

## Securing South East Asia: The Politics of Security Sector Reform

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Mark Beeson, who authored articles on Asia Pacific institutions and regional security along with Alex J. Bellamy who has written books on Kosovo and Security Communities, has written this book which discusses a very important subject of civil military relations in socio-political context. The authors have reservations for the book being classified under civil military relations because it comprehensively discusses the issue under Security Sector Reforms (SSR). The book discusses South East Asia as an experimental lab where after the World War II different international actors and nationalist movements have created complex matrices of decolonisation process. The interface of imperialist nations and nationalist movements created unique conundrum of nationalist parties, colonial powers, governance structures, military and public movements. Nationalist movements in Indonesia, Myanmar subscribed to new governance structures but few nations like Malaysia relied on imperialist nation support for smooth transition in a structured manner. Countries like Thailand and Philippines have suffered interference from the military leaders throughout their chequered history. On the one hand, Thailand has seen military leaders transform to civilian attire to secure acceptance for active politics but on the other hand, in many instances King Bhumibol Adulyadej intervention was required to create balance between civilian politics and military aspirations. Thailand prior to 2006 coup seemed to have resolved the intricacies of civil military relations but military coup in 2006 dispelled that notion. In Philippines, Marcos misused military to consolidate its power, witnessed public upsurge to remove the corrupt regime. Indonesia post Sukarno witnessed the revival of military interference in public matters because of military containment of 1965 coup. General Suharto's 'Guided Democracy' justified role for military in public matters. Capitalising on that military transformed itself as a corporate entity through military firms and sponsored activities. Malaysia which adopted consociational bargaining among different ethnic groups has been one outstanding example of harmony between the civil and military sectors. The book highlights that in spite of

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having a perfect harmony in the civil and military relations, the majority ethnic community represented the largest percentage in military. This lack of proportional ethnic representation has been postulated as detrimental for multiethnic nation.

The book has been divided into seven major chapters apart from introduction and conclusion. The seven major chapters deal with the issue of security sector reform, civil military relations, South East Asian security and four case studies of Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Philippines. The first chapter of the introduction deals with security sector reform in South East Asia. Firstly, it lists the three major contributions in the regional context, it states that there has been a renewed focus on the civil military relations especially in the context of military intervention in domestic affairs. Secondly, it discusses the comprehensive human security agenda by equating security with development and vice versa. Thirdly, the impact of defence measures especially in terms of defence expenditure, arms trade and defence diplomacy on the larger democratic institutions. The chapter argues that multinational organisations as well as multilateral organisations have been involved in developmental projects in different countries so as to promote development and growth and consequently democracy. But in order to have a long lasting democracy, there is a need for security sector reform which might lead to subtle democratisation and security. The complex balance between stable governance and security would ensure development and thereby democratic peace. In South East Asia, the militaries of few countries have mutated into corporate independent entities not subscribing to civilian control. This led to power bargaining between corrupt civilian leaders and military so as to sustain their regime. So there is reason for transformation and developing an understanding between civil and military establishments thereby ensuring long lasting stability and democracy. Defining the security sector, the authors have stated, "organisations that are able to employ lethal violence in a way considered legitimate by the political community and the mechanisms used to control those organisations". This is a rather constrained definition which does not demarcate the professional military to the state sponsored armed militia. While discussing the SSR reforms, three major areas have been discussed. These include control, capacity and cooperation which mean control of democracy, capacity to undertake military tasks and transnational/international cooperation in dealing with regional or international crisis. In the regional context, efforts have been made to raise professional armies have been initiated. Within Thailand even in the past, the erstwhile prime ministers have tried to interfere in military decision making, so as to assert civilian control with limited success. The departures of Marcos and Suharto in Philippines and Indonesia have created conducive conditions for de-politicisation of armed forces. The assistance of the western countries and internal structural reforms provided impetus for re-professionalising the armed forces. In Indonesia, military has relinquished a number of seats in legislature and are in the process of surrendering military business

enterprises. At the global level, the socio-economic role of the military as well as international engagements under UN has created the launching pad for the military reforms in these countries.

In the second chapter, the discourse has more to do with comparison between civil military relations in the western world and non-western world. There are inherent differences between these two sets of military governance and civil military relations. The role of ideational factors in the Asian context discusses systemic environment, perception of threats and intra-regional relations among nations. While talking about issues, it lists 'strategic culture' and 'pathologies' of institutional structures. In the last part of the chapter, there is a passing remark about the beliefs, values, ethics and practices at the domestic level which defines subtle changes or drastic changes required in the military set up. While discussing the civil military relations the authors have taken up Michael Desch model which takes into cognisance different variables determining the civilian control over military. These are the experience of civilian leaders, unity among leaders, politicisation in military, unity between military leaders, orientation of armed forces and the difference between military and civil opinion. These variables determine the level of military relations with the civilian setup and the professionalism of the armed forces.

The third chapter deals with the origins of South East Asian security. Though it is a much-discussed issue in hundreds of articles and books this intends to set up the military sector reforms in the regional context. This chapter, in fact, breaks the continuity of the book as it suddenly tries to jump from theoretical context to history. Though it is required but this could have been a part of introduction rather than a separate chapter. The argument that has been proposed in the chapter is that contextual, historical, ideological and internal factors propelled militaries to play a larger role in governance and public matters. In fact, many of the South East Asian militaries have tried to emulate their colonial masters or their western counterparts in terms of organisational setup and charter of duties. The course of history has determined the structure of military as well as further development. The role of American hegemony as well as the development of regional corporative mechanisms like ASEAN has been instrumental in security sector reforms.

The fourth chapter which is a case study of Malaysia discusses that Malaysia has been an exception for the one fact that military has not played a prominent role in domestic politics. Malaysia adopted the constitutional model of civil military relations but other elements of the security sectors like police and special branch have political influences. In fact, the professional orientation of the Malaysian security forces can be attributed to the British legacy and there is a clear work demarcation among the security agencies. The issue of politics and economics has been discussed at length in this chapter and the political underpinnings of Mahathir's rise and the dissent within his party has somehow influenced the security forces. The issue of religion has also been

discussed but it ends with just a few lines about special religious corps in armed forces. They should have been expanded to show the intricacies of ethnic and religious influence in professional army. The chapter ends with a reference to Francis Loh who had described Malaysian security sector being dictated more by police than by the army. In this chapter the role of judiciary has also been described which had adjudicated the balance between civil and security sector.

In the subsequent chapter, Thailand has been discussed and despite acting as buffer state between different imperialist powers, it is a country which has yet to create balance between military and civilian establishments. In the country the new constitution and the military rule has been synonymous as it witnessed 18 constitutions and 22 successful and unsuccessful coups. The chapter begins with the 2006 military coup and describes the justifications proposed by the military general for the coup. The prognosis which has propounded in 1992 that military has returned to the barracks was falsified after 2006 coup. It does accept the fact that post 1992 'fine tuning' reforms regarding corruption, hierarchy and counter insurgency operations had been initiated. The chapter places historical emphasis on the civil military relations and the role of revered monarch in the domestic politics. The unification and nationalism propounded by a Thai military has given it legitimacy in domestic politics. While discussing the evolution of military in Thailand and the role of conscription in late nineteenth century, the issue that has been highlighted is that military has been constrained to act as a repository of national identity and pride. Though in the post 1992 phase, there were reforms in the form of government having a say in military spending and procurement processes but then the involvement of military in elections and parliamentary process meant that these reforms were only eyewash. The New Constitution of 1997 gave power to National Corruption Commission to look into appointments as well as cases of corruption in military but despite this corruption remained unbridled among military officers. The military education and exposure to western models of military have opened new areas of reforms but these remained largely constrained due to politico-military compulsions. The role of peacekeeping in strife torn provinces as well as exposure to situations in East Timor and Aceh have given new meaning to the international responsibilities of Thai army. These have given much needed exposure to military and have reoriented military for larger geo-strategic role.

In the sixth chapter, Indonesia has been discussed in the context of security sector reforms. Though after Sukarno, the rise of General Suharto did ensure that a powerful military leader would not let Indonesia go Thailand way but it also ensured deep entrenchment of military in political and economic affairs. The corporatisation of military under Suharto as well as Suharto's role in annexation of Timor Leste cannot be discounted by the fact that it was the only alternative available. The lack of disbursement of economic opportunities and decentralisation have alienated a number of provinces on Indonesia be it the

Sulawesi, Papua, Aceh or the former East Timor. Even after the resolution of Aceh crisis, under Aceh legal framework the retrospective law for prosecuting military officers for violating human rights was scuttled in the Parliament, shows the clout of military. Also, the involvement of military in corrupt practices in Papua has led to widespread unrest which affected neighbouring Australia in the form of 'boat people'. These things show that military is embedded in Indonesian politics. But with military moving out of legislative process and democratic structures becoming prominent, military would have to return to barracks. The final de-politicisation of Indonesian military would happen only when its business ventures are usurped by the government and sponsoring of army activities by multinational organisations is curbed.

In the last case study Philippines has been discussed. The Philippines military have inherited the legacy of Spanish and US armies which helped it to form one of the structured armies in the region. But even with regard to civil military relations, politics has transgressed the limits and political leaders have used military for its ulterior motives. The military on the other hand, due to the slow economic growth, has been involved in a number of unsuccessful coup attempts. The indictment of military in corrupt practices, factionalism and domestic instability has been reported by press. The emergence of different civilian and military power centres within the country led to complex matrix of civil military relations. This has jeopardised any reformist initiative in security sector. Post Marcos the restructuring of military started through reducing salaries of personnel and concentrating more of development projects rather than military modernisation, which was not well received by armed forces. Countering the rise of communist mercenaries and the insurgency in Southern Philippines empowered military forces. The lack of coordination and cooperation with civilian authorities has kept the relationship inherently flawed. This can be one the reasons for the recurring military coups since 2003 because of the increasing level of politicisation of the armed forces.

The last concluding chapter discusses inhibitors and drivers of SSR and has listed the reasons for the lack of reforms which includes historical legacy, authoritarian rule, corruption, politicised military and civilian oversight of military, thereby complicating the process. The emergence of strong democratic structures as in Indonesia, decentralisation of power and globalisation of South East Asian economies might provide the necessary catalyst for security sector reforms but coups like that in Thailand cannot be ruled out. The whole region needs to reconfigure approach towards military and it must not be seen as the last resort for stability and security. Instead, the emphasis should be on developing democratic structures or semi democratic structures with least reliance on military.

The book provides a unique amalgamation of political compulsions, historical backdrop and military transformation since 1945. At a number of places, the description becomes very sketchy as in the case of Malaysia. But the case

studies on Thailand and Indonesia has been well articulated. The strength of the book is the active engagement of the reader in political and security sector intricacies in South East Asia. The book does not even evaluate the role of armed forces in Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. Also, the case studies that have been taken have already been discussed by a number of writers in various articles and books. In the chapter on Malaysia, police forces have also been analysed but the complexities involved with regard to ethnic relations in Malaysian military has been rather left untouched, though a number of problems have emerged in the armed forces about religious conversion and burial of non-Muslims lately. Within Indonesia the role of military business enterprises, military-multinational nexus in Papua and role of former generals in civil administration and governance is not discussed. In spite of these few shortcomings, the book is an excellent reading for understanding the theoretical aspects of security sector reforms and has comprehensively discussed existing literature on the subject. 