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BOOK REVIEW

Damien KINGSBURY (der.), Violence in Between Conflict and Security in Archipelagic Southeast

Jewellord Nem SINGH

Lund University, Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies

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Violence in Between: Conflict and Security in Archipelagic Southeast Asia

Damien KINGSBURY (ed.)

Clayton and Singapore, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies and Monash Asia Institute, 2005, 326 pages.

Prepared by: Jewellord NEM SINGH*

“Archipelagic Southeast Asia now appears more violent, more potentially fragmented and more prone to seemingly random acts of political and religious violence, than at any time in its post-colonial history” (p. 7)

This sentence captures the essence of the book: a brave assessment of the future of Maritime Southeast Asia in the face of old and new security threats. The book is a collection of essays written by Australian-based scholars with research interests on the security of Peninsular Southeast Asia (henceforth PSEA). With detailed descriptions of the various conflicts in the region ranging from ‘old’ and ‘new’ terrorism, maritime security up to local conflicts in Indonesia and the Philippines, *Violence in Between* is an extensive (perhaps too detailed) introduction to understanding the rapid changes in these societies. My assessment is that most chapters offer a constructivist view on conflict and security because these struggles are part of a construction process by groups aiming to maintain or challenge political power and domination in society.

The first three chapters of the book comprehensively discuss the emergence of terrorism as a security threat in PSEA. In Chapter 1, terrorism as a result of political and economic scarcity is explored. While Islamic movements flourish from the systematic neglect of grievances, the state’s use of violence in dealing with conflicts remains the major challenge toward resolving the conflict. Chapter 2 shifts the discussion to the complicated relationship between “old” and “new” terrorism where the former refers to ‘selective political violence committed by anti-government insurgents and ethno-nationalist separatists acting in isolation and confined in geographical scope’ while the latter is used to describe “high profile mass casualty against civilians by internationally networked terrorist groups”. (p. 53) The chapter argues that it becomes difficult to delineate the two (therefore complicated to resolve), since terrorist organizations are not monolithic structures but rather have

* Master’s student in Asian Studies, Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies, Lund University, Sweden

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dynamic linkages and relationships. Using Al Qaeda as a starting point of analysis, the chapter weaves insights from country specialists and regional analysts to unravel the complex relations emerging from the linkages created by Al Qaeda to local struggles and organizations which took a regional scope of activities (e.g. Jema'ah Islamiyah (JI) based in Indonesia and Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines). In essence, Islamic militancy in Southeast Asia can be characterized as the links between Al Qaeda (defined as a small group with limited global influence concentrated in Afghanistan), regionally developed terrorist groups, and local struggles in PSEA. Finally, Chapter 3 moves to a specific focus on Islamism as a radical ideology that developed in Indonesia. Here, Barton makes a distinction between Islam as religious beliefs and Islamism as a construction of radical ideology. Following the preceding chapter, he stresses the exaggeration of the threat of radical Islamism to regional security and refutes the primordialist/essentialist constructions of Islam as a radical religion in Indonesia. The chapter successfully demonstrates the persistence of Islamic movements as rooted in state repression for regime survival (e.g. the clamp down on communist and religious movements). Islamism, being "preeminently concerned with changing society by political means in order to bring the state and society into conformity with a particular understanding of [radical] Islam" (p. 99), this makes the ideology problematic and threatening as it is anti-democratic and imposes the interpretation of Islam by a small group to a moderate Muslim majority. All in all, the three chapters provide a problematized view on terrorism, conflict and security in PSEA, where the details become valuable information for first time readers on the topic. The major pitfall though is the uncritical treatment of the Islamization of politics in Malaysia and the Philippines where the role of Islam is different from that in Indonesia. The former demonstrates a case where the Badawi government is trapped in the need to make political concessions with Islamic groups to retain power and legitimacy while the latter presents a case where the Arroyo administration has resumed using violence against Muslims due to her shaky democratic credentials and her reliance on the military for survival. The conclusion is that Islamism and Islamization have varying impacts in Southeast Asian societies.

The fourth chapter presents a different view on security as it takes up the issue of maritime security in PSEA. Starting from the maritime forces' role in security, the chapter critically looks at the challenge of Chinese military dominance in the region. Although descriptive and simplistic in comparing military capabilities of countries across the region, it traces historically state-to-state relationships including the South China Sea dispute. Its main argument is that the Chinese military does not pose a serious threat to peace in Asia because of the inherent

limitations in military modernization but governments ought to take modernization of maritime forces seriously as the United States' interest in protecting the waters in PSEA has diminished. What the chapter does not look at is the complex web of strategic interests that make war unlikely in the region: the renewed interest of the US through the War on Terror, the use of multilateral frameworks like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in managing conflict, and the increased emphasis on "soft" security and economic issues in the post Cold War era. All these complicate the way governments deal with "hard" security issues like maritime security.

The fifth chapter seems to be the introductory chapter for the next six chapters. Kingsbury analyzes the source of instability in PSEA by examining state formation and state legitimacy processes. He argues that nation-building is fragmented – a key source of instability – due to the failure to construct "shared identity" and "common political aspirations". This is a by product of the arbitrary state formation in the region brought about by pre-colonial and colonial history. The end results are the lack of state cohesion, systematic use of violence to resolve tensions, lack of legitimacy in governance, and weak institutional set-ups. In essence, these states will remain fragile as threats from below persist such as Maluku, Aceh and Kalimantan in Indonesia, Mindanao in the Philippines and the Chinese in the whole region. In Chapter 6, Collier takes the case of Mindanao as a construction of both essentialist and instrumentalist myths perpetuated in Philippine society to serve the interests of Muslim elites and the governments in power. *Datus* (Muslim leaders) used religious undertones for self-preservation and privileges such as the "sanctified inequality" between Muslims and Christians and the distinctive Moro identity shaped by colonial resistance. As Mindanao was integrated into the post-colonial Philippine state, Muslim leaders knew that the vote-rich region of Mindanao would be useful in getting access to privileges from the national government. When the *Bangsamoro* struggle was initiated as a counter-elite movement by religious groups, the MNLF¹ conveniently used reformist strategies such as elections, regional autonomy and aristocratic-autocratic leadership. The conclusion is that resolving the conflict requires clarifying and eradicating the primordialist distinctions between Muslims and Christians while systematically addressing the needs of normal Muslim citizens through social and economic policies. Chapters 7 and 8 are both historically grounded analyses of the nature of the conflict in Aceh and critical views on the way Indonesian governments have handled the Aceh issue. Chapter 7 shows how the "security approach" in Aceh has always been

¹ The Moro National Liberation Front was the first group recognized by the Philippine government as a legitimate representative of the Muslims in the negotiation process.

symptomatic of the power relations in policy-making in Indonesia. Sherlock refutes the primordialist claims that Acehnese are “putatively troublesome and rebellious... with the history of the anti-colonial struggle and post-independent movements as evidence” (p. 187). Rather, Aceh was at the center of the concern of Suharto’s New Order regime to maintain national economic development and therefore Aceh’s extensive natural resources have been a resource for political survival. It was therefore logical for Suharto to tighten his grip over Aceh, which led to a steady increase of resentment from the Acehnese. In the post-Suharto period, there were rising expectations about its future – regional autonomy and an end to militarization. The failure to deliver these promises is largely due to the lack of civilian control in security policy-making and the increased assertion of Tentara Nasional Indonesia’s (TNI – The Indonesian Military) stake in the conflict.² Chapter 8 echoes the same conclusion but with a stronger critique against the military and a more systematic analysis of greed as a strong factor in handling Aceh. As Suharto gave TNI the power to decide what to do in Aceh, the military expanded its role, blurred civil-military relations, and engaged in illegal activities to fund the military. Therefore, it was in the military’s interest to keep Aceh integrated in Indonesia and to use the “security approach” – violence – as the proper method in “resolving” the conflict.

Chapter 9 shifts the view on conflict by looking at Ambon, Indonesia, as a result of the national-local nexus of security. The partisan role played by the security forces has prolonged the conflict as national forces struggle to keep the country integrated and stable while local forces were given leeway to handle the conflict in lieu of the vacuum of authority at the national level. Both before and after the Ambon conflict was unleashed, the political landscape has been conducive to a role expansion of the security forces leading to systematic and increased insecurity. The tensions within and between the military, civilian government and police have led to state breakdown, political instability, and violence.

The last two chapters deal with a contemporary challenge to Indonesia: East Timor. Chapter 10 is an Australian domestic perspective of this local turned international conflict. Fernandes shows the three phases of policy making the Australian government had to face: preserving the status quo (maintain East Timor under Indonesia), diplomatic and material support to manipulate the outcomes of the elections, and negotiation to force the Indonesian government to withdraw and send peacekeeping forces. Al-

² Aceh has been a good source of funding for the military in its activities through both legal and illegal activities. Regional autonomy raises the costs for the military and any move toward this direction has been systematically blocked.

though very descriptive in discussing the flaws of the Australian government's policy on East Timor, it lays down a compelling argument on the key role played by domestic and international pressure toward government in recognizing the human rights violations, the need for peacekeeping troops, and the recognition of East Timor's independent status. Finally, the last chapter deals with the border security issue between Indonesia and East Timor. Like in Ambon and Aceh, the military has some stake in the border security of both countries. Trade and smuggling have been pervasive and the TNI together with other groups have benefited from the situation. As negotiations over borders continue, the TNI attempts "to facilitate the possible re-integration of East Timor into Indonesia... which feeds into the sense of legitimacy of TNI" (297). In conclusion, Indonesia's relations with East Timor may largely be defined by the military as transition in the country is set back by political instability and reliance on force in governance. This opens opportunities for greater military intervention in politics and therefore a return to Suharto-style money politics and coercion with democratic rhetoric.

Although the book raises several issues on contemporary security and conflict in PSEA, it is limited in analytical content and largely descriptive in explaining these issues. Not only does the book lack a good introduction to synthesize the issues, it remains incoherent in terms of an overarching theoretical framework in explaining conflict. The constructionist analysis in identity politics is very subtle and requires a more extensive literature review in order for the reader to better compare essentialist/primordialist, instrumentalist and constructionist explanations on group identity and conflict. It remains inconclusive in its assessment of the region's future as every chapter deals with its own topic without any attempt to relate its contribution to the larger processes in the region. Except for a few chapters (5, 6, 7, and 9), there is little attempt to synthesize theory and empirical evidence so as to understand violent conflicts, leading one to wonder whether reading the case studies is worth doing after all.

The book contributes only marginally to the theoretical debate on terrorism and conflict but provides an excellent overview of contemporary Southeast Asian affairs. Readers unfamiliar with terrorism may find this book helpful especially since there are scant resources describing the new terrorism in Asia. The book traces the linkages between international, regional and local groups aiming to promote a radical ideology but complicates the solutions set forward by policy makers. In sum, the book is a good addition to the literature describing the contemporary situation of security in PSEA.