

ISSUES IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY

LEADERSHIP

AND

SECURITY IN

SOUTHEAST

ASIA

INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

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Introduction

The interrelationships between leadership, security and institutions in the countries of Southeast Asia form the focus of the articles in this volume. In the equation between leadership and security, the former is assumed to be the independent factor while the latter is seen as the dependent variable although in the interactive relationship cause and effect are sometimes obscured. Security is seen in holistic terms, but the emphasis is clearly on the domestic aspects of the security question, with the exception of one contribution. The articles, it was intended, would focus on the institutional dimension in the interconnection between the leadership variable, including leaders' definition of the domestic security situation, and national security management and performance. While the writers were expected to discuss how institutions (or a particular institution) might mediate between leadership and security, there was no rigid analytical framework imposed on the individual authors. This accounts for the diverse foci of the case studies.

It is not the purpose of this introduction to impose an analytical Procrustean bed to fit all the contributions in the volume. Rather, it is hoped to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the commonalities and differences in the country experiences exposed in the articles. The unifying theme of the book is the relationship of leadership and institutions to security.

THE HOLISTIC MEANING OF SECURITY

Defining "national security" is an elephantine problem because of

the accordion-like nature of the concept: its meaning shifts according to the level of analysis and the issue area. Moreover, in the case of weaker states, the problem of definition is complicated by the lack of clarity of the referent object.¹

There is an external and a domestic, and a "hardware" and "software", side of security and its management with, undoubtedly, preponderant attention being given to the external and hardware side because of the dominance of the realist paradigm in international politics,² including writings on Southeast Asian security. In the era of Cold War international politics, the security of Southeast Asian nations was dominated by concerns over external vulnerabilities. It would be foolish to suggest that external insecurity is a figment of the imagination of national élites. It may, nevertheless, be safely argued that there is no universal meaning to the concept "national security" and that the operational definition depends on the context.

With the demise of Cold War international politics, however, national security concerns in Southeast Asia have been re-directed to internal issues of national cohesion, political stability, and socio-economic development. The shift from concern over external vulnerabilities to internal security, however, does not hide the fact that the predominant emphasis is on the nation-state as the primary referent object for national security. In "domestic" terms, security appears to be a shorthand for all the comprehensive issues and problems related to the maintenance and survivability of the existing state structure. Within this security environment, then, the main task is one of political development, and state and nation-building. The success of political management for national stability and security is dependent more on the "software" of political leadership and political institutions than the "hardware" of military capability. Indeed, as Azar and Moon argue, the software side of security management in a polity involves attention being paid to "the political context and policy capacity through which national values are defined, threats and vulnerabilities are perceived and assessed, resources are allocated, and policies are screened, selected and implemented".³

Even when defined in these terms, as Girling (Chapter 8) reminds us, security "is always for someone and about something". And, in the succinct language of Khong (Chapter 2), "the motives of the leadership should not be taken on trust". Girling's clear preference is for the optimization of "societal" (over what he terms "technical" and "institutional") security, embracing such social

purposes and values as economic growth, welfare distribution policies, and democratic choice — values assumed to be worth of protection in Khong's essay. The reality is that, in the dynamic interaction between élites' motives and societal goals, as the case studies in this volume reveal, élite and regime security might be given more prominence in security policies and management, often couched in terms of political stability and the national security. Thus, national security priorities assigned by a national leadership might not be coterminous with the needs and interests of the state or the security of subnational collectivities, such as the lower economic classes or ethnic groups, but are more likely to reflect the imperatives of regime or governmental security and the interests of the élite strata.

Security might, after all, be about politics and that age-old currency called power. Politics, in one dominant tradition of writings, is about the pursuit of interests of values, the achievement of which brings physical or psychic satisfaction and a sense of security. Because "the locus of security is in the present as well as the future", Lasswell and Kaplan define security as "high value expectancy, position, and potential: realistic expectancy of maintaining influence".⁴ In general terms, man in life and politics pursues eight "base" values, according to Lasswell, namely power, wealth, enlightenment (or knowledge), well-being, skill, affection, rectitude (righteousness or morality), and deference (or respect), the relative weight given to each varying from person to person and from group to group, as well as differing between cultures and over time.⁵ Scarcity of values is a phenomenon of politics as of economics. Hence, the art of societal security management is interest intermediation between groups: the question is whether this task can be safely left in the hands of élites and national leaders or should the intermediation be routinized in institutional arrangements. This central dilemma of politics (and social security) dominates the discussion in Khong's article in the volume.

The problem of defining the ends and specifying the means of national security has not been resolved in this volume. The writers in this book largely chose to subsume the question of security in the complex of political, social and economic problems associated with the nation-building and modernization syndrome. In the writings on political development or modernization, "crisis" theory has been employed to analyse the problems and challenges confronting developing countries hoping to achieve "modernity", that is, the status of developed nations. In this prevailing paradigm