
Security Challenges in the Malay Archipelago

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INTRODUCTION

This article is about the Malay Archipelago, which has become significant to regional and global security for a number of reasons. It contains the world's largest population of Muslims over which radical Islamists are trying to gain influence, has been designated by the Usa as the Second Front in the Global War on Terror (Gwot), has the busiest and most strategic waterway in the world, viz the Straits of Malacca, and has emerged in recent years as a battleground in great power rivalries, particularly between China on the one hand, and the Usa and its allies on the other. To add to the complexity of the security *problematique* in this pivotal region, all these security challenges are taking place in the context of heightened concerns over energy security, especially the security of oil and gas supplies from the Middle East which traverse the narrow and vulnerable waterways in the region to the vibrant economies of Northeast Asia.

The recent interest in the Malay Archipelago has been a consequence of post-Cold War developments that reached an apogee in the wake of the seminal terrorist attacks in the Usa on 11 September 2001, which resulted in the Us-led Global War on Terror. Renewed interest in the Malay Archipelago took place in this context. With its forested terrain, an increasingly fundamentalist population, a crisis of governance in Indonesia in the post-Suharto era, and the presence of long-standing Muslim insurgencies in places such as Aceh, Patani and Mindanao, it was feared that Al Qaeda-linked terrorists fleeing counter-terrorist action in Afghanistan and the rest of the Middle East would easily find refuge and support in the Malay Archipelago. Moreover, the region has its own militant Islamist groups, such as the Al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiah (Ji) which carried out the deadly Bali bombing in 2002 that killed 202 people, mostly Western tourists.

Concerns over terrorism soon spilt over to maritime security given fears of a maritime terrorist attack carried out by militants that could severely disrupt the vital Straits of Malacca, the trade and energy lifeline for the booming economies of Northeast Asia. A

maritime version of 11 September 2001, such as a chemical tanker being hijacked and then blown up in a major maritime container-hub such as Singapore, would have devastating consequences for the world economy given the just-in-time manufacturing processes that underpin the global interlinked economy. Thus, attention began to be focused on the poorly regulated and unsecured maritime logistical chain which is clearly vulnerable to any maritime terrorist attack.

The ongoing Gwot also focused attention on the links between regional Muslim separatist insurgents and the global *jihād*. Muslim insurgents have been battling governments throughout the Malay Archipelago, and in the post-Suharto era, a new front opened up in Sulawesi and Maluku as Muslim-Christian sectarian violence began to involve radical *mujahideen* from outside those places. Local Muslim separatists have been ambivalent about Al Qaeda. Indeed, after the events of 11 September 2001, the main Muslim insurgent groups in Aceh, southern Thailand and Mindanao distanced themselves from Al Qaeda and its global *jihād*, preferring to concentrate on pursuing their long-standing territorial and ethno-nationalist objectives, which long predated Al Qaeda. However, there have been continuing concerns over the trends in these sub-regions, where continuing conflict and the presence of radical Islamist elements have sparked fears of emerging links with the global *jihād*.

These emerging security challenges as a result of 11 September 2001 did not replace the traditional interstate and great power tensions and rivalries that have affected the region. However, the emergence of China as a great power, with its voracious appetite for energy, resources and markets, has resulted in much greater interest by China to secure its strategic interests in the face of the established dominance of the Usa and Japan. The Usa has in turn begun to coordinate its regional security policy with its allies in the region in order to contain China as well as better synergise responses towards terrorism and related security challenges in South-east Asia. The emerging Trilateral Security Dialogue between the Usa, Japan and Australia thus began to coordinate security responses to the emerging terrorist problems in the Straits of Malacca and the wider Malay Archipelago, assisted by Singapore, which saw an opportunity to enlist extra-regional allies to counter its Muslim neighbours. China has however, viewed this development with concern, perceiving this as a potentially anti-China alliance.

This article thus argues that our traditional understanding of security in this pivotal region, based to a large extent on inter-State relations, needs to be updated in the light of the emergence of complex security challenges since the end of the Cold War. This article examines the complex inter-relationship amongst a host of security

challenges in the post Cold War and post-11 September 2001 era, such as terrorism, maritime and energy security, Muslim separatist rebellion in places such as Aceh, Patani and Mindanao, and great power rivalries. All these security issues are linked within a 'security complex' in the sense that they are all interlinked and affect each other¹. These linkages suggest that managing security in the Malay Archipelago requires a comprehensive and holistic approach. This comprehensive approach must knit together political, economic and social dimensions, as well as regional and international cooperation, instead of the simplistic, uni-dimensional and military-oriented approach inherent in current US grand strategy based on the Gwot, which, moreover, is narrowly focused on countering terrorism. The following is a brief survey of the security challenges affecting the Malay Archipelago since 11 September 2001.

TERRORISM

After the seminal terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, Southeast Asia, particularly the Malay Archipelago, became designated as the 'Second Front' in the Global War on Terror. This appeared to be prescient as the first major terrorist attack after 11 September 2001 occurred in October 2002 in Indonesia. Suicide bomb attacks on the popular tourist island of Bali killed a total of 202 people, of whom 164 were foreign nationals. Investigations in the aftermath of the audacious attack led to the arrest of members of a hitherto unknown radical Islamist network known as the Jemaah Islamiah (Ji)². This secretive network aimed to establish a pan-Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia that would cover the Malay Archipelago, using violence if necessary³.

The Ji can be traced to the abortive Darul Islam (Di) rebellion in the 1950s, which aimed to establish an Islamic State in Indonesia⁴. After it was crushed by the armed forces with a loss of

¹ The concept of a security complex is explained in BARRY BUZAN, *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Brighton, Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1983.

² The term Islamist does not refer to all Muslims. It refers only to those who subscribe to radical, violent interpretations of Islam, a distinct minority amongst Muslims.

³ ANDREW T H TAN, *A Political and Economic Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, London, Europa, 2004, p.44.

⁴ See *Al Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Ngruki Network in Indonesia*, «Asia Briefing», 8 August 2002, No. 20, International Crisis Group, <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

some 25,000 lives, its ideals were sustained by those who survived and were subsequently passed on to the next generation. Indeed, both Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar, the alleged co-founders of the Ji, see themselves as ideological successors to the Di. In the 1970s, they established a boarding school in Java from which many Ji members were educated. They later fled to Malaysia after attracting the attention of the security services of the Suharto regime. They established the Ji network in Malaysia in the early 1990s, building links with ex-Afghan *mujahideen* volunteers who had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Al Qaeda and Ji developed close links, with the Ji receiving funding and ideological training from Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was thus able to penetrate and co-opt the Ji. The Ji established a regional network of autonomous cells united by radical ideology, much like Al Qaeda. However, the Ji operated independently and makes most of its operational decisions locally⁵. Ji members also sometimes possess dual memberships in local militant groups⁶.

The Ji was uncovered when 15 of its operatives were arrested in Singapore in December 2001 and early 2002 after a video surveillance tape was discovered in an Al Qaeda safe house in Afghanistan by US special forces during Operation Enduring Freedom. The Ji had planned a major series of terrorist attacks in Singapore targeting Western embassies, several key US companies, US ships and military personnel, and local military facilities⁷. Had the attacks taken place, it would have been the largest terrorist attack after 11 September 2001. The Ji was subsequently responsible for a number of deadly terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia. They include the Bali bombing in 2002, the Marriott Hotel attack in Jakarta in 2003, the bomb attack on the Australian High Commission in Jakarta in 2004, and the second Bali attack in October 2005⁸.

Apart from terrorist attacks, the Ji has been involved in sectarian Muslim-Christian violence in the Indonesian islands of

⁵ *Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia: Damaged But Dangerous*, «Asia Briefing», 26 August 2003, No. 63, International Crisis Group, Executive Summary, <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

⁶ See *Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi*, «Asia Report», 3 February 2004, No. 74, International Crisis Group, <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

⁷ *US Brands Indonesian Group Terrorist*, «CNN.com», 23 October 2003, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/10/23/indonesia.terror/>.

⁸ ANDREW T H TAN (ed.), *The Politics of Terrorism*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 165.

Maluku and Sulawesi, where a state of civil war from 1999 to 2002 led to the deaths of over 10,000 people. The root cause of the conflict was economic competition in the context of the Asian financial and economic crisis, which severely affected Indonesia. This exacerbated the already growing resentment by local Christians against the influx of mostly Muslim migrants. Moreover, there has also been much resentment over the lucrative contracts held by military-backed companies engaged in fisheries, forestry and mining⁹. Not surprisingly, calls for independence in these islands have been made¹⁰. While many of these grievances are clearly not religious, religion became a central issue once violence broke out. Various Javanese-based radical groups became involved, including the Laskar Jihad (later disbanded in 2002), the Ji, elements of the old Darul Islam, the Mujahideen Kompak (the military wing of a Muslim charity), and a Makassar-based Muslim militia, the Laskar Jundullah, which has close links with Al Qaeda through its leader, Agus Dwikarna. The Malino Accord in February 2002 finally brought an end to open conflict but communal tensions have remained. The peace agreement has largely held, but has been undermined by the failure, due largely to corruption, in economic reconstruction and social rehabilitation. There have thus been continued attacks carried out by Ji-Mujahideen Kompak elements against Christians¹¹.

Since being uncovered in early 2002, over 400 alleged Ji operatives have been arrested throughout the region, including its key operations commander and liaison with Al Qaeda, Hambali, who was arrested in Thailand and is now in US custody¹². These arrests have significantly weakened the Al Qaeda-Ji nexus in the region. Those arrested included senior Al Qaeda operatives such as Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi and Jabarah Mohammad Mansour, who were arrested in 2002, in the Philippines and Oman respectively; Omar al-Faruq, an Iraqi citizen, in Indonesia in 2002; and Riduan Isamuddin (or Hambali), in Thailand in 2003. Both Omar al-Faruq and Hambali were subsequently transferred to US custody. Omar provided authorities with a detailed assessment of Al Qaeda and Ji activities in the region, which included a plan to assassinate presi-

⁹ *Spite Islands*, «Far Eastern Economic Review», 20 January 2000, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Independence Calls Grow in Strife-Torn Islands*, «Straits Times», 23 June 2000, p. 43.

¹¹ *Indonesia: Tackling Radicalism in Poso*, «Asia Briefing», 22 January 2008, No. 75, International Crisis Group, pp. 1-2, <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

¹² ANDREW T H TAN, *A Political and Economic Dictionary of Southeast Asia*, cit, pp. 136-137.

dent Megawati of Indonesia. A major counter-terrorist success was the killing by Indonesian security forces in November 2005 of Azahari Husin, a former Malaysian University lecturer who was a key bomb-maker¹³. In January 2007, police raids in Poso in Sulawesi island after 3 schoolgirls were beheaded by militants resulted in the deaths of 17 men and the arrest of more than 20 Ji members¹⁴. The operations revealed the links between the Ji in Java to the militant violence in Poso. The Ji had sent religious teachers to the islands since the sectarian conflict had broken out as the area appeared to have the potential to become a secure base for the Islamists. There were further arrests of Ji operatives in March 2007 in Java, accompanied by the seizure of explosives and weapons, as well as documents revealing plan to assassinate police officers, prosecutors and judges. In June 2007, a key Ji leader, Yusron Mahbudi (Abu Dujana) was arrested, dealing a major blow to Ji's overall operational capabilities¹⁵.

Concerted counter-terrorism operations and successes in Indonesia and throughout the region have seriously affected the Ji's operational effectiveness, with many key operatives and bomb-makers either arrested or killed. However, key Ji figures remain at large. Mohamed Noordin Top, who leads a militant wing of the Ji known as Al Qaeda in the Malay Archipelago, and Dulmatin, another key bomb-maker, have thus far evaded capture despite major efforts by security forces to locate them. Another key figure who joined the most wanted list in early 2008 was Mas Selamat Kasturi, a key Ji operative who headed its Singapore cell. He escaped from detention in Singapore in early 2008, sparking a worldwide Interpol alert as he had planned major terrorist operations before his arrest in Indonesia and deportation to Singapore in 2006¹⁶. The presence of *ex-mujahideen* from Afghanistan, new recruits from local conflict areas such as in Sulawesi and Maluku, and a solid core estimated to total more than 900 means that there continues to be a significant terrorist threat from the Ji. This was demonstrated when a Ji plot to bomb a *café* in Sumatra, in Indonesia, was thwarted with the arrest of 10 militants led by a Singaporean and

¹³ *Azahari Was Shot Dead*, «Sydney Morning Herald», 10 November 2005

¹⁴ *Jihadism in Indonesia: Poso on the Edge*, «Asia Report», 24 January 2007, No. 127, International Crisis Group, p. 1, <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

¹⁵ *Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's Current Status*, «Asia Briefing», 3 May 2007, No. 63, International Crisis Group, p. 2, <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

¹⁶ *Interpol Alert Follows Suspect Escape*, «Associated Press», 29 February 2008, <http://www.wtopnews.com/?nid=105&sid=1353308>.

the recovery of bombs in July 2008¹⁷. The long-awaited execution of the three Bali bombers, Imam Samudra, Amrozi Nurhasyim and Ali Ghufron, in November 2008, also resulted in an outpouring of militant angst amidst fears that the three men have become martyrs for the Islamist cause and inspire further terrorist attacks¹⁸.

Moreover, the Ji is not the only radical terrorist threat. In the Philippines, the Abu Sayaff Group (Asg) has posed a serious challenge to security. The Asg was founded in the early 1990s by former *mujahideen* who had returned from Afghanistan. It established links with Al Qaeda, which sent Ramzi Yousef (responsible for the World Trade Center bombing in New York in 1993) to train its members in the use of explosives. Through extortion, kidnapping for ransom activities, assassinations and urban bombings, the Asg brought terror to the Southern Philippines. The Asg and Ji carried out a joint operation in February 2004, when a ferry in Manila Bay was bombed, resulting in the deaths of over 100 people¹⁹. After the events of 11 September 2001, the United States sent troops and advisers to train and provide technical and surveillance support for the Philippine army in its operations against the Asg's estimated 2,000 members. The Us has also, through Usaid, provided development aid to Mindanao and Sulu focusing on reintegrating former separatists, and improving local governance and infrastructure²⁰. In August 2006, the Philippine army launched a major operation which led to the death of Asg leader Khadaffy Janjalani and the capture of Asg camps. However, the Asg threat remains under the leadership of Yasser Igasan, a Syrian-trained Islamic scholar who has close ties with foreign radical jihadists²¹.

MARITIME AND ENERGY SECURITY

Since the events of 11 September 2001, concerns over maritime security in the Malay Archipelago have been heightened due to the vulnerability of maritime shipping to terrorism. The narrow Straits

¹⁷ *Indonesia Police Smash Ji Plot to Bomb Café*, «News.com.au», 3 July 2008, <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,23963544-401,00.html>.

¹⁸ *Indonesia Executes Bali Bombers*, «BBC News», 9 November 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7717819.stm>.

¹⁹ ANDREW T H TAN (ed.), *The Politics of Terrorism*, cit., pp. 116-117.

²⁰ *Widening the War in the Southern Philippines*, «Asia Times», 18 May 2007, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast Asia/IE18Ae01.html>.

²¹ *Yasser Igasan Succeeds Janjalani as New Abu Chief*, «Gma News TV», 27 June 2007, <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/48531/Yasser-Igasan-succeeds-Janjalani-as-Abu-chief>.

of Malacca, arguably the world's most strategic waterway and chokepoint, is located within this region. The Straits of Malacca is very narrow and is only 800 meters wide at its narrowest point. It is also very congested, as one quarter of the world's trade, half the world's oil and two-thirds of its natural gas trade pass through its waters. By comparison, oil flows through the Straits are three times more than through the Suez, and fifteen times greater than the Panama Canal. The Straits are the vital lifelines through which oil, gas and other supplies flow and which sustains the booming economies of Northeast Asia. Indeed, 70% of Japan's oil traverses the Straits of Malacca. However, the high rates of piracy around Indonesian waters, the unregulated and insecure nature of the maritime trade, the threat of terrorist activity and the fact that any disruption of this sea-borne trade would have a devastating global impact raised increasing fears over maritime security.

In particular, in view of the trend towards increasing links between trans-national organised crime and terrorism (recently reinforced by pirate attacks off Somalia), concerns have been heightened that vulnerable, high risk and high value shipping, such as cruise ships and chemical tankers, could be tempting terrorist targets. Ships, and particularly containers, could also be used to smuggle terrorists as well as weapons of mass destruction. One scenario is the hijack of a chemical tanker and its use as a floating bomb to devastate ports – a maritime version of 11 September 2001²². Given the global economy's overwhelming dependence on seaborne trade and just-in-time manufacturing processes, any major attack on a super container hub, such as Singapore, would have a devastating impact.

There is evidence that Al Qaeda has been aware of the vulnerability of seaborne vessels, as it has carried out maritime terrorist attacks, such as on the *Uss Cole* in 2000 and a French oil tanker, the *Lindberg*, off the coast of Yemen in 2002. The Ji also planned to attack US naval vessels in late 2001 as part of its failed bomb plots in Singapore²³. A senior Al Qaeda operative captured by the US in 2002 also revealed that the masterminds of the *Uss Cole* attack had planned to attack another US ship visiting Malaysia²⁴. Giv-

²² See for instance GRAHAM GERARD ONG, *Pre-empting Maritime Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, «Iseas Viewpoints», Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 29 November 2002.

²³ «Straits Times», 12 January 2002.

²⁴ YUN YUN TEO, *Target Malacca Straits: Maritime Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, «Studies in Conflict and Terrorism», 2007, Volume 30, p. 547.

en the growing nexus between organised crime and terrorism, there has thus been growing concern over the possibility that pirates, with their vast maritime knowledge, and terrorists could easily join forces to carry out a devastating attack on either a ship or a port. In June 2005, Lloyd's Market Association's Joint War Committee thus classified the Straits of Malacca as an area in danger of wars and related perils, on the grounds that the *modus operandi* of pirates operating there are now similar to modern-day terrorists²⁵.

Given that the entire logistical chain, including ships, ports and containers, needs to be secured, the challenges are enormous. Unlike the aviation industry, the maritime industry is not as well regulated. For instance, there is no proper vetting or certification of shipping crew, and ships are not tracked real time unlike aircraft. The waters in Southeast Asia, particularly around Indonesia also suffered, until recently, from the world's highest incidences of piracy since the early 1990s²⁶. Indeed, there was a dramatic increase in such cases since the crisis of governance in Indonesia following the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. Ports in the region have thus made haste to implement the requirements of the International Ship and Port Security (Isps) Code, which came into effect on 1 July 2004. Under the code, governments, ships and ports are required to have enhanced security measures to ensure better control and monitoring of the movement of people and cargo²⁷. The region has also gradually responded to Us-led initiatives designed to improve port and container security as part of preventive measures against terrorism. For instance, under the Container Security Initiative (Csi), Us-bound containers would be inspected at source by Us Customs.

The three littoral States, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have, since 2004, improved maritime security cooperation, through coordinated year-round patrols, linked by communications hotlines, as well as joint air patrols²⁸. Whilst Malaysia and Indonesia have

²⁵ CATHERINE ZARA RAYMOND, *The Threat of Maritime Terrorism in the Malacca Straits*, «Terrorism Monitor», 9 February 2006, Volume 4, Issue 3, p. 8, http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/uploads/TM_004_003.pdf.

²⁶ FREDERICK CHEW, *Piracy, Maritime Terrorism and Regional Interests*, «Geddes Papers 2005», Australian Command and Staff College, pp. 73.

²⁷ See INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANISATION, *What is the Isps Code?*, http://www.imo.org/Newsroom/mainframe.asp?topic_id=897 accessed 19 August 2007.

²⁸ *Malacca Straits Anti-Piracy Patrols Start Next Week*, «Mima News Flash», July 2004, http://www.mima.gov.my/mima/htmls/mimarc/news/newsflash_files/news-

opposed, on grounds of sovereignty, foreign naval patrols and private armed escorts, they have accepted foreign assistance, particularly from Japan, in the areas of capacity-building, equipment and training. The littoral States have also taken measures to improve counter-terrorism cooperation through the Five Power Defence Arrangements (Fpda) which groups Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia. From 2005, Fpda multilateral military exercises have focused on maritime security, particularly on countering terrorist threats²⁹. As a result of these measures, the incidence of piracy in Southeast Asian waters has declined significantly. In the first quarter of 2008, there were 11 incidences, the lowest in five years³⁰. However, whilst attention has been shifted to maritime security in Somalia waters, there remains genuine concern over the possible nexus of terrorism and piracy in the Malay Archipelago, given the presence of Islamist terrorist networks in the region.

MUSLIM SEPARATIST REBELLION

The Malay Archipelago has suffered from several long-standing Muslim separatist insurgencies, in places such as Aceh, Mindanao and Patani. Their persistence and severity suggest the failure of State legitimacy. Indeed, the sense of separateness, and the rejection of central authority, is very strong in these sub-regions. Not surprisingly, Al Qaeda has paid special attention to these insurgencies, since such conflict zones could be fertile ground for the spread of pan-Islamist radical ideology. However, although Al Qaeda has attempted to penetrate and build links with local Muslim rebel groups, it has met with mixed results, as it has had to battle strong pre-existing nationalist imperatives.

The Moro rebellion in the Southern Philippines has deep historical roots. The native Muslim Moros have been overwhelmed by massive Catholic migration from the North over the years. Together with corruption, landlessness, discrimination, poverty and unemployment, a great deal of resentment has been generated. Following the Jabitah massacre of 28 Muslim recruits to the Philippine military at Corregidor in 1968, the Moros rose up in rebellion. The

[cut/july04.htm](#) accessed 19 August 2007, and *Joint Air Patrols over Malacca Strait to Start Next Week: Indonesia*, «Afp», 8 September 2005.

²⁹ «The Age», 22 November 2005.

³⁰ JANE CHAN AND JOSHUA HO, *Report on Armed Robbery and Piracy in Southeast Asia: First Quarter 2008*, Singapore, Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2008, p. 1, http://www.rsis.edu.sg/research/PDF/Armed_Robbery_and_Piracy_in_SEA-1stQtr08.pdf.

Moro National Liberation Front (Mnlf) led by Nur Misuari was founded in 1972, and fought a long and costly civil war. The Mnlf signed a peace accord in 1996 but the failure to bring about development in the Southern provinces led to a renewed separatist insurgency dominated by a more overtly Muslim group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Milf) led by Hashim Selamat. The Milf established ties with Al Qaeda and accepted both funding and training assistance from it through Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, who ran a Muslim charity in Manila³¹. However, the events of 11 September 2001 led to the Milf publicly distancing itself from Al Qaeda whilst strongly reiterating its nationalist credentials³². Since then, the Milf has participated in peace negotiations with the government. The emergence of Murad Ebrahim as the new leader of the Milf, following the death of Hashim Selamat in 2003, improved the prospects for peace, as Murad is a moderate nationalist, unlike the more fundamentalist Hashim, who was a religious cleric. Indeed, Murad has consistently reiterated the Milf's territorial and nationalistic, as opposed to religious, objectives.

The appointment of a more enlightened Philippine army commander in Mindanao in 2007, major-general Raymundo Ferrer, also improved the peace prospects, given his emphasis on development and education as important steps to peace-building³³. Moreover, the presence of an international monitoring team from Malaysia, Brunei, Libya and Japan provided favourable conditions for negotiations to take place³⁴. Thus, a peace agreement was signed in August 2008. But the subsequent decision of the Philippine Supreme Court to block the implementation of the agreement on grounds that the demarcation of what constituted ancestral domains of the Moros was unconstitutional led to renewed fighting between the Milf and government forces that has resulted in the displacement of 400,000 people³⁵. However, security challenges would have

³¹ ROHAN GUNARATNA, *Inside Al Qaeda*, London, Hurst, 2002, p. 185.

³² See «Straits Times», 4 November 2002, p. A6, which reported the strong denials of the Milf spokesperson of alleged links with Al Qaeda.

³³ *Military's Positive Role in Milf Peace Process*, «Newsbreak Online», 26 April 2007, www.newsbreak.com.ph.

³⁴ *Grp, Milf Extend Imt Stay for One More Year, Expand Imt Scope, Too*, «Minda News», 28 August 2007.

³⁵ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Philippines: Thousands Suffering the Impact of Shattered Mindanao Peace Talks*, 28 October 2008, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/philippines-thousands-suffering-impact-shattered-mindanao-peace-talks-20>.

remained even if the agreement had been satisfied. For instance, renegade Mlrf commanders have provided sanctuary to Ji fugitives and Asg members. Moreover, the presence of younger, extremist elements in the Mlrf, within the older Mnlf, as well as in the extremist Asg, virtually ensured that violence would not have ended even with a peace agreement.

A similar Muslim separatist insurgency has, until recently, been on-going in the province of Aceh, in the Northern island of Sumatra in Indonesia. Indonesia's transmigration program under the Suharto regime led to an influx of Javanese migrants who competed for jobs and opportunities from locals. The widespread corruption, lack of development and the domination by the Javanese *élite* led to deep resentment against Jakarta. Despite huge gas deposits, little of it has benefitted the people of the province, who have mostly lived in poverty and under conditions of discrimination. The presence of fundamental grievances resulted in armed separatist rebellion against the Indonesian State. Despite the evident piety of a deeply religious province, however, the main rebel group, the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Gam), has consistently emphasized its nationalist agenda. Gam has opposed attempts by radical Islamist groups to establish a presence in Aceh. Thus, when Al Qaeda leaders led by its deputy chief, Al Zawahiri visited the province in 2000, they were rejected by Gam. Indeed, following the events of 11 September 2001, then Gam commander, Abdullah Syafiah, who was later killed by Indonesian security forces, was amongst the first to send a message of condolence to the Us Ambassador³⁶.

The massive tsunami in December 2004 which destroyed Bandar Aceh and killed 127,000 people in Indonesia led to a final peace agreement, given the evident need for recovery and reconstruction. This was signed in August 2005 in Helsinki, under which Gam agreed to disarm and take part in the political process, whilst the province would get greater autonomy and the military would withdraw³⁷. However, the peace agreement has been undermined by political infighting within Gam between the old guard exiled leadership based in Sweden led by the ageing Hasan di Tiro, and younger commanders led by Irwandi Yusuf, who had fought in Aceh. Since gaining power in local elections in 2006, Gam has also failed to deal

³⁶ Interview with a leading Acehnese scholar. See ANDREW T H TAN, *Security Perspectives of the Malay Archipelago: Security Linkages in the Second Front in the War on Terror*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2004, pp. 178-179.

³⁷ ESTHER PAN, *Indonesia: The Aceh Peace Agreement*, Council on Foreign Relations, 15 September 2005, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/8789/>.

with the many economic and social issues in the province. In addition, the passage of the law on governing Aceh in June 2006 undermined the Helsinki agreement by weakening some of the provincial government's authority³⁸. Given the continued presence of underlying economic and political grievances, and the failure of the nationalists to deliver, a resort by disaffected youth to radical Islam cannot be ruled out.

Another long-running Muslim separatist insurgency has been that in Southern Thailand. The southern provinces, dominated by Malay Muslims, were incorporated into modern Thailand through the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. In subsequent years, the influx of Thai Buddhists and the policy of assimilation alienated the Malays. The latter involved the centralization of the bureaucracy, which eroded the power of Malay royalty and the religious *élite*. Secular Thai education and language also challenged traditional Malay Muslim culture. Not surprisingly, there have been various revolts against the central government. A more enlightened, comprehensive approach after 1977, involving decentralisation and greater recognition for Malay culture and language, helped to contain the discontent. The insurgency movement has been heavily fragmented. The four main groups are: Brn-c (Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate, this being the largest group), Pemuda (a separatist youth movement), Gmip (Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Patani, which was established by ex-Afghan *mujahideen* in the 1990s), and the New Pulo (New Patani United Liberation Organisation, which succeeded one of the oldest insurgent groups in the South)³⁹.

The situation worsened after the Thaksin government took power in 2002. The government centralised control, which in turn led to much corruption and mismanagement in the South⁴⁰. The introduction of tough security measures to deal with the upsurge in separatist violence in 2004 also led to some deadly incidents. In April 2004, 108 Muslims were killed by security forces in a single day, with 32 killed whilst sheltering at the historic Krue Se mosque, which was attacked by security forces⁴¹. In October 2004, at Tak

³⁸ *Aceh: Post-Conflict Complications*, «Asia Report», 4 October 2007, No. 139, International Crisis Group, p. 2, <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

³⁹ *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, International Crisis Group «Asia Report», 18 May 2005, No. 98, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3436>.

⁴⁰ ANDREW T H TAN (ed.), *The Politics of Terrorism*, cit. p. 198.

⁴¹ *Who Was Behind Thai Attacks?*, «Bbc News», 30 April 2004. See also *Grieving Begins in Thailand's South*, «Bbc News», 29 April 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3669353.stm>.

Bai, in what is now known as the Tak Bai incident, 85 unarmed Muslim protesters died after they suffocated in police vans⁴².

The Thai authorities initially claimed that the insurgents had deep links with Al Qaeda. Radical Islamist ideology has indeed penetrated Southern Thailand, with evidence that Ji and Al Qaeda operatives have found shelter amongst co-religionists in Thailand. For instance, the top Al Qaeda-Ji commander in the region, Hambali, was arrested in Thailand⁴³. The level and organisation of separatist violence also increased from 2001, with the use of more sophisticated techniques hitherto seen only in Iraq, such as remote-controlled Improvised Explosive Devices (Ieds), reflecting enhanced linkages with global jihadist elements⁴⁴. Yet, what is significant is that Western tourists and interests have not been specifically targeted. The insurgency has so far remained local and nationalist in orientation, and has also been largely confined to the four Southern Muslim provinces. According to Hambali, now in US custody, the insurgents had rebuffed Al Qaeda when approached for assistance to carry out bombings in Thailand⁴⁵.

The coup against the Thaksin Government in September 2006 and its replacement by an interim military-dominated administration led by Surayud Chulanont appeared to offer fresh prospects for resolving the insurgency. Surayud made an unprecedented apology to the Muslims of Southern Thailand for past abuses, announced an end to the 'blacklisting' of suspected insurgents and expanded efforts at reconciliation⁴⁶. However, the uncoordinated approach and lack of a strategic plan led to uneven implementation and the alienation of the Buddhist population. The separatists responded by intensifying violence against Buddhist civilians, leading to increased communal tensions and vigilante action against Muslims by Buddhists. The election of a new civilian government in Thailand in December 2007 did not contribute to better prospects for peace, as the victorious People's Power Party was closely connected to the deposed Thaksin government that had pursued a

⁴² *Deadly Demo Puts Thais on Tightrope*, «The Age», 30 October 2004, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/10/29/1099028209065.html?from=storylls>.

⁴³ See, for instance, *The Thai Connection*, «Al Ahram Weekly», 6-12 May 2004, Issue No. 689, <http://weekly.ahram.org>.

⁴⁴ *Terror Suspect Hambali Quizzed*, «Bbc News», 15 August 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3152755.stm>.

⁴⁵ *Targeting Thailand*, «Time», 19 January 2003.

⁴⁶ *Official Apology To Thailand's Muslims*, «New York Times», 3 November 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/03/world/asia/03bangkok.html?fta=y>.

tough military-security approach to the insurgency, with disastrous results. The subsequent political infighting between the populist pro-Thaksin forces and the royalist-military camp, best exemplified by the civil disturbances in 2008 that led to the closure of Bangkok airport, has led to a lack of central political leadership⁴⁷. The result has been a lack of coherence in strategy towards the Southern provinces. More seriously, the failure to address the fundamental grievances of the Malay Muslims and the events of 2004 could yet transform the separatist movement, providing the opportunity for Islamist radicals to link the troubles in the South with the global *jihād*. The danger is thus that Southern Thailand could eventually become transformed into the region's Chechnya.

From the brief survey above, it is evident that the Muslim separatist insurgencies in the Malay Archipelago share many common characteristics. The strong historical sense of local identity has been sustained by deep adherence to Islam and its use as a focal rallying point in opposing the central government. There are also fundamental grievances, such as the presence of migrant communities, discrimination, mismanagement, corruption, and insensitive policies pursued by the central governments involved. Not surprisingly, Al Qaeda has sought to profit from the situation, though its attempts to penetrate existing separatist insurgencies have met with mixed results.

GREAT POWER RIVALRIES

The security challenges from global terrorism, heightened concerns over maritime and energy security, and the growing nexus of local separatism and global terrorism, have attracted the attention of external powers with an interest in maintaining stability in the region. In turn, this has turned the region into a strategic battleground and an arena for great power rivalries.

After the events of 11 September 2001, the Usa designated Southeast Asia as the Second Front in the Global War on Terror. The region, particularly the Malay Archipelago, has strategic importance for the Usa as it has the world's largest Muslim population. Given heightened fears of terrorist attacks on vulnerable shipping in the region, the Usa actively moved to improve maritime security in the Straits of Malacca with the support of its regional allies. This has taken many forms, such as improving bilateral cooperation with the littoral States, namely, Malaysia, Indonesia and

⁴⁷ *How Did Thai Protesters Manage it?*, «Bbc News», 3 December 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7762806.stm>.

Singapore, the provision of indirect military support for counter-terrorism in the Southern Philippines, and measures to improve maritime security⁴⁸. However, because of popular anti-US sentiments in Indonesia and Malaysia, there have been deep domestic sensitivities which both governments have had to pay attention to. Thus, they opposed suggestions that the US might station forces in the vicinity of the Straits of Malacca to secure sea-lanes and carry out counter-terrorism operations⁴⁹. This, however, had the effect of galvanising cooperation amongst the littoral States, leading initially to coordinated year-round patrols in the Straits of Malacca⁵⁰.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, Japan has also been very concerned over terrorism threats and maritime security in the region. It has a major stake in the security of the Straits of Malacca, given that it is its oil and economic lifeline. Indeed, 70% of its oil supply traverses the Straits of Malacca. Any prolonged disruption due to terrorism or regional instability would have a serious impact on Japan's economic security. Moreover, Al Qaeda had threatened to attack Japan on account of its alliance with the US and its dispatch of troops to Iraq⁵¹. Japan therefore realized that it has to play a more active role in countering terrorism and threats to maritime security, particularly in the *environs* of the Straits of Malacca. Japan has despatched its Coast Guard to the region for anti-piracy and counter-terrorism training exercises with a number of States in the region.

Given its constitutional constraints on the deployment of military forces in the region, and mindful of any lingering mistrust as a result of the Second World War, Japan has opted to emphasize capacity building and governance. This capacity building approach has taken the form of the provision of training and equipment in the areas of immigration control, aviation security, customs cooperation, export control, law enforcement cooperation and measures against terrorism financing⁵². Thus, following heightened concerns

⁴⁸ See ANDREW T H TAN, *Singapore's Cooperation with the Trilateral Security Dialogue Partners in the War Against Global Terrorism*, «Defence Studies», June 2007, Vol. 7, No 2, pp. 197-198.

⁴⁹ *Us Plan to Secure Key Shipping Lane Upsets Se Asia*, «Cnsnews.com», <http://www.cnsnews.com/ForeignBureaus/Archive/200404/FOR20040406a.html>, 6 April 2004.

⁵⁰ *Nation Patrols of Strait Launched*, «Straits Times», 21 July 2004.

⁵¹ *Al Qaeda Threatens Japan, Poland, Bulgaria Over Iraq*, «The Namibian», 22 July 2004, <http://www.namibian.com.na/2004/July/world/0456659A85.html>.

⁵² *Japan's Counter-Terrorism Assistance*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/terrorism/assist0306.html>, accessed 9 January 2006.

over maritime security after the abduction of the Japanese crew of a tugboat in the Straits of Malacca in March 2005, Japan offered to provide Indonesia with high-speed patrol boats for anti-piracy missions⁵³. Japan has also funded the installation and maintenance of navigational aides and buoy-tenders, provided technical assistance to upgrade marine safety data management systems and conducted hydrographical surveys⁵⁴. In 2005, Japan also proposed multinational patrols in both territorial and international waters as a counter-piracy measure. This was, however, met with opposition by Indonesia and Malaysia, both of which are concerned with the potential violation of their sovereignty and possible limitations to controlling their Exclusive Economic Zones (EeZs)⁵⁵.

Australia has also accorded the Malay Archipelago much greater attention, as Australia has become a prime terrorist target due to its close alliance relationship with the Usa. This was amply demonstrated by the two Bali attacks in 2002 and 2005, as well as the bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta in 2004. Australia has furnished Indonesia with forensic and other police assistance in investigating the various Ji terrorist bombings, and also established the Centre for law enforcement co-operation in Jakarta. Australia and Asean also issued a joint declaration for cooperation to combat international terrorism in 2004, in which both sides pledged to exchange intelligence, strengthen capacity-building, curb document and identity fraud, and terminate terrorism financing, among other measures⁵⁶.

Major external powers with an interest in the stability and security of the Straits of Malacca, namely Japan, Australia and the Usa, have realised the advantages of coordinating their strategy towards the region. This led to the emergence of a Us-Japan-Australia trilateral security *nexus* that has at its core a common interest in securing the vital Straits of Malacca and containing the threat of radical terrorism in the surrounding Malay Archipelago⁵⁷. The

⁵³ *Japan: Pirates and Force Projection in the Straits of Malacca*, «Stratfor», 18 March 2005.

⁵⁴ ROSENBERG DAVID, *Dire Straits: Competing Security Priorities in the South China Sea*, «Japan Focus», April 2005, <http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=254>.

⁵⁵ *Malaysia Won't Allow Japan Coast Guard to Patrol Malacca Straits*, «Japan Today», 18 March 2005.

⁵⁶ Asean-Australia joint declaration for cooperation to combat international terrorism, <http://www.aseansec.org/16205.htm>.

⁵⁷ DAN BLUMENTHAL, *Strengthening the US-Australia Alliance*, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 29 April 2005, http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.22410/pub_detail.asp.

idea of a Trilateral Security Dialogue was first mooted in 2001, and has since involved discussions on Asian security between senior officials of all three countries. In 2005, it was elevated to the level of the foreign ministers of Japan and Australia, and the Us Secretary of State⁵⁸. One obvious advantage in a more coordinated approach is a greater division of labor. Japan and Australia, being more acceptable in the Malay Archipelago, have taken on a greater role compared to the Us, which is the subject of strong anti-Us sentiments by Muslims in the region. Both countries have provided training, funding and other capacity-building assistance to improve local capabilities. Japan and Australia have thus been able to gain greater acceptance, compared to the Usa, for counter-piracy and counter-terrorism roles in the region.

Interestingly, the growing roles of all three external powers have been facilitated by Singapore, which has developed very close security ties with Australia, the Usa and Japan. Uniquely, it has signed free trade agreements with all three, indicating the depth of bilateral cooperation with the three extra-regional powers that have significant interests and stakes in the region. Not surprisingly, the four work closely together on a range of regional security initiatives, for instance, in broadening participation in Asia in the Us-led Proliferation Security Initiative⁵⁹.

However, the evolving Trilateral Security Dialogue partnership of the Usa, Japan and Australia has been perceived by China to be directed against it. Apart from global terrorism, the emergence of China has been the other key issue in contemporary international relations, an issue that especially concerns the Us and Japan. China's rise as a political, economic and military power threatens the dominant position of the Us in the region. Thus, conservative circles in the Us have promoted the idea of a concert of democracies, comprising the Usa, Japan, Australia and India, directed at containing China⁶⁰. Apart from terrorism concerns, tensions between China and Japan due to historical animosities and strategic competition have also been a driving force behind Japan's more proactive

⁵⁸ *Trilateral Dialogue*, «Radio Australia», 24 May 2005.

⁵⁹ ROBERT JOSEPH, *Meeting the Challenges of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation*, The Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, 9 December 2005, <http://www.acronym.org.uk/docs/0512/doc03.htm>.

⁶⁰ BRAHMA CHELLANEY, *Obstacles to Overcome in the Development of a Concert of Asia-Pacific Democracies*, «Japan Times», 20 February 2008, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ea20080220bc.html>.

regional approach⁶¹. Given the developments, China has expressed concern over the ability of the Us to disrupt its access to energy supplies in what has been dubbed China's 'Malacca Dilemma'⁶². China has thus tried to reduce its vulnerability in this respect by building an oil pipeline in Myanmar (Burma) that would run from the port of Sittwe to Kunming in Southern China as an alternative oil transport route⁶³.

The Trilateral Security Dialogue partnership appeared to reach a culminating point with the seminal Malabar naval exercises in the Indian Ocean in September 2007. Originally a Us-India military exercise, the 2007 exercises involved the partners as well as India, which the partners had been courting. They were joined by the partnership's closest Southeast Asian regional ally, Singapore. The exercise was preceded by talks amongst the Trilateral partners and India, which led to China expressing open displeasure, given its concern that it appeared to be evolving towards a Us-led containment alliance designed to check China's rise⁶⁴.

Australia, however, has developed a complementary economic relationship with China on account of the latter's voracious appetite for resources, with China becoming Australia's largest trading partner in 2007. The Rudd government that came to power in 2007 has backtracked on the evolving Trilateral Security Dialogue process and has instead been very careful not to upset China with any suggestion that it is joining a Us-led containment alliance⁶⁵. On the part of Japan, the coming to power of a more pacifist government led by Yasuo Fukuda in September 2007 also led to an emphasis on cooperation and engagement, not confrontation and containment. India too is reluctant, despite growing relations with the Usa, to be

⁶¹ For instance, this Author made several trips to Japan where, in response to its concerns over China, he advised Japanese policy analysts on the need to be visible in the Straits of Malacca area in order to counter China's rising influence and preserve Japan's interests in the region. See also ANDREW T H TAN, *Singapore's Cooperation with the Trilateral Security Dialogue Partners in the War Against Global Terrorism*, cit., pp. 199-202.

⁶² IAN STOREY, *China's Malacca Dilemma*, «China Brief», Jamestown Foundation, 12 April 2006, 6(8).

⁶³ MORTEN B. PEDERSEN, "The Future Takes Form – But Little Change in Sight", in DALJIT SINGH and LORRAINE C. SALAZAR (eds.), *Southeast Asian Affairs 2007*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007, p. 234.

⁶⁴ *Five Nation Naval Exercise Begins*, «Bbc News», 4 September 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6977376.stm.

⁶⁵ GAVAN MCCORMACK, *Asia's New Axis?*, «Foreign Policy in Focus», 16 April 2008, <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftext/5153>.

identified with any quadrilateral arrangement that would be perceived by China as unfriendly. Despite these developments however, it is clear that globally and regionally, strategic rivalry between China and the Us is growing and would have significant security implications for the region.

CONCLUSIONS

The current interest in the Malay Archipelago has been a consequence of post-Cold War developments that reached an apogee in the wake of the seminal terrorist attacks in the Usa on 11 September 2001, which resulted in the Us-led Global War on Terror. Southeast Asia, especially the Malay Archipelago, became designated as the Second Front in the Gwot.

However, the above survey indicates that the Malay Archipelago needs to be seen not merely as a Us-led counter-terrorism theatre in the Gwot. Instead, the end of the Cold War and especially the events of 11 September 2001 have coincided with the emergence of complex security challenges that are interlinked. These include terrorism, maritime and energy security, Muslim separatist rebellion, and great power rivalries. All these security issues are intertwined and affect each other.

The threat of global terrorism has manifested itself in the region in the form of Al Qaeda-linked militant groups motivated by radical pan-Islamist ideology. These groups have carried out deadly terrorist attacks in Indonesia and the Philippines. The terrorist threat has also led to heightened concerns over maritime security and fears of a maritime version of 11 September 2001, given the insecure nature of the maritime industry compared to aviation. A major terrorist attack in the Straits of Malacca could severely disrupt trade as well as crucial energy supplies to the booming economies of Northeast Asia. Al Qaeda's attempts to penetrate existing Muslim separatist insurgencies have also meant that greater attention must now be invested in monitoring their linkages with the global *jihad*. Should Al Qaeda succeed in transforming these ethno-nationalist organisations into transnational pan-Islamist networks, as has occurred in Chechnya, the security challenge would become much more serious, with important implications for regional and international security.

The inter-relatedness of security challenges, and their transnational political, economic and social impacts, leads to the conclusion that they must be seen holistically. In turn, this suggests that managing the complex, inter-related security challenges in the Malay Archipelago requires a comprehensive approach comprising political, economic and social elements, including regional and interna-

tional cooperation amongst affected local and external actors, instead of the simplistic, uni-dimensional and military-oriented approach inherent in the Us-led Gwot, which has been narrowly focused on containing terrorism.

However, the response by external powers, which have taken on more proactive security roles in the region, have led to fears of growing great power rivalries, especially given the context of growing strategic rivalry between China on the one hand, and the Usa and Japan on the other. These rivalries have not abated with the end of the Bush administration and the inauguration of the Obama administration, as fears of a resurgent China threatening the dominant position of a much weakened Usa in the wake of the financial and economic crises of 2008-9 were awakened following the latest naval confrontation between the two countries in the South China Sea in March 2009⁶⁶. In Southeast Asia, China's resurgence, its geographical propinquity and the concomitant weakness of the Usa, have already led to States in the region increasingly throwing in their lot with China. In the wake of the financial and economic crises sparked by the sub-prime lending crisis in the Usa, the Chinese model of political and economic development, which is not based on liberal values or democracy, is likely to prove more attractive. The Trilateral Security Dialogue process, an evolving alliance of democracies which the Us hoped would be able to counter China, has fallen apart due to political changes in Japan and Australia, where their present governments are much more amenable to cultivating close ties with China, and which do not share the Us perspective of a possible threat from China. It is thus obvious that the growth of complex security challenges in this region has also been accompanied by some fundamental shifts in the regional balance of power. It should thus also be expected that in the coming years, China will increasingly have a bigger voice in deciding how these complex regional security challenges should be managed. This in turn would also mean that countries in the Malay Archipelago would increasingly be able to resist pressure from the West on a range of issues, including how to deal with complex security challenges. This however, might not be a bad thing, as dealing with these complex challenges requires a holistic, comprehensive and trans-national approach that extends beyond narrow Us security interests.

⁶⁶ *Chinese Ships 'Harass' US Vessel*, «Bbc News», 9 March 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7933171.stm>.