

The Southeast Asian Security Complex

Southeast Asia has drawn much attention recently as a possible region in which arms racing and reciprocal military spending increases may have a detrimental impact on regional inter-state security building. Noteworthy increases in the share of global arms imports, and high profile weapons acquisitions, have led some to speculate that this is the site of the "next great arms race."¹ The recent rapid economic growth of states such as Singapore, Thailand or Indonesia has also fuelled speculation about possible bids for regional status or hegemony, and the exacerbation of inter-state rivalries. Although the region is not particularly prone to inter-state conflict, there remain some long-standing tensions between Vietnam and Cambodia, between Thailand and Cambodia (over cross-border rebel groups), between China (not examined in this report) and various states over the Spratly Islands, and between other littoral states over conflicting maritime claims.²

On the other hand, several internal conflicts (of varying intensity) continue to plague the region, and to create significant security concerns. Indonesia has been faced with ethnic separatist or autonomy movements in East Timor, Java and Aceh. The Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea also face internal threats either from ethnic minorities or violent political opposition, although in recent years these have moderated considerably.³ The cross-border impact of such activity is felt in several states, including Laos and Thailand.

The states of this region do not, however, form one neat "security complex," but rather a series of interconnected and overlapping zones of cooperation and potential conflict. The western edge of the region includes Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, all of which are enmeshed in a series of internal conflicts that have spill-over or cross-border effects. Offshore and resource management concerns are important for states such as Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. Cooperation among the ASEAN states

¹ Michael Klare, "The Next Great Arms Race," *Foreign Affairs*, 72:3 (Summer 1993), 136-152. See also, for an excellent overview, Shannon Selin, *Asia Pacific Arms Buildups* parts one ("Scope, Causes and Problems") and two ("Prospects for Control"), working papers 6 and 7 (Vancouver: Institute of International Relations, UBC, 1994); Desmond Ball, "Arms and Affluence: Military Acquisitions in the Asia-Pacific Region," *International Security*, 18:3 (Winter 1993/94), 78-112.

² The Spratly dispute implicates China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Indonesia. *The Military Balance, 1995/96*, 168.

³ These threats range from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, to the Bougainville Revolutionary Army activities in Papua New Guinea, the Muslim Moro separatist movement on Mindinao in the Philippines, and the Karen and Shan rebellions in Myanmar. The recent moderation of rebel activity in some of these states (especially Myanmar), is not necessarily a sign, however, of greater accommodation from the government to their demands.