community's search for an end to the long-term scourge of terrorism by militant Muslims. The first is for introspection to take place among Muslim communities all over the world, to look for approaches that better address the root causes rather than just the symptoms of terrorism associated with political Islam. The second is for greater efforts on the part of the American leadership and people to understand the real reasons why their government has become the main target of terrorists the world over, and since September 11 last year, terrorists on their homeland itself.

Notes

1 Based on a paper presented at an international conference on "Dialogue, Competition and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific Region after China's Accession to WTO", Zhongshan University, 28-29 June 2002.

2 Presidential Spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao said, ''We think the Abu Sayyaf is basically a kidnap for ransom gang. They have some tinge of Islamic militancy, but essentially they've become a bandit group." "Tracing the Asian terror links", *CNN.com.* September 22, 2001. http://asia.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/09/22/gen.terrorism.asia/. Accessed 05-02-2002. Also "Across Southeast Asia: Ripple Effects of Attacks on US", *Christian Science Monitor.* September 18, 2001. http://www.csmonitor.com/200l /0918/p7s2-wosc.html accessed 05-28-02.

3 "ASEAN Calls for Cohesive Approach to Fight Terrorism", *Channel News Asia.* May 22, 2002, 6:30 p.m. http://asia.news.yahoo.com/020522/5/singapore8582.html. Accessed 28 May 2002. Hambali and Basyir of Jemaah Islamiyah have been named as prominent leaders, but Basyir has denied this.

4 Draft Report on International Terrorism. CSCAP Study Group Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 25-26 March 2002. The CSCAP definition was adapted from the definition by the International Institute of Strategic Studies.

5 Simon, quoting the *New Straits Times.*

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