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Regional Resilience

The Imperative for Maritime Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia

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THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION and the subsequent end of the Cold War have profoundly changed the global security environment. Multipolar instability and regionalism have replaced bipolar stability underpinned by the threat of global nuclear war. Policy makers in the Asia-Pacific region have been searching for ideas to manage the change and to reduce the ensuing uncertainty.

The regional states share a common predominant agenda, the desire for economic growth—and a common associated vital national interest, trade. Southeast Asian sea lines of communication (SLOCs) lie at the confluence of Pacific and Indian Ocean trade routes and form the strategic heart of the region. The SLOCs are vital to the national security interests of all the regional states and to several major external states. With the relative decline of superpower involvement and with increasing multipolar influence, the need for regional security cooperation is of paramount importance. This article reviews contemporary strategic trends in Southeast Asia, identifies security challenges and opportunities, and proposes options for maritime security cooperation.¹

Southeast Asian Security Trends

Southeast Asia is one of the most ethnically diverse regions of the world; it is a melting pot for Chinese, Indian, Malay, and European cultures, along with

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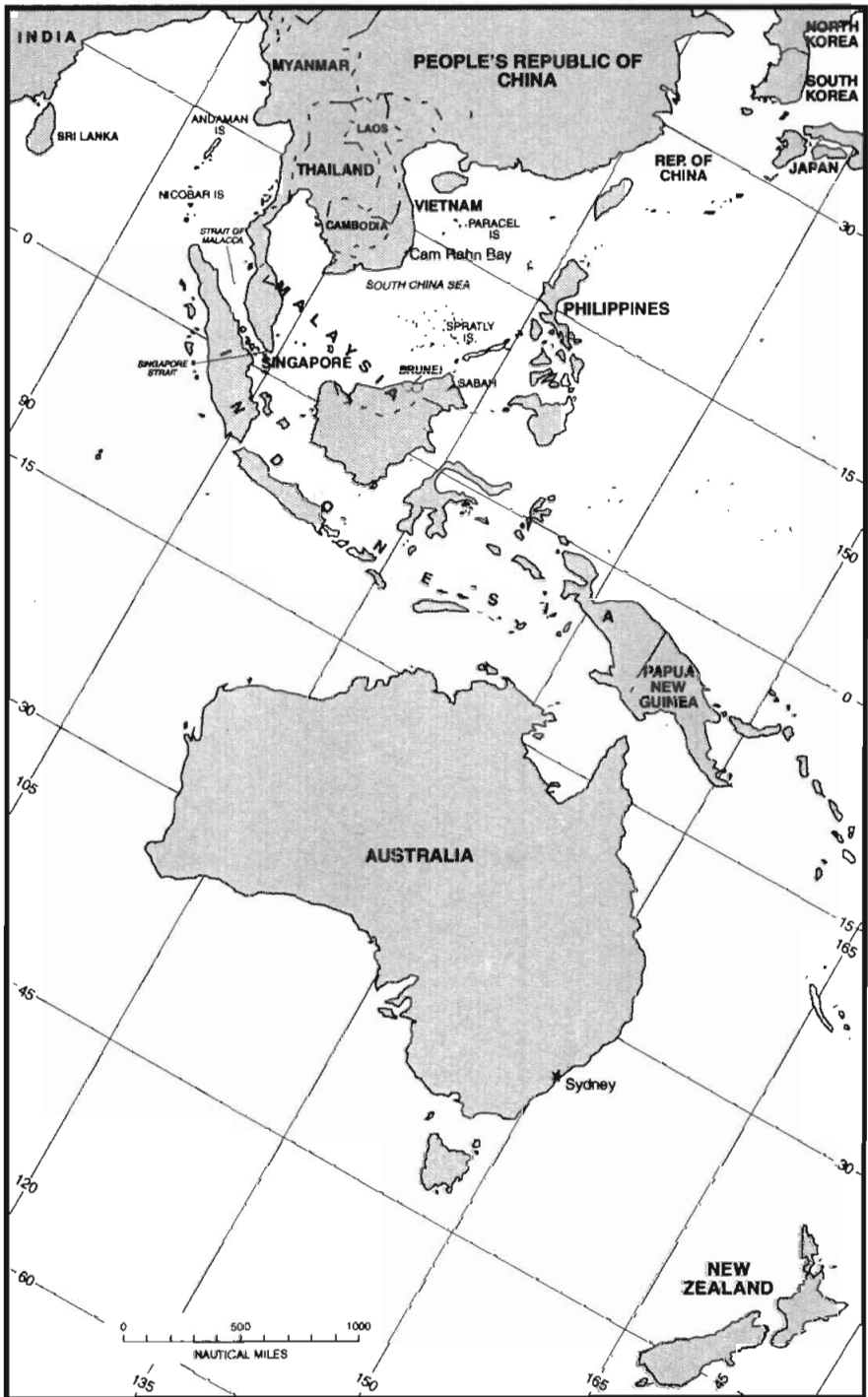
42 Naval War College Review

other regional and extra-regional influences. The world's major religions—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity—flourish. Linguistic, political, and social diversity abound. The main issue in common is the need for economic development, cooperation, and growth, an imperative which is accompanied by a related, broadly perceived need for a stable security environment. Productivity has replaced chauvinism as the national ideology of most regional states.²

Economic Factors. Increased global economic interdependence, combined with growing instability, has fostered the formation of economic blocs designed to promote cooperation and to focus economic power against external forces. The European Community (EC) has been the world leader in this regard, and the post-Cold War entry of the United States into the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) has followed this trend. Meanwhile, the Asia-Pacific region has enjoyed rapid economic growth and accounts for more than half of the world's production and over 40 percent of global trade; the trend is for this proportional share to increase rapidly. More than 65 percent of this trade is intra-regional.³ The Asia-Pacific states have been compelled to explore the formation of economic arrangements to encourage cooperation and to ensure that the region's voice is given due recognition in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and other economic negotiations. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is the most prominent new regional economic group and now comprises fifteen countries, including the spectacularly successful economies of East Asia, together with their major Pacific trading partners.⁴ APEC is not a free trade association or a bloc in the NAFTA or EC sense; its charter is to provide a forum for trans-Pacific economic dialogue.

At the January 1992 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Singapore, the member states pledged to form a free trade bloc within fifteen years, to be known as the ASEAN Free Trade Association (AFTA).⁵ Malaysia has since then advocated an "East Asian Economic Group," arguing that the Asian states needed to coalesce against the EC and NAFTA. Other ASEAN countries did not support this initiative, fearing a rift with the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand because those Pacific trading nations were not included.⁶ A modified proposal for an "East Asian Economic Caucus" was also rejected by some members of ASEAN in favour of the broader APEC.⁷ The emergence of APEC and the prospect of AFTA, along with numerous bilateral economic agreements between the Asia-Pacific states, highlight increasing economic and political interdependence.

Regional economies are heavily reliant upon trade, over 90 percent of which travels by sea. More than two hundred ships transit the Singapore Strait daily, which indicates the importance of the region's maritime highways. Geography



44 Naval War College Review

dictates the importance of SLOCs to internal trade—land routes are not available. External trade is largely reliant upon SLOCs also because both the “economic tigers of Asia” and the emerging economies are heavily dependent upon imports of raw materials from outside the region and exports of manufactured goods to the markets of the developed Western countries.⁸ For example: over 80 percent of Japan’s oil needs are imported by sea from the Middle East; over 60 percent of Australia’s global exports of raw materials (minerals and agricultural products) go by the sea to Asian countries.⁹

Resource availability is central to the future prosperity and development of Southeast Asia, and, as noted, resources are obtained mainly from external sources. At the same time, resources within the region are eagerly sought and jealously guarded. The South China Sea, specifically the Spratly Islands area, is a potential source of hydrocarbons.¹⁰ Six bordering states lay claim to part or all of the Spratly Islands and have established a physical presence in the area, including small military garrisons on numerous insular features, supported by naval patrols.¹¹ Disputes over territorial sovereignty there are complicated by conflicting and overlapping claims; a common basis for negotiation is lacking. Tensions came to a head in 1988, when naval forces of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) encountered Vietnamese Spratly Islands supply ships in a brief engagement, sinking three Vietnamese vessels and killing seventy-two military and naval personnel.¹²

There have been subsequent negotiation attempts among the protagonists, both bilateral and multilateral, but the situation today remains unresolved, tenuous, and complex.¹³ That the Spratly Islands are located in the centre of the South China Sea means that sovereign control of them offers a potentially commanding position with respect to adjacent vital SLOCs. Armed conflict in the area would directly affect intra and extra-regional trade, in addition to the direct effect on the protagonists. The situation remains volatile, with little likelihood of resolution in the near term, although the states concerned have recently shown a preference for dialogue over armed conflict.

Regional economic growth is uneven, and this factor causes further tensions. The ASEAN states, except the Philippines, have enjoyed strong growth in recent years, with annual rates of approximately 8 percent typical in Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore (though there is some evidence that this growth is reaching a plateau). Conversely, Indochina is still largely underdeveloped and is struggling with political change and instability. Inflation has been rampant in Vietnam, running annually at 700 percent during 1985–86 and an estimated 300 percent in 1992. Vietnam is seeking admittance to ASEAN as part of her normalisation process, but this appears to be some way from realisation. Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Laos face similar problems as they seek to move to market economies,

and United Nations peace-keeping efforts in Cambodia, if successful, will be only the first of many steps necessary for that nation's economic rehabilitation.¹⁴

The economic agenda represents an influence that is both stabilising and potentially destabilising. On one hand, regional states are fully cognizant of the need for political stability and a secure environment to support continued economic development, and they are therefore keen to pursue peaceful means of conflict resolution. On the other hand, they are hungry for resources, and balancing the two requirements represents a significant challenge.

The Security Environment. The security environment in Southeast Asia is both complex and fluid. Changes in the involvement of external powers, the emergence of regional powers, the continued existence of established bilateral and multilateral alliances, and proposals for new groupings all contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty.

The Superpowers. The demise of the Soviet Union and the subsequent withdrawal of military forces from Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam have significantly altered the balance of power in the region. The new Russian Federation and the other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States are no longer regional players of any consequence.

Withdrawal of U.S. military forces from bases in the Philippines and the simultaneous drawdown of American military power generally have reduced the regional presence of the U.S. and its apparent desire and capability to influence events. The reaction of ASEAN states to the changed U.S. position has been interesting to observe. Singapore quickly entered into a naval base agreement with the U.S., initially drawing an adverse reaction from some other Association states, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia; after intra-ASEAN diplomacy by Singapore, however, both Malaysia and Indonesia not only accepted and supported the initiative but offered the use of their own bases.¹⁵ Thailand and Brunei have also made their bases available for American use.¹⁶ The regional powers now appear to recognise the importance of a continued U.S. military presence as a stabilising influence.

The United States continues to have in the region many national interests, which can be summarised as follows: preventing the domination of Asia and the Pacific, either politically or militarily, by a single state or group of states; maintaining U.S. access to resources and markets and strengthening U.S. economic competitiveness—an objective to which the integrity of the SLOCs is central; supporting the security of friends and allies; and encouraging the development of democratic institutions, freedoms, self-determination, and human rights.¹⁷ While the U.S. appears determined to remain engaged in the region, it is faced with many economic concerns (both external and domestic) and global security problems more pressing to it than those in Southeast Asia.

46 Naval War College Review

Regional states are coming to realise that American commitment to intervene is by no means assured and probably could be relied upon only if the local economic or security situation deteriorated to the extent that U.S. national interests were significantly affected. While the U.S. military presence continues to be important, there is a growing awareness of an imperative to improve the region's own ability to cope with security problems without direct American involvement.

The PRC, India, and Japan. These three nations continue to improve their maritime military capabilities both quantitatively and qualitatively. ASEAN has recognised that these powers are important regional actors who have displayed signs of "wanting to play a more assertive role."¹⁸ Some states, particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, share a traditional distrust of the PRC. Recent evidence of Chinese maritime adventurism, particularly the pressing of sovereignty claims over the South China Sea islands and also a Chinese

"While a formal alliance may not be necessary for collective security, the ability to contribute to effective coalition warfare is essential. Interoperability between coalition maritime forces must be readily apparent to ensure credibility."

admiral's declaration (in conjunction with orders to his navy to "boost combat readiness") that "the fight for ocean rights will become more fierce," add fuel to these fears.¹⁹ The expansion of PRC influence in Myanmar and Thailand is also viewed with concern by some regional and extra-regional states.

India also appears to be prepared to take a more overt role, as demonstrated by actions in Sri Lanka and the Maldives and also the construction of naval and air facilities on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. India occupies a commanding strategic location astride the Indian Ocean SLOCs and at the entrance to the Malacca Strait, and it aspires to be perceived as the dominant Indian Ocean power. India's justification for military development is based upon manifestly realistic security threats posed by Pakistan to the west and the PRC to the north and east. While ASEAN states probably do not view India as a direct threat, the possibility of some form of military confrontation between India and the PRC is less remote, and it would undoubtedly threaten security of the SLOCs and the smaller Southeast Asian powers.

Despite Japan's strict adherence since the Second World War to a non-expansionist constitution, its strong commitment to the U.S.-Japan alliance, and its distribution of considerable economic development aid within the region, most Southeast Asian states still view Japan with suspicion. Japan spent over \$30 billion (U.S.) on defence in 1990, it has had an average military expenditure growth rate of 4.3 percent per annum over the last decade, and the Japan Maritime

Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) is the third-largest navy in the world.²⁰ Japan has acquiesced to mainly American pressure to take a more active role in global military affairs; it recently committed mine warfare forces to the Persian Gulf to assist in the coalition cleanup effort after the Gulf War and contributed ground forces to the UN peace-keeping effort in Cambodia. Japan has the second most powerful economy in the world, one that is almost entirely dependent upon imports of natural resources to support its manufacturing industry; the South China Sea SLOCs are vital to Japan's national interests.

While the PRC, India, and Japan are all taking today an increasingly prominent stance in the region, there is little direct evidence so far to support concerns about military aggression on their parts. Both the PRC and India are preoccupied with internal political and security concerns, and Japan's economic agenda is clearly paramount. If the SLOCs were threatened, both the PRC and Japan would lose economically; each might feel compelled to provide protection unilaterally, which would lead to countermoves by the other and thereafter to regional instability.

Regional Powers. The region has remained relatively quiet since the Second World War, as far as conflicts between its own states are concerned. The Vietnam War, which concluded in 1975, and the Indonesian Confrontation with Malaya, which ended in 1965, both involved external powers. There are numerous sovereignty and boundary disputes, of which the multilateral Spratly Islands contest remains the most divisive; some regional observers are concerned that in the event of armed conflict over the Spratly Islands, the U.S. may concede the Chinese position out of ignorance and indifference.²¹ Other disputes, including the long-standing disagreement between Malaysia and the Philippines over Sabah, are being managed peacefully.

Internal security problems have dominated the agenda in many Southeast Asian states, as these states strive to consolidate newfound independence. Indonesia's internal policy of "national resilience" has been largely successful, although the country's political system has been referred to as a "bureaucratic polity"—a regime that continues to be very bureaucratic and militaristic in character, with a form of democracy that bears little resemblance to the Western model, despite five general elections in the past twenty-five years. Much will depend upon the smooth succession of leadership once President Suharto decides to retire, after having been in power since 1966.²²

Malaysia recently removed the last of her communist insurgents and is displaying strong movement toward an external security focus, including an increasing emphasis upon naval and air capabilities. Tensions persist between the Malay majority and the large Chinese minority. Growing Islamic fundamentalism is also a significant concern; it may reduce internal cohesion in the future and has the potential to expand to neighbours.

48 Naval War College Review

Military control of the government of Thailand was recently broken, but it remains to be seen if the military coups that have dominated Thai politics for several decades have indeed ended. Thailand has moved closer to the PRC, raising concerns among some neighbours at the possibility of a regional split between pro and anti-PRC camps.

Persistent security concerns within the Philippines continue to focus that nation's security attention internally. Communist insurgency, Muslim secessionism, and military rebellion are significant problems, although the general global disenchantment with communist ideology has eased matters somewhat.²³ The American presence in the Philippines ensured external security in the past, but the U.S. base closures may force the Philippines to adopt a more outward-looking defence posture.

The unstable situation in Indochina is finally showing signs of resolution as an uneasy peace is restored in Cambodia and as Laos and Vietnam start to pursue nation-building policies. Myanmar continues to have an uncertain future: a military dictatorship, ethnic cleansing, and economic chaos prevail, while the PRC appears to be trying to impose her influence there, with unclear intent.

The Southeast Asian states are beginning to display an increasing political maturity, with an associated movement away from introspection and toward external involvement, although as outlined above, this tendency is uneven and uncoordinated. Improved economies have supported military spending, which continues to grow faster than economic growth rates. This "mini-arms race" has raised concerns, although the majority of military improvements are consistent with defensive sovereignty protection. All regional players share concerns for SLOC integrity and freedom of the international straits. A significant deficiency, however, is the absence of comprehensive security alliances or arrangements, either formal or informal, to coordinate defence efforts.

Regional Collective Security Arrangements

Southeast Asian alliances have not been as comprehensive or cohesive as those in Europe, for a variety of reasons.²⁴ First is the lack of a commonly perceived threat—some states have embraced China while others fear her, and those nations that have accepted support from the U.S. or, formerly, the Soviet Union have nonetheless maintained at least a facade of nonalignment. A second reason is the relative immaturity of the region's countries as nation-states, their emphasis being, as already noted, upon internal security concerns. Finally, there is the region's vast ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic diversity. Notwithstanding, there are some long-standing collective security arrangements and alliances in Southeast Asia, and others have recently been proposed.

The United Nations. The UN continues to be the primary global and regional collective security alliance. Southeast Asian states are generally strong supporters of the UN and routinely contribute forces to its efforts, commensurately with their capabilities. Qualified success in Cambodia has been encouraging for regional powers' continued support for UN efforts. Articles 52, 53, and 54 of the UN Charter permit regional security arrangements to be developed and allow them to be used for enforcement action, providing the Security Council is informed of actions or intentions. The efficacy of the UN has improved in the post-Cold War era, and the global security environment may be conducive to a more comprehensive collective regional security arrangement in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN. ASEAN was formed in 1967 with five original members, joined by Brunei in 1984. Papua New Guinea has applied for membership and signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation as a preliminary step; it currently has observer status.²⁵ Vietnam and Laos have also announced their intention to join the Association. They signed the Treaty when they attended, as observers, the ASEAN Annual Ministerial Meeting in Manila in 1992.²⁶ The ASEAN "dialogue partners" (Australia, Canada, the EC, Japan, New Zealand, the United States, and South Korea) regularly attend ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences.²⁷

ASEAN is the most important forum in Southeast Asia, but it is *not* a collective security alliance. ASEAN's aims are primarily to foster cooperation in economic, social, cultural, scientific, and educational matters and to promote regional peace and stability through dialogue. Despite an asserted non-security focus, the single most important issue discussed in Annual Ministerial Meetings since inception has been the security problem in Cambodia. ASEAN has been instrumental in encouraging the Cambodian peace process and supported Australia's initiative that led to the current UN peace-keeping operation.

ASEAN has developed a unique style of doing business, one that involves tactfully and patiently dealing with any issue and being very careful not to pass judgment upon the actions or positions of fellow members. Flexibility and willingness to accommodate the views of others are the keys, and public comment upon difficult issues (particularly those to do with security) has traditionally been avoided. After the January 1992 ASEAN Summit in Singapore, the Malaysian foreign minister, Abdullah Badawi, succinctly encapsulated this view when he said, "This is truly the ASEAN way of doing things. We never quarrel as we always agree on what to do. ASEAN has never ended anything with a controversy."²⁸

The Singapore summit provided an ASEAN landmark in that for the first time leaders of the six member states agreed to engage in a collective dialogue on security issues and to explore new avenues for security cooperation.²⁹ That they

50 Naval War College Review

did so was significant, because it indicated an emerging awareness of the need to pursue a new security agenda in an increasingly uncertain environment. There is a growing realisation that the Association's 1971 declaration of Southeast Asia as a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality," while a noble ideal, is not sufficient to make peace a reality.³⁰ The ASEAN states are now more aware of the need for regional collective security arrangements and are therefore more likely to be receptive to new initiatives. This does not suggest that a consensus on a particular way ahead will be easy to develop, or that a consensus among ASEAN members is even attainable. Indeed, the substantial difference in Thailand's view of the PRC from that of the other ASEAN states may alone render consensus impossible.

Five Power Defence Arrangements. The FPDA had its genesis in 1971, replacing the Anglo-Malayan Defence Arrangement. It was originally aimed at providing a sense of security for Malaya (as it was then known) after its mid-1960s confrontation with Indonesia, and for a nervous Singapore, which feared both Malaya and Indonesia.³¹ The five powers are Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. FPDA is a loose defence agreement that commits Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. to "consult" together if Singapore or Malaysia are attacked and to decide measures to be taken, either jointly or separately. All agreements are bilateral (i.e., between Australia, New Zealand, or the U.K., with Singapore or Malaysia, respectively) and provide for assistance to the Malaysian and Singaporean armed forces with training and development, advice and assistance on operational and technical matters, and assistance in the supply of equipment. The structure also includes the Integrated Air Defence System, which is centered in Malaysia and is jointly manned by personnel drawn from the Arrangement partners.

FPDA was expected to be transitional when first established, and it declined to an almost moribund state after the withdrawal of Australian and New Zealand forces from permanent bases in Southeast Asia.³² It was revitalised in the late 1980s at Australia's initiative (after the 1987 Defence of Australia policy paper placed greater emphasis on regional defence), a move which was warmly welcomed by Malaysia and Singapore. FPDA is of considerable value to the four regional members, although the U.K.'s rationale for continued participation is ambiguous. Mutually beneficial military training and exercises are conducted on a regular basis, including individual and single-unit training and more advanced, relatively complex, annual exercises. The benefit to the participants has continued to increase as regional defence forces improve in quality and capability and as familiarity and confidence in combined operations grow. Its value as a preparation for coalition warfare, combined with its inherent confidence-building

advantages, makes FPDA a model of defence cooperation worthy of wider emulation.

Other Existing Arrangements. Other regional defence agreements are mostly bilateral and form a mosaic of both intra and extra-regional interrelationships. Strong support in principle for regional collective security is evident in the clearly articulated and recently reaffirmed security doctrines of several states. Malaysia, for example, believes in a concept of “comprehensive security,” which has both a domestic context and an external dimension. The domestic focus is on comprehensive development of the economy, politics, social cohesion, and the military. Externally, the desire is to contribute to a stable region using the combined effects of diplomacy, UN collective security, regional dialogue, confidence-building measures, and military diplomacy.³³

Indonesia has extended its domestic concept of “national resilience,” which involves all aspects of society and adds the national ideology of *Pancasila* to a concept of “regional resilience” similar to the Malaysian approach. It considers that resilience at the national level will lead to a stable regional security environment that encompasses political, economic, social, and military dimensions.³⁴

Singapore’s concept of “total defence” acknowledges its strategically important yet vulnerable geographic location, demographic factors, and total dependence on the international market economy. “Total defence” involves a synergy of all aspects of national power—economic and social development, and military defence—and adopts a deterrent posture that has been compared to a “poisonous shrimp.” Singapore actively supports collective security as a member of FPDA, and it was the first ASEAN state to recognise the importance to regional stability of keeping the U.S. engaged, offering access to base facilities after the Philippine base closure.³⁵

The Australian concept of “defence self-reliance” and “defence in depth . . . within a framework of alliances and agreements” also reflects a maturing perspective on security that recognises the comprehensive nature of defence and the need for regional engagement and stability, and reflects also a desire to participate in collective security arrangements.³⁶ In common with Northeast Asia, Australia is heavily reliant on the South China Sea SLOCs.

One positive advance on the collective maritime security front is the initiation of the biennial Western Pacific Naval Symposium, which first convened in Sydney in 1988. The Symposium gradually progressed to a workshop (in Sydney in July 1992) on communications and other matters of mutual interest, but has not yet developed so far as to include exercises and training.³⁷

Another recent development of interest is the commencement of coordinated Indonesian and Singaporean naval patrols to suppress piracy, mainly in the

52 Naval War College Review

Malacca Strait. The prospect of major environmental damage from a tanker or chemicals ship grounded as a result of a pirate attack has heightened the need for cooperation.³⁸

Current Proposals. In line with increased cooperation in the economic dimension, there has recently been a growing call for some form of regional security cooperative. A proposal was floated by Australia in April 1991 for the Asia-Pacific region, following the European example of post-Cold War cooperation in the formation of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The Australian foreign minister, Senator Gareth Evans, proposed that the best way of achieving regional security is to work *with* others, not against them. He suggested that regional powers might consider the future evolution of a Pacific version of CSCE—a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia, or CSCA.

“Today the geostrategic situation and the timing are right for accepting the challenge of a security objective more substantial than a forum for dialogue, acknowledging that disagreements are best managed, and armed conflicts avoided, by negotiation.”

The Australian proposal avoided postulating a formal structure for CSCA or naming the regional states which may wish to become members, possibly recognising that to do so could cause unwanted polarisation. The official Australian position envisaged “an interlocking web of contacts, dialogue arrangements and cooperative strategies” that would improve confidence and “check any trend to competitive arms acquisition.”³⁹

Canada also has offered collective security proposals affecting Southeast Asia. Following a series of speeches in 1990 and 1991 by Joe Clark, then Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, the proposals included an exercise on policy and academic research, to be known as the “North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue.” It was to focus on seven North Pacific countries: Canada, North Korea, South Korea, the Soviet Union, Japan, the PRC and the U.S.⁴⁰ This idea was not adopted, but it indicated further recognition of the need for regional security cooperation.

In January 1992 the ASEAN states declared a commitment to use the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences to “promote external talks on security.”⁴¹ Again, this indicated incremental recognition of the need for regional security dialogue, even though ASEAN as a group had shunned the earlier CSCA suggestion.⁴²

The process was advanced in April 1992, when the Malaysian defence minister, Datuk Seri Najib, presented what has become known as the “Najib

Initiative," in which he proposed that an "Asia-Pacific Dialogue for Cooperative Peace and Security" be commenced, offering to host the first meeting in Malaysia during November 1993.⁴³ He stated that "security dialogues and other forms of CBMs [confidence building measures] must be based on the notion of cooperative security."⁴⁴ In a separate speech, Najib argued that "the new strategic environment, with no clear paradigms yet, certainly provides us with an opportunity to, perhaps for the first time in our history, chart the destiny of this region by ourselves and not be determined by the interests of extra-regional states."⁴⁵ This first proposal for a dedicated Asia-Pacific security forum from an ASEAN member has received a muted response. Apart from strong support from Australia, other ASEAN and Pacific Rim states have not responded publicly to the initiative.

The absence of a response from ASEAN members could be due to the lack of prior consultation (a prerequisite in intra-ASEAN relations that Malaysia has shown a predilection for not respecting), and also to reluctance on the part of other members to accede to a Malaysian leadership role.⁴⁶ As described earlier in this article, the "ASEAN way" of doing business is to avoid open disagreement and to present a joint front. Interestingly, the Indonesian foreign minister, Ali Alitas, argued in a speech in October 1992 for a package of confidence and security-building measures that—while confirming that the region remains a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality"—would "cultivate the habit and devise the mechanisms for closer and more structured mutual consultations on security issues in the region."⁴⁷

There appears to be a slowly emerging consensus on the need for a regional security forum. Whether it will be called CSCA or the Asia-Pacific Dialogue for Cooperative Peace and Security, or will amount only to increased use of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences, remains to be seen.

Challenges and Opportunities

The post-Cold War era presents a unique opportunity for states in the Asia-Pacific region to seize the initiative and actively determine their own security destiny. Shared regional security interests and attempts to develop a forum for regional security dialogue have been highlighted. Today the geostrategic situation and the timing are right for accepting the challenge of a security objective that is more substantial than a forum for dialogue allows, acknowledging that disagreements are best managed, and armed conflicts avoided, by negotiation.

Shared Security Interests. The economic agenda is clearly dominant, and all regional states have a shared, vital national interest in pursuing economic improvement. A stable political and security environment, where uninhibited

54 Naval War College Review

trade can be conducted with confidence, is essential to this interest. Unfettered access to resources and markets is also important in pursuit of the common economic objective. These shared interests rely on the SLOCs—the integrity of which is essential to trade—which may themselves pass over considerable resources (as potentially does the Spratlys zone), and which are vulnerable to disruption by conflicts within, or even outside, the region (for example in the Middle East, South Asia, or Northeast Asia). The key to enhanced security and stability is to reduce the vulnerability of the SLOCs by devising a cooperative maritime defence arrangement.

Formal or Informal Defence Arrangements? Having accepted that maritime defence cooperation is an essential common ingredient of regional security and prosperity, we must now consider the means by which this may be achieved. Some form of alliance or alignment to facilitate cooperation in the maritime environment appears necessary.

An alliance does not necessarily require a formal treaty, although one is customary.⁴⁸ In fact, permanent, formal alliances can be detrimental to the international system, as they tend to introduce dysfunctional rigidity. A loose system of states may have a greater chance of achieving effective cohesion than a tight one. Formal alliances have displayed a historical tendency to rigidity and failure, and states have shown a preference for casual commitments or alignments for specific purposes.⁴⁹ The regional experience with formal alliances is far from encouraging, the South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty (SEATO) being a notable example of an alliance that lost credibility after failing its first test.⁵⁰ The Thai foreign minister, Thanat Khoman, succinctly and realistically summarised the value of such alliances when in 1969, after the effective demise of SEATO, he said, “No treaty can bind any sovereign nation. . . . The partners to the treaty will carry out that treaty obligation only if their national interests are concordant . . . but not otherwise.”⁵¹ Lightly structured, pluralistic alliances tend to have greater vitality (ASEAN is an example), and large alliances tend to be less effective than small ones, due to coordination problems.⁵²

The Southeast Asian situation poses a conundrum for advocates of alliances: there is a clear need for collective security in the maritime environment, yet such an ideal would have little credibility unless the players were adept at interaction and were committed to collective success.⁵³ It is apparent that the regional states are wary of proposals to join even a loose security dialogue arrangement, one which falls far short of the level of commitment required for a formal military alliance. While some ingredients for alliance formation are present—domestic stability (for most states), shared economic interests, and a degree of ideological homogeneity—one major, widely accepted factor for security alliance formation, a commonly held perception of the threat, does not obtain.⁵⁴ Shared vital national

interests are not as conceptually compelling as a mutual threat. However, an informal maritime alignment may, notwithstanding, be achievable, and it may be all that is necessary in the contemporary Southeast Asian context.

Coalition Warfare. While a formal alliance may not be necessary for collective security, the ability to contribute to effective coalition warfare is essential. Interoperability between coalition maritime forces must be readily apparent to ensure credibility. The 1991 Gulf War presented an excellent example of effective employment of a maritime and air coalition. The cohesive performance of the Gulf coalition force did not occur by accident or develop overnight; the majority of the navies and air forces involved had been training and operating together for decades under the auspices of Nato, Anzus, and other defence agreements. Common procedures, equipment, training, and, above all, mutual respect for and understanding of the capabilities and limitations of other participants were essential to the demonstrated effectiveness of the force. The benefits that accrue from frequent, combined military exercises go beyond the “transparency” aspect often referred to by political leaders; they extend to being able to operate effectively in coalition if necessary, which fosters invaluable interaction and cooperation between military professionals and has a potential deterrent effect.⁵⁵

Regional defence forces that participate in regular multilateral defence cooperation and training are well placed to contribute effectively to a coalition maritime effort to control the SLOCs. The members of FPDA, for instance, have benefited from many years of mutual interaction and are able to form an effective coalition. Similarly, those navies and air forces that have regularly participated in the biennial “Rimpac” exercises are better prepared thereby for maritime coalition warfare.⁵⁶ Other advantages of coalition warfare include potential for burden-sharing (which has been an advantage to the participants in the Five Power Defence Arrangements); increased likelihood of agreement by extra-regional forces, as a result of the display of a strong local commitment to self-help, to assist in a crisis; and potential economies of scale in defence equipment procurement, if a degree of commonality is sought.

The Way Ahead to Regional Resilience

Genuine regional resilience can be enhanced by cooperative efforts in the maritime security environment. A two-track approach would appear appropriate and feasible: first, to continue to work toward a “Council on Security Cooperation in Asia,” or something similar, to provide the primary multilateral, political-level forum for security dialogue; and second, to develop a mosaic of formal

and informal multilateral maritime defence cooperatives, primarily involving naval and air forces.

The aim of maritime defence cooperatives would be to train for and practice traditional sea control operations. SLOC surveillance and control could be regularly exercised, with or without U.S. or other external-power participation. American involvement at the appropriate level could, of course, be mutually beneficial, as it would provide regional navies and air forces with enhanced training in interoperability, strengthen the deterrent value of a coalition, and provide U.S. forces with valuable littoral warfare experience consistent with the U.S. Navy role proposed in its white paper, ". . . From the Sea."⁵⁷ A skeletal multinational exercise-planning and coordination staff would be required, with participants hosting training and combined exercises in rotation, taking account of respective maritime capabilities and facilities. Additional staff could be drawn together for major exercises (as is the current practice for the FPDA "Starfish" series).

An effective western Pacific maritime coalition could be developed over time. Cooperation, coordination, mutual training, and respect would enhance maritime confidence-building, not only in the "transparency" sense but also in the coalition warfare context. A framework would be erected for rapid contribution to future maritime coalitions, either under direct UN auspices or under a regional banner sanctioned by the UN. Effective collective security response to any emerging situation, either between regional members or against external interlopers, would be provided for. While the historical record of collective security efforts has been indifferent, mutual and vital national interests in the freedom of the Southeast Asian SLOCs present a unique opportunity for success, and the 1990–91 Persian Gulf maritime coalition experience gives cause for some optimism.⁵⁸

The primary strategic intent of a maritime coalition would be to promote the shared vital national interests of regional stability and trade. The operational objective would be protection of the SLOCs in order to minimise disruption to trade. The regional maritime defence cooperation concept would include: in peacetime, search and rescue, and coordination of efforts against piracy and environmental transgressions; naval control and protection of shipping in periods of tension or conflict; cooperative maritime surveillance and information exchange; coalition warfare in support of maritime peace-keeping and peacemaking operations; and all aspects of SLOC control. The broader benefits of such a proposal would evolve to include defence burden-sharing and confidence-building, and making manifest a regional determination to maintain integrity and stability against internal or external aggressors.

Whether the formation of a cooperative maritime alignment in Southeast Asia would require a formal agreement is debatable. An informal arrangement under the auspices of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences or something similar, or an extension of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium to include exercises and training, may be all that is necessary and achievable. Alternatively, a loose alignment similar to the successful FPDA would provide a legitimate political basis for military coordination, although convincing the parties to commit to any such arrangement might initially be problematic and divisive. A loose but formal arrangement could encompass the following basic tenets: an expression of shared interest in maintaining the integrity of the Southeast Asian SLOCs; an undertaking to consult should the SLOCs be threatened, with a view to collective action if considered appropriate; and an agreement to seek mutually beneficial military training and opportunities for combined operations.

The time is right, and the need is clearly established, for a comprehensive, multinational, maritime cooperative arrangement, formal or informal, in the western Pacific area—one with a primary focus on protecting the Southeast Asian sea lines of communications. The opportunity to achieve regional resilience is at hand. Political and military leaders must recognise the imperative and accept the challenge.

Notes

1. Angela M. Hemming, "ASEAN Security Cooperation after the Cold War: Problems and Prospects," *The Indonesian Quarterly*, v. 20, no. 3, p. 287. The title of the present article is derived from the Indonesian concept of "national resilience" (which was later broadened to "regional resilience"), meaning that resilience at the national level would lead to a stable regional environment and that "economic and social problems are an integral part of regional security issues." "Resilience" in this context refers to a regional (Indonesian) concept of integration and cohesion providing institutional strength.

2. S.P. Cohen, "Leadership and the Management of National Security: An Overview," Mohammed Ayoob et al., eds., *Leadership Perceptions and National Security: The Southeast Asian Experience* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), p. 43.

3. Andrew Elek, "APEC—Motives, Objectives and Prospects," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, November 1992, p. 161.

4. *Ibid.* APEC includes the six ASEAN states plus the U.S., Canada, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

5. ASEAN comprises Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and Singapore. See also Michael Antolik, "ASEAN's Singapore Rendezvous: Just Another Summit?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, September 1992, pp. 143–4.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 145–6.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

8. The economic "tigers" of Asia include Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore.

9. Jacqueline Rees, "Australia: Foster the Links: Trade and Immigration Bring Asia Nearer," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 March 1993, p. 22.

10. R. Haller-Trost, "The Spratly Islands: A Study on the Limitations of International Law," Occasional Paper no. 14, Centre of South-East Asian Studies, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1990, pp. 54–55. A 1969 UN seismology report declared that the Spratly Islands area might be rich in hydrocarbon deposits. Several nations, including the PRC and the Philippines, have either commenced or plan to commence oil exploration efforts in the region.

58 Naval War College Review

11. The PRC, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Vietnam claim sovereignty over all the Spratly Islands; Malaysia and Brunei each claim part of the area.

12. "South China Sea: Treacherous Shoals," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 August 1992, p. 15.

13. The PRC and Vietnam discussed the Paracel and Spratly Islands at high-level talks during Li Peng's visit to Hanoi in December 1992. Indonesia, not directly implicated, adopted a mediatory role and hosted informal multilateral discussions at Bandung in 1991. There have also been bilateral discussions between Malaysia and the Philippines, and Malaysia and Brunei.

14. Steve Chan, "National Security in the Asia-Pacific: Linkages among Growth, Democracy, and Peace," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, June 1992, p. 20.

15. Antolik, pp. 148-9.

16. Michael Richardson, "Indonesia Opens Commercial Door to US," *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, October-November 1992, p. 35.

17. Rizal Sukina, "Security Arrangements in Southeast Asia: A Challenge for ASEAN in the Post-Cold War Era," *The Indonesian Quarterly*, v. 20, no. 3, p. 275.

18. Hemming, p. 291.

19. On 25 February 1992, the PRC published Order No. 55, "Law of the PRC on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone," which claims sovereign control over the Nansha (Spratly) and Xisha (Paracel) Islands. See also Michael Richardson, "Spratlys Increasing Cause for Concern," *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, October-November 1992, p. 36.

20. Kevin P. Clements, "Peace and Security in the Asia Pacific Region—Post Cold War Problems and Prospects," *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, v. 23, 1992, p. 178.

21. Leszek Buszyński, *ASEAN: Security Issues of the 1990s*, Working Paper no. 165 (Canberra: The Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National Univ., 1988), p. 9.

22. T.B. Simatupang in Ayooob et al., ed., pp. 137-9. See also Damien Kingsbury, "Looking After No. 1," *The Bulletin*, 6 April 1993, p. 24.

23. W.V. Villacorta, "The Management of National Security in the Philippines: The Role of Leadership Styles," in Ayooob et al., eds., pp. 62-4.

24. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato) and, formerly, the Warsaw Pact.

25. Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 170-85. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia was signed by ASEAN member states at Bali on 24 February 1976. The full text is republished there.

26. Antolik, pp. 146-7.

27. In the ASEAN context, "dialogue partner" is the term used for those nations specifically invited to participate in ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences.

28. Antolik, p. 152.

29. Michael Richardson, "ASEAN Opts for Closer Security Ties," *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, April-May 1992, p. 32.

30. Leifer, pp. 163-4. The Declaration, known as "ZOPFAN," was signed by the ASEAN member states on 27 November 1971 and is reprinted in full at the reference.

31. Noraini Haji Abdullah, in Ayooob et al., eds., p. 194.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Datuk Sri Hj Mohd Najib Bin Tun Abdul Razuk [Malaysian defence minister], "Malaysia's Strategic Perceptions: Challenges of the Post-Cold War Era," *Asian Defence Journal*, no. 2, 1993, pp. 11-12. "Military diplomacy" refers to the whole gambit of military-to-military contacts and the use of the military to further diplomatic objectives.

34. T.B. Simatupang, "Indonesia: Leadership and National Security Perceptions," in Ayooob et al., eds., p. 119. The Indonesian ideology of *Pancasila* includes "Five Principles": Belief in God; Humanity; Unity of Indonesia; Democracy based on the Wisdom of a Representative Process of Deliberations; and Social Justice for all People. See also Hemming, p. 287.

35. Muthiah Alagappa, "Comprehensive Security: Interpretations in ASEAN Countries," in Robert A. Scalapino et al., eds., *Asian Security Issues: Regional and Global* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1988), pp. 70-76.

36. Kim C. Beazley [Australian Minister for Defence], *The Defence of Australia 1987* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987), pp. vii, x, and 1.

37. Sam Bateman [Commodore, RAN], "Build a WestPac Naval Alliance," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January 1993, pp. 81-2. The WPNS comprises the six ASEAN states, the PRC, Japan, South Korea, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea. WPNS has met three times so far: in Sydney in 1988, Bangkok in 1990, and Sydney in 1992.

38. Michael Richardson, "Crackdown on Piracy," *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, October-November 1992, p. 34.

39. Geoffrey Wiseman, "Common Security in the Asia-Pacific Region," *The Pacific Review*, v. 5, no. 1, 1992, p. 44.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Henning, p. 294.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
43. Najib, p. 11.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Dr. Bilveer Singh, "The Najib Initiative and Confidence Building in the Asia-Pacific Region," *Asian Defence Journal*, no. 7, 1992, p. 12.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Zara Djan, "A Southeast Asian Vision of Peace," *Asian Defence Journal*, no. 12, 1992, p. 4.
48. Julian R. Friedman, "Alliance in International Politics," in Julian R. Friedman et al., eds., *Alliance in International Politics* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1970), p. 30.
49. Charles W. Kegley and Gregory A. Raymond, *When Trist Breaks Down: Alliance Norms in World Politics* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 271.
50. Leszek Buszynski, *SEATO: The Failure of an Alliance Strategy* (Singapore: Singapore Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 83, 93.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
52. Ole R. Holsti et al., *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973), pp. 6, 16, 19, and 21.
53. Julian R. Friedman and Hans J. Morganthau, "Informed Analyses" and "Alliances," in Friedman et al., eds., pp. 78, 80–92.
54. Holsti, pp. 11, 30. See also George Liska, "Alignments and Realignments," in Friedman et al., eds., p. 109.
55. "The Najib Initiative . . .," *Asian Defence Journal*, p. 7. The one aspect of confidence-building measures most commonly emphasised is defined in this article as follows: "The object of any CBM is to reduce or eliminate mutual misperceptions, suspicions and fears by making military intentions more transparent."
56. The Rimpac exercise participants in recent years have included the U.S. Navy, the Canadian Forces, the Royal Australian Navy and Air Force, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and recently forces from the Republic of Korea. New Zealand has not participated since the rift with the U.S. over Anzus in 1986 but has maintained an active bilateral training program with Australia and is a member of FPDA. (For an account of the Anzus episode, see Wallace J. Theis and James D. Harris, "An Alliance Unravels: The United States and Anzus," *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1993.) The value of the Rimpac series of exercises and other combined training over many years to the RAN's ability to contribute effectively to coalition warfare was clearly demonstrated in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, where the RAN was able to integrate fully into a predominantly Nato-trained naval force.
57. U.S. Department of the Navy, ". . . From the Sea" (Washington: September 1992).
58. Josef Joffe, "Collective Security and the Future of Europe: Failed Dreams and Dead Ends," in the Naval War College Force Planning Faculty, eds., *Fundamentals of Force Planning*, Vol. III, *Strategy and Resources* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1992), pp. 471–84. "Collective defense" generally applies to formal alliances between states against a determinate foe. "Collective security" describes a looser situation in which the purpose is to defend the status quo against violent change where there is no predetermined threat or enemy, and no formal alliance. Joffe points out that collective security arrangements have been noted for failure in the past. There is no clear precedent for the collective security approach for the protection of the Southeast Asian SLOCs, as proposed in this paper. The collective interest in the freedom of the SLOCs and in the seas generally provides a new opportunity for effective collective action.