

MICHAEL LEIFER

**Selected Works on
Southeast Asia**

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MICHAEL LEIFER

Selected Works on Southeast Asia

Compiled and edited by
Chin Kin Wah and Leo Suryadinata



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
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Director's Message

K. Kesavapany

Michael Leifer was one of the most distinguished scholars in the field of Southeast Asian Studies. He was a teacher of international repute at the London School of Economics, and in a professional lifetime spanning nearly forty years he published more than twenty single-authored and edited books and innumerable scholarly articles covering not only the international relations of Southeast Asia, which was his field of specialization, but also the domestic politics and foreign policies of key Southeast Asian countries.

The enduring quality and the encyclopaedic range of his works deserve to be commemorated in this volume of his selected writings, which ISEAS is sponsoring. It is hoped that students and later generations of scholars, researchers, and policy-makers will find resonance and relevance in his works on the region. This volume also includes a most comprehensive bibliography of Leifer's published as well as unpublished works, which will be an invaluable asset to researchers.

I wish to compliment Dr Chin Kin Wah and Dr Leo Suryadinata for completing this scholarly enterprise within a period of eight months.

Finally, this volume highlights Leifer's professional links with ISEAS, which were developed over the years and culminating in his appointment as Senior Professorial Fellow of the Institute between 1995 and 1997.

Preface

Chin Kin Wah and Leo Suryadinata

Michael Leifer, Emeritus Professor of International Relations and founding director of the Asia Research Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science, was a highly respected scholar in the field of Southeast Asian Studies. When he died in March 2001 Michael left behind a rich legacy of works on Southeast Asia — nearly 300 published and unpublished articles and twenty single-authored and edited books ranging over some of the most momentous developments in post-colonial Southeast Asia. While his expertise in the international relations of the region was widely recognized, he also made substantial contributions to the study of the domestic politics and foreign policies of Southeast Asian states. The depth and reach of his expertise on the region and the enduring quality of his publications made it possible to contemplate this volume of selected works when we sought to commemorate his scholarship in Southeast Asian studies.

In this endeavour we were greatly helped by the existence of a comprehensive collection of his works at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) library where Michael himself had researched during his numerous visits to Singapore. Moreover the ISEAS library had just brought out an excellent bibliography, which covers his

entire corpora of works on the region published between 1961 and 2002. We are fortunate to be able to include this valuable bibliography in the book.

Our familiarity with Michael's works was derived from our personal and professional associations with him. Michael had been External Examiner (1979–83) and Visiting Professor (1986) at the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore where we had both taught courses in the international relations as well as comparative politics of Southeast Asia. One of us had also been a student of his at the LSE.

This volume of selected works is essentially the voice of Michael Leifer heard over nearly four decades. The depth of his reflections ensures that the voice will not be lost in the years ahead as Southeast Asia continues to undergo transformation and adaptation in coping with the forces of change.

In the preparation of this volume we laboured under the nagging concern that we might not be able to do sufficient justice in reflecting Michael's encyclopaedic range of interest in the region. Both constraints of space and budget meant that we had to be extra-selective in the works to be showcased. Where we encountered prohibitively high copyright fees to reproduce an item, we have had to substitute with articles that cover similar issues though perhaps not in an exactly similar analytical framework. Most of the articles have been considerably shortened but we were guided by the importance of letting Michael speak up in his original coherent way.

This book is divided into two parts: Part I focuses on the international relations of the region including the roles and impacts of the major external players. Part II deals with domestic politics and foreign policies of Southeast Asian countries. Each part begins with an introduction by the respective editors to provide a better appreciation of the sections that follow. In the case of Part I, the sections are presented thematically while Part II covers the regional states. Introductory comments on the chapters are provided at the beginning of each section. Given severe constraints of space most of the chapters are presented in abridged form. This is to avoid unnecessary overlaps but where a chapter in one part touches on issues that are linked to or have bearing on a chapter in the other part of the book, a cross-reference is provided in the relevant introductory commentary. We have not drawn too heavily from Michael's single-authored books, as these are readily accessible to those who are interested in the field.

Readers who wish to locate other items not included in this collection may turn to the bibliography for guidance. The contents of the bibliography have been arranged in a manner that complements the organization of the chapters.

Many hands have contributed to the preparation of this book. Special thanks are owed to the ISEAS Librarian Ch'ng Kim See and her dedicated library staff for their labour of love in compiling the bibliography. In this endeavour, Gandhimathy Durairaj served admirably as principal searcher and compiler.

To the ISEAS Publications Unit, in particular its Managing Editor Triena Ong and Production Editor Rahilah Yusuf, we are much indebted. They have been unstinting in their co-operation and support, which made possible the expeditious processing of an enormous manuscript. We would also like to thank Teo Kah Beng for his timely assistance in going over the proofs.

We are thankful to the London School of Economics for permission to reproduce the photograph of Michael Leifer on the cover and Part Opening pages of this book. Finally, a special word of gratitude is owed to Mrs Francis Leifer for her kind permission to republish some of her late husband's articles in this volume.

We alone are responsible for any errors of compilation and interpretation.

Foreword

Wang Gungwu

Michael and I first met on the eve of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. I was at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur engaged in producing the volume of essays, *Malaysia: A Survey*, to explain and celebrate this new and controversial political entity. He had been attracted to the growing conflict in the former French territories of Indochina and had focused his attention on the fate of Cambodia, lodged between neighbouring Vietnam and Thailand. But the common interest we had in British efforts to tidy up their messy political arrangements in Southeast Asia led us to talk about the future of the region in broader terms. Beyond our concerns for the increasingly uncomfortable relations between Singapore and the Federal Government, we discussed the probable outcomes of Sukarno's *konfrontasi* policy and the American military involvement in Vietnam. He was then at the University of Adelaide and about to return to Britain, and was deeply concerned to analyse what the British could still do. On my part, I wanted to understand the likely outcomes for newly independent states in Southeast Asia with the Cold War hotting up on their doorsteps.

Needless to say, we both encountered surprises in the years ahead. For him, the American war in Vietnam and its consequences called for

a thorough re-examination of Southeast Asia's place in the security structure of the Asia-Pacific region. And he played an important role at various levels of thinking about that structure for at least three decades. For myself, I was fascinated by the drama of Mao Zedong's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, not only because it highlighted the unbridgeable chasm between China and the Soviet Union but also because it challenged everything I had learnt about the nature of Chinese culture and history. For these reasons, our work over the next decades barely touched. There was, however, one subject that brought us together from time to time. That was the future of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ups and downs of ASEAN during the next three decades provided the core of our common interests, Michael from his diplomatic and security point of view and I from the past and future of China's connections in eastern Asia.

Michael was more constant in his focus, always exploring what the superpowers and their allies had in mind for Southeast Asia. It is, therefore, most appropriate that his most enduring works on the region have been collected in this volume and edited by two scholars who have followed his work closely over the decades. From the collection, we can see how deeply Michael had immersed himself in the region's fate and how much he served as the questioning and critical voice that tracked and captured the region's history since the early 1960s. It was this steady examination of the possibilities of a viable regional structure that gave us all much to admire in Michael's work.

When I returned to work in Singapore in 1996, I met him again while he was engaged in putting together the letters that David Marshall had written during his visit to China as an independence-seeking leader from Singapore. I learnt how much he felt about Marshall's Jewish background and how that background influenced what Marshall thought about an earlier phase of China's revolution. This was a side of Michael I never knew. The juxtaposition of that perspective of David Marshall and Michael's own reading about a happier China before the Great Leap Forward was eye-opening. This was the first time I had heard him speak with feeling about developments in China and it was the beginning of several conversations we had before his last visit in January 2001 about how China's transformation would force ASEAN towards a more coherent community. This became all the more important as we looked at how the region faced yet another harsh test of its capacities. How will ASEAN evolve to deal with the

unexpected financial crisis of 1997–98 that had halted its promising development?

Michael was then deeply engaged in writing his last book, *Singapore's Foreign Policy*. This is indeed a subject that had engaged his attention ever since he first began to work on Southeast Asia in the early 1960s. His regular visits to Singapore over a period of almost forty years had given him an extraordinarily realistic understanding of the island state's vulnerability. When the book appeared, I was not surprised to find that, despite his usual cool analysis, it revealed a deep feeling that he rarely showed in his writings. One sentence sums it up, "Singapore's attempts to drive its region have been successful up to a point. They have not served to transform its security environment that displays a disconcerting continuity." The same comment about success up to a point might also apply to ASEAN as a whole as that organization tries to adapt to the larger East Asian community. Michael did not live to see the world after September 11. In the context of the wise words he has given us about Southeast Asia, we would dearly love to hear him tell us what we should look out for now.



With Tan Sri Dato' Dr Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, Chairman of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, and Mr S. Rajaratnam, Distinguished Fellow, ISEAS and formerly Singapore Senior Minister, at ISEAS 25th Anniversary celebrations on 29 September 1993.



With Professor Chan Heng Chee, former Director of ISEAS, and Professor Somsakdi Xuto, a member of the ISEAS Regional Advisory Council, at the ISEAS 25th Anniversary celebrations on 29 September 1993.



With Dr Francois Godement, Director of Asia Centre, French Institute of International Relations, and Dr Kusuma Snitwongse, Chairperson of the Advisory Board of the Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, at a dinner held after the Conference on Strategic Concepts and Strategic Cultures in East Asia and Europe at The Regent, Singapore on 10–11 November 1995.



Speaking at a seminar during his stint as a Senior Professorial Fellow at ISEAS in January 1997.



Front row, left to right: Mrs Jean Marshall, wife of Singapore's first Chief Minister Dr David Marshall, Mrs Frances Leifer, Mr K. Kesavapany, Director of ISEAS, Mrs K. Kesavapany, Mrs Barry Desker, and Mr Barry Desker, Director of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, at a ceremony to inaugurate the annual Michael Leifer Memorial Prize held in ISEAS on 18 May 2004.



Left to right: Ms Ch'ng Kim See, Head of ISEAS Library, Mr Jeremy Leifer, Dr Chin Kin Wah, Mrs Frances Leifer, Mrs Jean Marshall, and Dr Leo Suryadinata at the display of Professor Michael Leifer's works in ISEAS Library.



Introducing Southeast Asia

In this *tour de force* of Southeast Asia, Leifer highlights three characteristics of the region: first, its great socio-cultural, religious, ethnic, and political diversity; second, the legacy of colonial political boundaries (with enduring implications for the forces of separatism and irredentism) and parliamentary democracy (with a more chequered outcome); and third, the absence of geopolitical coherence until the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, which provided at least a conventional, if limited, coherence. Post-World War II nationalism found expression in anti-colonial struggles of varying intensities. The Cold War and its conjunction with the struggles between local Communist and anti-Communist movements added to regional fragmentation. Such conjunction of local and international conflicts was most evident in the first and second Indochina wars while the third was essentially a fall-out among the Communist powers themselves albeit with disturbing consequences for ASEAN's vision of regional order. The end of the Cold War and Vietnamese weariness in Cambodia opened the way to regionwide conciliation culminating in the identification of all existing Southeast Asian states with ASEAN by the end of the twentieth century. Ironically, just when a new regional coherence was being realized, it was diluted by strategic and economic changes that obliged ASEAN to expand its regional horizons.

Southeast Asia

South-East Asia comprises ten states: Myanmar (formerly Burma), Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines. They are diverse in human and physical geography, their territorial boundaries a legacy of colonial interventions and accommodations.

At the outset of the twentieth century, the term South-East Asia did not enjoy common currency; its disparate territories were objects of empire and not subjects of international relations, with Thailand, known as Siam until 1939, as the sole exception. They did not begin to enjoy international status until after the end of the Pacific War in 1945.

The term South-East Asia came into effective usage only during the Pacific War. It was employed by the Western Allies as a military-administrative arrangement for dispossessing Japan of wartime gains. A South-East Asia Command (SEAC) was created in August 1943.

Reprinted from Michael Leifer, "Southeast Asia", in *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Michael Howard and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 227–39, by permission of the publisher.

Based in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), its responsibilities were confined initially to Burma. Thailand, Malaya including Singapore, and the island of Sumatra. In July 1945, at the Potsdam Conference, SEAC's domain was enlarged to include British northern Borneo, the whole of the Netherlands East Indies (except western Timor), and French Indochina south of the sixteenth parallel of latitude but not the whole of South-East Asia. When SEAC was disbanded in November 1946, a common understanding of South-East Asia's bounds still did not exist.

South-East Asia began to assume a geopolitical coherence only during the last quarter of the twentieth century. That coherence came to be registered through the activities of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) established in August 1967 by Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Brunei became a member on resuming sovereignty in January 1984. But it was only at the end of the cold war from the early 1990s that the three states of Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) as well as Myanmar acknowledged ASEAN's regional credentials, attracted partly by the economic achievement of most of its member states. Vietnam became its first communist member in July 1995.

Colonialism was imposed on South-East Asia from the sixteenth century but its consolidation was not completed until the early years of the twentieth century concurrent with the first stirrings of nationalism. By 1900 the British were ensconced in Burma, in Malaya, including Singapore, and northern Borneo, as were the Dutch in their East Indies archipelago incorporating in the main Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi (Celebes), and the major part of Borneo. The French had established dominion over Indochina, while the USA had just succeeded to Spanish rule in the Philippines. The Portuguese retained a vestige of empire in the eastern half of the island of Timor. Only Thailand enjoyed an independent status as a buffer zone between British and French colonial domains.

Colonial rule disrupted and changed traditional society. For example, kingship was either removed, as in Burma and Vietnam, or remodelled to lend legitimacy to the machinery of colonial government, as in Malaya, Cambodia, and parts of the Netherlands East Indies. Colonialism also made an impact through promoting plantation agriculture and extractive industry. Metropolitan economies profited from exchanging their manufactures for tropical products. This kind of economic development was accompanied and stimulated by flows of migrant workers from southern China and to a lesser extent from

southern India and Ceylon. These migrants served the colonial economic design in filling the roles of labouring and economic middlemen and in consequence stirred up local resentments which were a factor in the emergence of modern nationalism. Nationalism was stimulated also through educational provision for indigenous élites to service the needs of colonial society.

Modern nationalism developed in urban centres where Western-educated indigenous élites who had assimilated liberal ideas experienced frustration and humiliation because of the racist structure of colonial societies. Nationalism proved to be a containable challenge until Japan overthrew the colonial orders within a matter of months from December 1941.

The first major expression of nationalism took place in the Philippines when a short-lived independence was declared in June 1898 in the political vacuum created by the Spanish–American War. The United States decided to retain possession. It crushed all resistance but then coopted the mestizo élite which had evolved during Spanish dominion. Political accommodation with this landed oligarchy was sealed with the establishment of civil government on the American democratic model in July 1901. National independence was never in contention but a matter of timing, which was agreed during the 1930s and upheld after the Pacific War, despite a brutal and destructive Japanese interregnum.

Collaboration was also a feature of colonial experience in Vietnam but in tandem with strong élite resistance to French rule inspired partly by Japan's modernization and China's republican revolution. Nationalist parties modelled on Chinese example were crushed by French repression which provided scope for the clandestine Communist Party of Indochina which the Vietnamese exile Ho Chi Minh founded in Hong Kong in 1930.

Elsewhere, nationalism arose from a religious source. In Burma, Buddhism was a vehicle for anti-colonial resistance after the First World War but was overtaken during the 1930s by a radical student-based movement influenced by Marxist ideas. Led by Aung San, this movement established a military link with the Japanese before the Pacific War and took part in their invasion of Burma. Buddhism played a corresponding role in Cambodia during the 1930s.

In the Netherlands East Indies, Islam provided an organizational frame for nationalism stimulated by resentment of alien Chinese competition in traditional textiles. The *Sarekat Islam* (Islamic Union)

was set up in 1912 and attracted a mass following and also a Marxist affiliate which developed in 1920 into the Communist Party of Indonesia. Internal division and governmental repression destroyed its viability, while a Communist revolt in 1926 was put down ruthlessly. A distinctive Indonesian political identity crystallized nevertheless during the late 1920s from a secular base. Leadership was provided by a young architect named Sukarno, who was confined to internal exile by the Dutch before collaborating with the Japanese during their occupation in the nationalist interest. In Malaya, nationalism also had an Islamic source as a basis for upholding an indigenous Malay identity threatened by alien migration. Religious nationalism, however, did not gain the support of the Sultans or rulers of the Malay states, who enjoyed a privileged role under British rule.

Thailand was not subject to colonial rule but registered an anti-Western nationalism under a military regime which had come to power through overthrowing the absolute monarchy in 1932. Modernizing reforms introduced during the late nineteenth century by King Chulalongkorn had generated tensions between the court and the bureaucracy over political prerogatives which were resolved in the latter's favour. Japan provided a model for emulation which was employed by the military leader Marshal Phibun Songkhram, who pursued irredentism at French colonial expense. After the fall of France in June 1940, Thailand went to war to recover territory in western Laos and Cambodia, securing its end through Japan's mediation, which foreshadowed its subsequent aggression in December 1941. From June 1940, Japan secured military access to Indochina, from which its forces were able to strike at colonial South-East Asia.

Japan launched airborne attacks on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Concurrent attacks were launched within South-East Asia, beginning with an air raid on Clark airfield in the Philippines and a sea-based assault on southern Thailand, from which the invasion of Malaya, Singapore, the Netherlands East Indies, and Burma proceeded. By May 1942, with the fall of Corregidor in the Philippines, the Japanese conquest of colonial South-East Asia was complete. The superiority of Europe was exposed as a hollow myth as its surviving soldiers and colonial civil servants were herded like cattle into prison camps.

With Japan's displacement of the colonial orders, the pace of political change was strictly controlled to serve its war effort. A nominal independence only was conferred on Burma and the Philippines in

August and October 1943 respectively, and in Indochina in March 1945, when the French Vichy administration was removed in favour of local nominees. The human effect of Japan's occupation was profound, with economies devastated and subject peoples and colonial captives treated with great brutality. Japan was driven forcibly from South-East Asia by Allied forces only in Burma and in part in the Philippines, which meant that there was minimal opportunity to redeem a shattered colonial reputation. Elsewhere, Japan's dispossession followed from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Returning colonial powers divided into the compliant and the dogged. The United States was the most compliant, honouring a promise made in the 1930s by according independence symbolically on 4 July 1946 to the Philippines. Manuel Roxas, a nominee of General Douglas MacArthur and a collaborator of the Japanese, was elected as the first President of an independent Republic. Britain made concessions in the face of an assertive and popular Burmese nationalism organized through the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League led by Aung San. An agreement on independence was concluded in January 1947. The assassination of Aung San by a political rival in July did not interrupt the timetable for the transfer of sovereignty, which took place on 4 January 1948, with U Nu as Burma's first Prime Minister.

In Malaya, including Singapore, Britain did not face pressing demands for independence. The indigenous Malay majority were apprehensive of the large ethnic-Chinese community which had provided most recruits for armed resistance to the Japanese through the vehicle of the Malayan Communist Party. A Malay nationalism emerged with the formation of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in March 1946 in reaction to a British proposal for a Malayan Union, excluding Singapore, in which non-Malays would enjoy ready access to citizenship, while the Sultans, the symbols of Malay rule, would lose their constitutional status. In the event, Singapore remained a separate British colony and naval base, while Malaya was reorganized into a Federation with the status of the Sultans restored in return for a more gradual acquisition of citizenship by non-Malays.

The eruption of Communist insurrection in Malaya in June 1948 delayed Malaya's progress to independence. The transfer of sovereignty occurred on 31 August 1957 with Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister after a Malay-Chinese political accommodation at élite level which has been the basis for political rule ever since. Singapore became

self-governing in June 1959. British possessions in northern Borneo had reverted to direct colonial control for reasons of good government. Sarawak was transferred from the personal rule of the Brooke family and North Borneo (now Sabah) from that of a chartered company, while Brunei was restored as a protected state. Portugal resumed control over the eastern half of the island of Timor.

Fierce struggles for independence took place in the Netherlands East Indies and Indochina. The Republic of Indonesia was the first new state to assert independence, proclaimed by nationalist leaders Sukarno and Hatta on 17 August 1945 just two days after Japan's surrender. Indonesia's independence was achieved through a combination of armed struggle and negotiations, with the embryonic Republic being accorded quasi-international status and representation at the United Nations from August 1947. The Dutch were obliged to transfer sovereignty in December 1949, but relations with Indonesia remained strained by their unwillingness to concede the western half of the island of New Guinea. Indonesia's struggle for independence was aided by Cold War considerations. Initial US support for the Dutch was withdrawn after the Republic had put down a communist-supported revolt in Madiun in East Java in September 1948.

In the case of Indochina, however, and in particular Vietnam, US Cold War calculations served French interests. Unlike Indonesia, Vietnam had declared independence under the aegis of the Communist Party. In July 1941 Ho Chi Minh, operating from southern China, had established the League for the Independence of Vietnam or *Viet Minh* which attracted nationalist support. In August 1945 it took advantage of Japan's surrender by seizing Hanoi and forcing the abdication in its favour of the Emperor Bao Dai. The proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam took place in Hanoi on 2 September 1945, with Ho Chi Minh employing the idiom of the United States' declaration of independence in an abortive attempt to secure international recognition.

Indochina had been divided along the line of the sixteenth parallel of latitude with responsibility for taking the Japanese surrender shared between the Nationalist Chinese forces of Chiang Kai Shek to the north and those of SEAC to the south. The Chinese dispossessed the *Viet Minh* in North Vietnam, while SEAC enabled the return of French administration to South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. A *modus vivendi* between the French and the *Viet Minh* against a background of Chinese withdrawal broke down at the end of 1946. The political future of

Vietnam, as well as of Laos and Cambodia, was then to be decided by force of arms in two stages.

Thailand was an exception to the regional pattern. It was an independent state but had become tainted politically through association with Japan's aggressive design. The United States sought Thailand's international rehabilitation, however. Bangkok's declaration of war had not been communicated by the Thai legation in Washington nor accepted by the US government, while Britain's and France's wish for retribution was interpreted as an expression of an abiding colonialism. With a civilian government restored, Thailand was treated little differently from any other country liberated from Japan's tyranny, albeit obliged to return its wartime territorial gains. But when that government was overthrown by a military *coup* in the wake of the unexplained violent death of the young King Ananda in June 1946, cold-war priorities interposed to sustain American patronage.

The post-colonial states of South-East Asia began their independent existence with two legacies: the colonial political boundaries and the parliamentary democracy deemed a necessary symbol of international legitimacy, given the global dominance of the United States. Those state boundaries contained fissile social diversities which were not readily willing to accept the cultural and economic imperatives of alien political centres. For example, Burma was afflicted with ethno-regional dissent and challenge which has persisted for over half a century. Neighbouring Thailand also experienced a separatist pull from its mainly Muslim south stimulated by the rise of Malay nationalism. Indonesia in its archipelagic condition was most vulnerable to centrifugal political forces, encouraged by Dutch policy before the transfer of sovereignty.

Communist insurrection was another endemic feature of South-East Asia in the wake of the Pacific War. It made a major impact in Burma and the Philippines shortly after independence and in Malaya and Indonesia before the transfers of sovereignty, although ultimately failing. In the important case of Vietnam, the communist movement assumed the mantle of nationalism to attain ultimate military and political success.

Despite an endemic separatism aggravated by communist insurrection, none of South-East Asia's post-colonial states have experienced involuntary dismemberment. The Federation of Malaysia took a conscious decision to eject Singapore to independence in August 1965. Irredentism has enjoyed greater regional import, for example, in

Indonesia's recovery of the western half of the island of New Guinea (known now as Irian Jaya) in May 1963 and in the unification of Vietnam in April 1975. With minor exceptions, the territorial inheritance of colonialism has been transferred intact. But Indonesia's annexation of the eastern half of the island of Timor in December 1975 was inconsistent with the nationalist *raison d'être* based on the Dutch colonial domain.

The political inheritance of the West has been much less durable. Parliamentary systems have experienced a chequered record and were placed under great strain in Burma and Indonesia during the 1950s as tensions between polity and society were aggravated by economic difficulties. Both states opted for authoritarian solutions, as did Thailand. The Philippines maintained the form of democracy into the early 1970s, but then President Ferdinand Marcos assumed dictatorial powers for over a decade. Malaya/Malaysia and then Singapore sustained their initial parliamentary practices on independence but increasingly employed legislatures as rubber stamps for one-party government.

The post-colonial era coincided with and was affected deeply by the Cold War and the determination of the United States to contain international communism. In Indochina, France's confrontation with the *Viet Minh* was represented as a theatre of global conflict. Its failure to contain the *Viet Minh's* advance by early 1954, however, prompted the United States to contemplate direct military intervention, which caused alarm among regional states of a neutralist disposition. The governments of Burma and Indonesia combined with those of three South Asian states in Ceylon's capital Colombo to appeal for moderation. That meeting led on to a wider Asian-African Conference in the Indonesian city of Bandung in April 1955, which registered for the first time the international agenda of post-colonial states.

The historic Bandung Conference convened in the wake of the First Indochina War. France had suffered a devastating military reverse at the hands of *Viet Minh* at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in the north-west of Vietnam close to the border with Laos. The surrender of the French position took place on 7 April 1954, one day before an international conference convened in Geneva to address the Indochina conflict. Ceasefire agreements were concluded for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, together with an unsigned Final Declaration endorsing their terms. Vietnam was divided along the line of the seventeenth

parallel of latitude for the purpose of regrouping military units. That line solidified into a *de facto* international boundary enduring for over twenty years. A communist government led by Ho Chi Minh took power to its north; to its south an anti-communist administration headed by former exile Ngo Dinh Diem was installed. Under the terms of the Geneva agreements, nationwide elections were to be held in Vietnam within two years, but they never took place as the country became the locus of the Cold War in Asia.

Communist-supported revolutionary movements in Laos and Cambodia were not recognized at the Geneva Conference. Cambodia was restored to independence under the leadership of King Norodom Sihanouk, who abdicated in favour of his father in March 1955 to set up a Vichy-style organization through which he dominated politics for a decade and a half. Laos was also restored to a fragile independence; two of its provinces abutting China and Vietnam remained under control of *Viet Minh*-controlled Laotian forces. The United States sought to hold the line against further communist advance in Indochina through a Collective Defence Treaty for South-East Asia concluded in Manila on 8 September 1954 whose members assumed unilateral obligations to Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam. Within South-East Asia, only Thailand and the Philippines signed up. A South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was set up in Bangkok in February 1955 but without a military command. From the early 1960s, the south of Vietnam reverted to armed struggle, with Laos drawn into that conflict because of the importance of its eastern uplands as an infiltration route into South Vietnam — which achieved notoriety as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

In Indonesia, President Sukarno replaced Indonesia's parliamentary system with an authoritarian Guided Democracy in July 1959 in the wake of abortive regional uprisings. He commanded the country's political heights through remarkable oratorical skills and by playing off the armed forces and the large Communist Party. He also exploited nationalist issues — in particular, Holland's refusal to transfer the western half of the island of New Guinea. Fear of Communist advantage attracted US support for this irredentist cause, but its realization encouraged Sukarno's engagement in external diversion as a way of maintaining political control in deteriorating economic circumstances. A revolt in the British-protected Sultanate of Brunei in North Borneo in December 1962 provided a pretext for challenging the formation of the Federation of Malaysia.

In May 1961 the Prime Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, proposed unifying the Malay Peninsula with self-governing Singapore and British possessions in North Borneo as a way of containing local communist and Chinese influence in Singapore seen as synonymous. Indonesia's challenge to the legitimacy of Malaysia from January 1963 was distinguished by the term *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) — a form of coercive diplomacy which had been used against the Dutch over West New Guinea. Malaysia was established on 16 September 1963 but without Brunei's adherence. Indonesia's "Confrontation" and Sukarno's "Guided Democracy" collapsed in the wake of an abortive *coup* in October 1965 attributed to the country's Communist Party. On 11 March 1966 power was assumed by Lieutenant-General (later President) Suharto, whose military-based administration embarked on economic development and regional cooperation involving reconciliation with Malaysia and a newly independent Singapore.

Political crisis and change in Indonesia occurred concurrently with political decay and military confrontation in South Vietnam. The leadership of President Ngo Dinh Diem had failed to prise the nationalist standard from the grasp of the *Viet Minh*, who were reconstituted under the leadership of the Communist Party as the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) in December 1960. Buddhist protest against the government in Saigon, seen as dominated by Catholics, as well as the lamentable military performance of its army against a rural insurgency, led to a withdrawal of American support for Diem who was murdered during a military *coup* in November 1963, just days before the assassination of President Kennedy. A series of juntas then exercised power but without any grasp of the requirements for political victory which led the United States to assume growing responsibility for the conduct of the widening war. By March 1965 the United States had changed its nature by embarking on the sustained aerial bombardment of North Vietnam. When this attempt to impose an unacceptable cost on the ruling party in Hanoi failed, more than half a million combat troops were introduced progressively into the south but without inflicting the desired military reverse on the communist army increasingly stiffened by infiltration from the north.

The turning point in the conflict came at the end of January 1968 during the Tet festival for the Vietnamese lunar new year when the NLF launched coordinated attacks against urban targets. Although a military failure, the Tet Offensive proved to be a historical turning point because of its political impact within the United States where

popular protest was rising in opposition to the heavy price in lives and casualties being paid by American servicemen. A peace agreement concluded in Paris in January 1973 left the government in Saigon in place but not for long. A Vietnamese communist military offensive in March 1975 in the central highlands set off a rout among the southern army, with northern forces seizing Saigon on 30 April. Formal reunification took place on 2 July 1976 with the promulgation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

A communist victory had also occurred in neighbouring Cambodia on 17 April when Phnom Penh was invested by a revolutionary movement known as the Khmer Rouge. This movement had its roots in a nationalist-communist alternative to the neighbouring Vietnamese party but had acquired military and political significance only in the wake of Prince Norodom Sihanouk's overthrow by a right-wing *coup* on 18 March 1970. The restoration of the royal government in April 1975 was short-lived, to be replaced on 5 January 1976 by an ironically termed "Democratic" Kampuchea and Prince Sihanouk's resignation and house arrest. Under the leadership of the fearsome Pol Pot, a gruesome social experiment was inaugurated. Cambodia was transformed into a primitive agricultural work camp combining the worst excesses of Stalin and Mao in which around a million people died from execution, starvation, and disease. An attempt to conceal the failings of economic dogma through xenophobic nationalism led on to military confrontation with Vietnam. Laos, subject to a fragile coalition, also succumbed to communist control during the course of 1975. In December, the constitutional monarchy was removed and the Laos People's Democratic Republic was established in a close relationship with Vietnam.

As the Vietnam War intensified, a group of non-communist states began an experiment in regional cooperation. Thailand, Malaya and the Philippines set up the Association of South-East Asia (ASA) in Bangkok in July 1961, based on the rationale that economic progress through regional cooperation would provide a foundation for national security. ASA fell victim to Indonesia's "Confrontation" and the claim by the Philippines to the part of North Borneo incorporated into the Federation of Malaysia as Sabah. ASA was superseded in August 1967 in Bangkok by ASEAN, with the additional membership of Indonesia and Singapore.

ASEAN was an attempt to provide a framework for regional reconciliation. Its declaratory goals were economic and cultural

cooperation but security was uppermost in mind among governments which shared a common experience of resisting internal revolutionary challenge and which also had misgivings about the regional staying power of the United States. A progressive willingness to cooperate in avoiding and managing conflict served to engender external business confidence in regional economies which, beginning with Singapore under the dynamic leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, came to emulate Japan's example of export-led growth.

In February 1976, after the success of revolutionary communism in Indochina, ASEAN demonstrated its collective nerve by holding the first meeting of its heads of government in Indonesia. A political agenda was set and an agreement reached to establish a secretariat in Jakarta. Moreover, Japan began to take ASEAN seriously. Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda with his Australian and New Zealand counter-parts attended the next meeting of heads of governments convened in August 1977 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of ASEAN's formation. Japan had returned to South-East Asia in an economic role during the 1950s through the vehicle of reparations agreements. That role expanded over the years as access to raw materials and market opportunities was succeeded by capital investment to take advantage of cheaper labour and land, pointing the way for burgeoning multi-national enterprise.

The Third Indochina War marked the final occasion in the twentieth century when a local conflict within South-East Asia would serve as a focus for global conflict. It began in December 1978, when Vietnamese forces invaded and occupied Cambodia. The belligerent Khmer Rouge regime was driven out to find active sanctuary in Thailand, and a People's Republic of Kampuchea was established in January 1979 in a special relationship with Vietnam. China responded by launching a punitive expedition into North Vietnam in February. The United States and Japan applied economic pressure on Vietnam while the ASEAN states played an active diplomatic role, with the alignment supporting an armed resistance against the Vietnamese occupation, including the Khmer Rouge.

The burden of the Third Indochina War broke the back of Vietnam's resolve to engage concurrently in socialist development and to uphold a special relationship with neighbouring states in Indochina. In the event, Vietnam lost the countervailing support of the Soviet Union and was obliged to appease China in particular by withdrawing its forces from Cambodia from the end of September 1989. ASEAN then

took a back seat diplomatically, as the permanent members of the Security Council assumed the initiative for a peace settlement through the vehicle of a United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) provided for at an international conference in Paris in October 1991. UNTAC conducted nationwide elections in Cambodia in May 1993, despite the recalcitrance of the Khmer Rouge, leading to the restoration of the constitutional monarchy under Norodom Sihanouk in September and the formation of a fragile coalition government in October. Complete peace was not restored, however, as a diminished Khmer Rouge continued to fight for a share of power as a basis for resuming its exclusive exercise.

The end of the Cambodian conflict registered the regional impact of changes in global politics at the end of the century. It also registered an acknowledgement by the ruling party in Hanoi that it had lost its way economically and had placed its legitimacy at risk. During the Third Indochina War, the members of ASEAN, augmented by an independent Brunei from January 1984 and with the exception of the Philippines, continued to prosper as they benefited from concentrating on comparative advantage in manufactures. Vietnam faced penury as the cost of prosecuting the Cambodia war compounded the failings of the rigid application of socialist doctrine. Revision in Hanoi came in December 1986 at the Third National Congress of the Communist Party which appointed the economic reformer Nguyen Van Linh as General Secretary. A new doctrine of *Doi Moi*, meaning renovation or renewal of the economy through free-market practice, was promulgated and applied progressively, despite resistance from party diehards.

Doi Moi registered the need to encourage free-market economics and inward investment if Vietnam was to raise standards of living to match those of its regional neighbours. Such a repudiation of economic doctrine, replicated in Laos, was not matched by a revision of the political system. On the contrary, economic change was undertaken in order to protect the leading role of the Communist Party. To that extent, a convergence of a kind emerged in political systems with some other regional states which had pioneered successful economic growth through a practice of developmental authoritarianism whereby the state intervened to ensure political demobilization in the interest of social stability and economic progress. Such a practice had been demonstrated in the case of Indonesia under the leadership of President Suharto and Malaysia under Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and strikingly so in the case of Singapore, whose Senior Minister and former Prime

Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, was invited to Vietnam to offer economic advice.

In the wake of the Cold War, the astounding economic successes of a number of South-East Asian states provided a source of self-confidence in rebutting attempts by the West to impose its own democratic values. The issue of democratization within the region had arisen well before the end of the Cold War in the Philippines, where the venal rule of President Marcos had provided a political opening for the insurgent Communist Party. Against a background of political and economic decay Marcos called a snap election in February 1986. He was challenged by Mrs Corazon Aquino, the widow of his one-time principal political opponent, Benigno Aquino, who had been murdered at Manila Airport in August 1983 on his return from exile in the United States. Fraudulent conduct of that election served as the context for a military revolt in Manila led by Fidel Ramos, the deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, and Juan Ponce Enrile, the Defence Minister. Marcos loyalists were prevented from crushing that revolt in support of Mrs Aquino by the physical interposition of civilian demonstrators encouraged by the Catholic Church. That display of so-called “people power” persuaded the United States to withdraw its longstanding support for Marcos, who, with his family, went into exile in Hawaii, leaving Mrs Aquino to be inaugurated as President. She restored the democratic process, but a stable political order had to await the election in June 1992 of her successor Fidel Ramos, whose loyalty as Defence Minister had thwarted a series of military *coups*.

Democracy triumphed also in Thailand. A false start had been made in October 1973 when student revolt and intervention by King Bhumibol restored the parliamentary system, but it was soon overturned by another military *coup* three years later. During the 1980s benign military rule and respect for constitutionalism ensued under Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanond. When the military removed his elected successor, Chatichai Choonhavan, by a *coup* in February 1991, King Bhumibol distanced himself from the junta, who chose civilian caretaker, Anand Panyarachun, as Prime Minister. Fresh elections were held in March 1992, but the appointment of an unelected former army commander, General Suchinda Krapayoon, provoked angry demonstrations in Bangkok reminiscent of Manila in February 1986 but culminating in a bloody confrontation. The King intervened to restore democratic order, with further elections in September 1992 giving rise to an elected government with a civilian base which has

been sustained. In both the Philippines and Thailand, popular protest but in contrasting economic circumstances had served the democratic interest. Corresponding protest in Burma, however, resulted in the flowering of democracy being ruthlessly crushed.

Burma had been ruled by a military regime headed by General Ne Win ever since the armed forces had seized power in a *coup* which displaced the democratic regime in March 1962. A mixture of Marxist and Buddhist nostrums provided a doctrinal basis for a so-called “Burmese Road to Socialism” under the monopoly rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). The outcome by the late 1980s was a condition of national penury indicated by application to the United Nations for Burma to be accorded the status of “least developed country” in order to secure grants in aid. Demonetization of larger currency notes in circulation in September 1987 provoked student unrest which rose to a crescendo during August and September 1988, to be met with ruthless military repression. Ne Win had resigned as head of government in 1981 and gave up the leadership of the BSPP in July 1987, but he retained a dominant political influence despite his ailing physical condition. In the face of popular protest which was inspired by the presence in the country of Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the revered nationalist martyr Aung San, the armed forces launched an “incumbency *coup*”. All state and party organs were abolished by the new junta, which styled itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and which in June 1989 changed the name of the country to Myanmar.

Elections were held in May 1990 in which the National League for Democracy — led by Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been placed under house arrest in July 1989 — won an overwhelming majority over the National Unity Party, which was the political vehicle of the military junta. That electoral outcome was not honoured and the SLORC went ahead with drafting a new constitution designed to entrench the political role of the armed forces along the lines of the Indonesian model as well as to exclude Aung San Suu Kyi from power.

Through its diplomatic performance and economic accomplishments, ASEAN had become increasingly attractive to non-members, giving the region a historically unprecedented coherence. The prospect seemed good for realizing the aspiration of transforming South-East Asia into a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) which had been articulated at a meeting of ASEAN’s foreign ministers in November 1971. In fact, with the end of the cold war, the strategic

environment in East Asia, including South-East Asia, changed in a way that did not permit the members of ASEAN to shape regional order in a prerogative manner. South-East Asia did not enjoy a self-contained condition but was linked by land, water, and politics to a more extensive East Asia. This geopolitical linkage was pointed up in contention over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, which had not been dominated or delimited by colonial powers.

The People's Republic of China had pressed a claim to all the islands of the South China Sea from its establishment, had employed force to secure the northerly Paracel Islands at Vietnam's expense in the mid-1970s, and had seized a limited number of the southerly Spratly Islands in the late 1980s with a further armed occupation in the mid-1990s. Claims to partial jurisdiction in the Spratly Islands had been asserted also by Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei — all members of ASEAN — while Vietnam, which joined the Association in July 1995, sought jurisdiction over both the Paracel and Spratly Islands. China's irredentist disposition was displayed at a time when it had come to enjoy an unprecedented regional strategic latitude free from any major adversary and had begun to modernize its armed forces with an increasing ability to project naval and air power southwards. Moreover, the United States had conceded nationalist demands and had withdrawn its once formidable military presence from the Philippines by the end of 1992.

Despite a sustained commitment to a ZOPFAN, ASEAN governments have never shared a common perspective of external threat; nor has the Association been willing to engage in defence cooperation. In the circumstances, ASEAN opted to extend its approach to regional security based on multilateral dialogue to a wider East Asia in order to cope with an assertive China and a retreating United States. In July 1993 in Singapore, the annual meeting of ASEAN's foreign ministers was used to host an inaugural dinner for eighteen foreign ministers to launch the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) intended to promote a predictable and constructive pattern of relationships in Asia-Pacific. Apart from the six ASEAN states, and their seven dialogue partners from the United States, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Korea, and the EU, there were Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, and Laos as well as China and Russia. The first working meeting of the ARF convened in Bangkok in July 1994.

South-East Asian governments have also found themselves obliged to accept a wider framework for economic cooperation. ASEAN has

long had a formal commitment to economic cooperation but it was only in January 1992 that a decision was taken by its governments to set up a free trade area. By this juncture, however, through Australian initiative in 1989, a wider consultative forum for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was established which has assumed a growing importance through annual meetings between its heads of government.

By the end of the twentieth century, the governments of an expanding ASEAN have given coherence to the concept of a South-East Asia. Ironically, just as this coherence has been registered, they have been obliged to expand their regional horizons in order to cope with changing strategic and economic environments in a way which casts doubt on the very viability of the concept of South-East Asia.



PART I

International Relations

Introduction to Part I

Chin Kin Wah

Michael Leifer's interest in Southeast Asia was awakened during his first academic appointment at the University of Adelaide where he spent more than three years in the 1960s. In his first book on Southeast Asia¹ published after his return to the United Kingdom, Leifer admitted to having fallen prey to the Australian "national habit" of continually looking to their "near north" — a habit that was to distinguish his own academic achievements in ensuing years. Interestingly Leifer's early research skills were honed in quite a different field — Zionism and Palestine in British Opinion and Policy — a doctoral dissertation topic, which led to his coming under the joint supervision of Elie Kedourie at the London School of Economics. In a tribute to his former teacher, Leifer acknowledged the intellectual influence of Kedourie from whom he acquired "a fuller understanding of the activity of politics and what might be expected of those who indulged in it". Such an understanding, he felt, stood him well in his subsequent endeavours to interpret a vastly different regional field of study.²

In an academic career spanning over three decades, Leifer witnessed and sought to make sense of the historic transition of Southeast Asian states from being objects to subjects of international relations. In his

academic lifetime (when his first book was published the United States was getting increasingly embroiled in the Vietnam War), he also observed a region undergoing transformation — in a process often punctuated by turbulence — from being “a category of convenience” associated with a wartime military command and from the so-called “Balkans of the Orient”, to one with a growing sense of regional oneness and geopolitical coherence. By the time of his death in March 2001, the whole of Southeast Asia had become identified with ASEAN, thus fulfilling the regional association’s putative vision of “one Southeast Asia”.

In this saga of regional transformation, the formal emergence into statehood often marked the beginning of a chapter in the struggle for survival and stability. Indeed the problem of how the new and often vulnerable states of the region were to maintain their independent existence in a less than benign regional environment that threatened to engulf them, posed a central puzzle and refocused his attention albeit in a different context, on “the activity of politics” and “those who indulged in it”. It was not surprising that his early works on Southeast Asia sought to address the security challenges faced by some of the most vulnerable of successor governments in the region — Cambodia seeking a precarious independent foreign policy against the backdrop of an unfolding American intervention in Indochina; the new Malaysian Federation then being confronted by neighbouring Indonesia; Singapore struggling to come to terms with an unexpected independence. The interplay of external providence (or improvidence) and enlightened domestic leadership (or the lack of it) were to result in radically different outcomes for those who indulged in the activity of politics in post-colonial Southeast Asia. These “domestic” developments of regional states are taken up in greater detail in Part II of this volume. Part I looks at Leifer’s analysis of the broad forces at work which shaped the patterns of international relations in Southeast Asia.

His Theoretical Underpinnings and Method

On reading Leifer one is often struck by the detachment of his analysis and avoidance of intellectual faddishness. Others have been left with an impression of his being a-theoretical. He often avoided stating upfront his theoretical approach in his numerous studies of the region, but his largely empirical works were by no means lacking in theoretical

underpinnings. Nor was he unfamiliar with the contending schools of thought in international relations. Indeed he often evinced a strong underlying realism although as a former colleague of his at the LSE noted, it was a tough realism uniquely blended with humanity that made it difficult to categorize him in simple terms.³ If he had appeared traditional and even conservative in his approach it was because his method was one which tended to draw heavily on “substantive examples which have an illustrative function”⁴ — in other words the diplomatic record was usually grist to his analysis of international politics. Be that as it may, his analyses of current events were often cast in cogently developed intellectual frameworks.

Leifer’s realist assumptions were quite consistently reflected in the attraction that power and balance of power analysis held for him in his interpretation of the shifts in foreign policies and patterns of regional relations; in his essentially state-centric “billiard-ball” perspective of international politics and the importance of national interests and national sovereignty as determinants of state action as well as regional co-operation. In his first book on a regional state’s foreign policy, he noted Cambodia’s hypersensitivity to shifts in the regional balance of power and anticipated that it would “maneuver in any direction to preserve its national independence”.⁵

In subsequent works Leifer sought to explain the elusive balance of power concept in terms of a dimension he deemed pertinent to the ASEAN experience namely, of a balancing policy pursued with a view towards preventing undue dominance by one or more states. Such balancing purpose was as he saw it, reflected in the way ASEAN provided a structure for regional partnership that would place checks (“constraints” in later-day parlance) on a willingly accepting Indonesia previously known for its hegemonial aspirations. Leifer also saw a balance of power purpose reflected in the way ASEAN responded as a diplomatic community to Vietnam’s invasion and occupation of Cambodia. His masterly analysis of external power intervention in the conflict similarly highlighted the balance of power considerations behind the respective policies of China, the former Soviet Union, the United States, and Japan. That said, Leifer did not elevate the balance of power to an immutable law of state behaviour in an anarchic world. On the contrary he acknowledged the existence of international society (for which he could be said to reflect a defining strand of thought in the “British School of International Relations”) but without exaggerating the constraining role of the norms therein.

With the end of the Cold War, the changing balance of power and the prevailing condition of stability had made it possible for ASEAN to venture into multilateral security co-operation in the form of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) that took it beyond its geostrategic ambit by the end of the last century. However, to the extent that it was very much dependent on a pre-existing stable balance of power situation (which could change over time, and where the one state capable of redressing that change would be the United States, an extra-regional power), it was seen as an imperfect diplomatic instrument, lacking in teeth and, as Leifer colourfully but also realistically put it in his seminal work on the ARF, not unlike “making bricks without straw”.

A vein of realism also runs through much of Leifer’s reflections on regional co-operation and association. While he saw that ASEAN held forth the possibility of widening functional ties, he did not see much promise in David Mitrany’s theory of functionalism (with its assumption of deepening regional co-operation leading eventually to supra-nationalism) being fulfilled in a Southeast Asian setting given that regional leaders tended to guard jealously their nation’s sovereignty. Such a view held in his early observations of ASEAN co-operation had been sustained through subsequent regional transitions and expanding regional membership and has not lost its relevance in the arena of high politics, despite the rhetoric of regional integration and community-building which has gained currency in recent times.

Although Leifer took an essentially “statist” approach in his analysis of the international relations of the region, he was nevertheless conscious of the non-state variables and the ethical (as opposed to the power) elements to a contentious international issue. This is vividly illustrated in his almost magisterial treatment of the clash of principles over Vietnam’s intervention in Cambodia, cast in terms of the debate between the Rights of State versus the Rights of People. A similar non-partisan approach was reflected in an earlier discussion of Southeast Asian responses to the Vietnam War. If he appeared too much of a realist to some (indeed he never quite rejected the realist label) it could be because the objects of his analysis often seemed to hold a mirror to his own realist inclinations.

Some Recurring Themes

Conflict, co-operation, and order were some of the recurring themes in Leifer’s study of the international relations of the region. His entry into

Southeast Asian studies coincided with the intensifying Cold War manifested in the most cataclysmic manner in the Vietnam conflict, which like the subsequent Cambodia conflict (pivot to another Cold War this time, among the Communist powers themselves) marked a conjunction of local, regional, and global contestations. At the local level, there was also a template of traditional conflicts, which were rooted in pre-colonial antagonisms, contested state identities and disputes over boundaries — which questioned the viability of “regional solutions to regional problems” and set parameters to attempts at regional association.

But it was the management of political order (intertwined between the domestic and regional levels) or how to achieve that condition of politics that is characterized by stability and predictability rather than conflict and violence that preoccupied him intellectually. At the level of international relations he most persistently pursued the issue of ASEAN’s vision of and capacity to bring about a Southeast Asian-wide regional order — a capacity that was found wanting during the Cold War. Indeed with the emergence of an Indochina sub-system following the American departure from Vietnam, Southeast Asia was left with two contending visions of regional order. Be that as it may, Leifer was ungrudging in his acknowledgement of ASEAN’s achievement in sustaining a condition of orderliness (in the sense of a relative absence of violence in the conduct of intra-mural relations) among the members of the regional association. ASEAN effectively presented a viable structure of regional confidence-building, which at the conclusion of the Cold War was embraced by its hitherto regional antagonists. He was more sceptical of ASEAN’s attempts to extend its model of regional order beyond its ambit.

Leifer’s interest in the problem of managing regional order was pursued into the maritime realm where China’s policy has a critical bearing on how local states could bring about more “orderliness” in the South China Sea environs, seen by Leifer as the last frontier of Southeast Asia. His realist inclinations led him to see assertions of maritime claims as most likely where the regional balance of power is in flux and where countervailing power seems doubtful. The post-September 11 regional environment is however witnessing changes in the way maritime security is being redefined. New areas of functional needs to counter threats to maritime security are presenting new opportunities for co-operation between regional and extra-regional states. Complicating such co-operation are the traditional notions of sovereignty, which Leifer had so usefully explored.

And Some Lacunae

Leifer graduated in politics and economics from Reading University, but there is little hint of this background in his works on Southeast Asia. Indeed he seems not to have given fuller treatment to foreign economic policy or the economic aspects of foreign policy-making by the more developed regional states. Where he has attempted a limited politics cum economic approach it has been in connection with his later-day analysis of China's and Taiwan's economic engagement with the region. A sharper political economy angle on the region itself and considerations of emerging new economic interdependence might have provided a prism to a different pattern of regional dynamics and made better sense of the growing impacts (and consequent political implications) of China and India on the geoeconomic terrain of Southeast Asia.

If he were to look at the region today he would probably have more sharply factored in the rising profile of India, which in his time seemed to be diplomatically distant — serving almost as a contrasting footnote to the rise of China. This despite the fact that he anticipated the growing influence of India in the region. Today as India reorients its international outlook and attitudes towards the Southeast Asian region and extends its strategic reach, it will be an increasing reminder to ASEAN of its strategic presence on its western flank. Indeed the region has never had to face the rise of both China and India at the same time as it is currently, and Leifer would have compared and contrasted their respective impacts.

Among the major external powers which had shaped the strategic environment of Southeast Asia, the United States and China consistently took much of Leifer's attention. Since the demise of the Soviet Union and the onset of economic malaise in Japan, Moscow and Tokyo seemed to have lost their appeal although Leifer had directed his attention on their interests in and diplomacy towards the region during the Cold War years. His interest in the Sino-U.S. relationship underlines its importance to the stability of East Asia of which ASEAN is a part.

Today Leifer would perhaps have linked more clearly the greater significance of an evolving East Asian mega-region to the economic and strategic environment of ASEAN especially since there is growing acceptance of the need to factor in economics in any security and foreign policy evaluations. Regional states' economic entry into China

is also redefining traditional notions of space as they increasingly grow their stakes in the internal stability of China itself — a significant transformation from the early Cold War years when China was all too readily seen as a threat to their domestic security. More importantly he would have revisited the question of regional identity and what underpin that, in the light of what has been claimed as a growing East Asian consciousness and relate that back to ASEAN's place in the greater game of today in East Asia.

Leifer died before the horrendous events of September 11 and the emergence of a transnational threat posed by a non-state network of terror. Since September 11, a whole host of non-traditional security concerns (but particularly international terrorism) are crowding into the security agenda of the region — a phenomenon that would have given exciting materials for Leifer to reflect on although he might still be inclined to focus on the level of states' response and co-operation.

His Sense of the Paradoxical and the Ironic

In his years of observing Southeast Asia, Leifer was able to look out for the paradoxical and the ironic without seeming to be cynical. In his study of Singapore's foreign policy, he drew out several paradoxes including the observation that the island-state needed the region and yet sought to transcend it. The old ASEAN-5 had also seemed like a paradox to Leifer. It was best contemplated as a security organization of a kind — in the sense that its members shared a common interest in preventing radical internal political change and sought to promote mutual security by consultation and co-operation wherever practical. Yet paradoxically, it did not possess the form or the structure of an alliance and its corporate activity was devoted in the main to regional economic co-operation. This "paradox" was "a function of the perception of threat held by the individual governments of the association and of other limits to the degree of co-operation between them".⁶ Leifer returned to this paradoxical element in his comments on the strains registered on Malaysia-Singapore relations as a consequence of Israeli President Chaim Herzog's visit to Singapore in 1986. He saw that the visit once again pointed to a paradoxical quality of ASEAN, present at its creation. "ASEAN was established between adversaries of different kinds in an attempt to promote a structure of reconciliation. The regional enterprise was embarked upon in the full knowledge that certain underlying facts of political life could not be changed at will, including the sense of

vulnerability of some member states; some partners in reconciliation would remain potential enemies.”⁷

In taking stock of ASEAN developments, Leifer often revealed a sense of the ironic. He noted for example that by the end of the last century, the governments of an expanding ASEAN had given coherence to the concept of a Southeast Asian region. “Ironically, just as this coherence has been registered, they have been obliged to expand their regional horizons (through the creation of the ARF) in order to cope with changing strategic and economic environments in a way which casts doubt on the very viability of the concept of South-East Asia.”⁸

Leifer clearly recognized ASEAN’s need at century’s end to reinvent itself — the alternative being institutional atrophy. Yet every solution seems to have its own problems! The dilemma for ASEAN is that the diversity that came with expanding membership underlined the value of “a tightly restricted model of regional security” based on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of neighbours. Keeping in view the debate about revisiting the terms of intra-regional engagement, Leifer warned that, “ASEAN cannot be expected to expand beyond its role which means that the Association is condemned to suffer from the defects of its qualities and the evident limitations of its collective competence ... Its prime saving grace ... has been to sustain an original role of containing and managing intra-mural tensions which is an accomplishment not to be disparaged in an imperfect world. In that respect, ASEAN lends itself to an old adage that in contemplating its future role the best should not be made the enemy of the good.”⁹

Leifer’s familiarity with the region and its many key policy-makers did not lead him into the realm of advocacy. It was as if he believed that vision making was best left to regional visionaries. What he did was to bring a sense of the realistic to bear on the prescriptions of the day — “regional solutions to regional problems”, “going the ASEAN way”, “constructive/flexible engagement in ASEAN”, “towards ‘one Southeast Asia’” — dissected them and spelt out their implications. He subjected to close scrutiny such concepts as diplomatic community, security community, defence community, co-operative security, and the notion of a distinctive ASEAN peace process, which have entered regional discourses. In so doing he forced many to clarify their own thoughts and review the empirical evidence even as they sought to

take issue with his brand of realism. It is this role as the constructive critic that will be sorely missed in Michael Leifer.

Notes

1. Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security* (London: Pall Mall, 1967).
2. Michael Leifer, "A Personal Note", in *Elie Kedourie CBE, FBA, 1926–1992: History, Philosophy, Politics*, edited by Sylvia Kedourie (London; Portland OR: Frank Cass, c1998), p. 29.
3. Adam Roberts, "Obituary: Professor Michael Leifer", *The Independent*, 9 April 2001.
4. Michael Leifer, *Dilemmas of Statehood in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1972), p. xi.
5. *Cambodia: The Search for Security*, p. 19.
6. Michael Leifer, "The Paradox of ASEAN: A Security Organisation Without the Structure of an Alliance", *Round Table* No. 271 (July 1978), p. 261.
7. Michael Leifer, "ASEAN's Search for Regional Order" (Singapore: G Brash for Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 1987), p. 18.
8. "Southeast Asia", *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Michael Howard and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 239.
9. Michael Leifer, "The Limits of ASEAN's Expanding Role", unpublished paper written in mid-1997 in connection with an ISEAS commemoration of ASEAN's 30th anniversary, p. 16.

Southeast Asia: Conflict and Co-operation

INTRODUCTION

Conflict and co-operation are traditionally “such stuffs” as international relations are made on, and to Leifer, an understanding of their nature and inter-play is an essential point of entry to making sense of the international relations of Southeast Asia — an academic endeavour which for him had begun during the Cold War. Three sources of regional conflict during that era attracted his attention. These were contests over state identity; pre-colonial historical antagonisms, such as those between Vietnam and China and Kampuchea (Cambodia) and Vietnam; and legacies of the transfers of sovereignty resulting in disputes over state boundaries. Such conflicts — whether internal, for example, Communist insurgency in Thailand, Malay(sia), South Vietnam and Burma (Myanmar), or separatism in Southern Thailand and the Southern Philippines, or inter-state, for example, boundary disputes and territorial claims — although rooted in the region, acquired particular saliency when conjoined with the competitive interests of external powers. Such was the fate of local powers that lacked the capacity to manage regional order on their own (Ch. 2).

The conflicts that existed during Leifer's early academic entry into the region were a hinderance to regionwide co-operation. Revival of traditional antagonisms reflecting old fears and new anxieties between regional states and "mutual antipathy" underlay relations between Cambodia and its neighbours, namely, Vietnam and Thailand. Malaysia–Thai border problems, Confrontation, the Philippines' claim to Sabah, and post-separation Malaysia–Singapore tensions suggested a lack of trust and limited scope for regional integration. Leifer questions the notion of "Asian solutions to Asian problems" which assumed that regional commonality necessarily made for a conciliatory approach (Ch. 3).

By far the most cataclysmic regional conflict since World War II was the Vietnam War, which to Thailand especially, appeared as a fusion between historical threat and an emerging Communist menace. In a hitherto unpublished paper written in 1986, Leifer notes that the public impact of the war on regional states outside Indochina was low compared to what transpired in America. Regional responses depended largely on the political identities, experience and, above all, the security priorities of the governments. Regional dispositions ranged from neutrality to alliance. But even between regional allies of the United States (Thailand and the Philippines), interests and responses were differentiable. Despite varying strategic perspectives, Leifer saw that non-Communist Southeast Asia shared a common desire for the United States to play the role of prime manager of the regional balance of power. Such hope was not fulfilled in Indochina as the war came to an end (Ch. 4).

Besides seeking to understand regional conflict, Leifer also turned his attention to indigenous attempts to create institutional frameworks for regional association. He examines (in Ch. 5) the dynamics of regional diplomacy leading to the formation of the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) and its subsequent grounding by the Philippine claim to Sabah and the unfolding Confrontation against Malaysia by Indonesia. The Maphilindo proposal was stillborn given its hasty conception against the backdrop of Confrontation. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that superseded ASA was more promising in view of the transformed regional environment following the end of Confrontation and the inclusion of Indonesia. At the time, Leifer already saw that although such a regional association reflected essentially limited functional ties, its scope could well be extended as the habit of co-operation developed. Indicative of his realist outlook

Leifer felt that such progress would be determined by the self-interest of participating states.

Such a realist perspective was evident in his critique of David Mitrany's seminal theory of functionalism applied to the Southeast Asian context (Ch. 6). To Leifer, Southeast Asian political leaders guarded jealously their national sovereignty over any notion that regional co-operation might either render the state-form superfluous or lead to supranationality as suggested by functionalism. Reviewing the experiences of the Baguio and Bandung conferences of the 1950s, SEATO, ECAFE, ASA, early ASEAN and the Lower Mekong Basin Committee (the last, seen as a clearer example of functionalist endeavour), Leifer concluded that functional co-operation or rather "pseudo-functionalism" in Southeast Asia was most likely where it served the particular and separate interests of participating states — a practice which worked counter to the very process that Mitrany had sought to promote.

Sources of Regional Conflict

It is possible to identify three general sources of either internal or inter-state conflict within Southeast Asia, although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In this analysis, internal conflict is not differentiated from inter-state conflict as a factor relevant to the problem of regional order because, in its various forms, it has long been of major importance in attracting not only the interests of regional states but also the competitive involvement of external powers. The three sources of regional conflict may be described as: issues of state identity; historical antagonisms; and legacies of the transfers of sovereignty.

Issues of State Identity

This subject comprises the basic values which inform the social and political character of the state. It will be discussed under three headings:

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revolutionary social challenge; separatism and irredentism; and nation-building and alien minorities.

Revolutionary Social Challenge

Revolutionary social challenge has been a fundamental source of internal conflict, manifesting itself from the onset of decolonization. The circumstances of its expression have varied in each case of transfer of sovereignty and have depended, in part, on whether or not the colonial power in question was dogged or conciliatory in response to nationalist claims. The common feature of such conflict has been organized armed opposition to successor elites to colonialism by alternative elites who offer a radically different vision of modernity and social order. The appeals of such alternative elites are cast doctrinally in terms of the values of distributive justice and are designed to attract groups alienated by poverty, by gross disparities of private wealth and by the intolerance of a dominant culture. However, the prospect of adventure and a career is relevant to recruitment to revolutionary forces, as is resort to terror.

In every case of relatively peaceful and negotiated transfer of sovereignty within Southeast Asia, the authority of the successor government has been challenged by an insurgent Communist party which established a position of internal strength during the course of the Pacific War. The experience of Burma, Malay(si)a, Singapore and the Philippines may be cited in this respect, while Thailand, which was never subject to direct colonial domination, has shared that experience only during the past two decades. In Indonesia, where the colonial power used force in an attempt to deny nationalist claims, a Communist party enjoyed a tense co-existence within the mainstream of the nationalist movement until September 1948, when it became implicated in an abortive rebellion against the Republican government in Yogyakarta. After independence this party was rehabilitated, and it pursued its political goals within the framework of succeeding political systems. In October 1965 it was again implicated in an abortive coup whose outcome served to outlaw it.

In the special case of Indochina, where the colonial power also resisted nationalist claims, the Indochinese Communist Party — with a patrimonial political role in Laos and Kampuchea — was able to assume the leadership of Vietnamese nationalism. Indeed, it was the

only Communist party in the region to attain this position, and this had a decisive effect on the course of the struggle against the French in the First Indochina War. In Vietnam, the Communist Party succeeded to power only North of the 17th Parallel, with the conclusion of the Geneva Conference on Indochina in July 1954. Internal conflict, as such, was resolved only in part. Armed opposition revived South of the 17th Parallel in the late 1950s against an American-backed government in Saigon, as it did in Laos, where the Pathet Lao revolutionary movement exercised *de facto* control of two provinces bordering North Vietnam. It was not to revive, in any substantive sense, in Kampuchea until after the deposition of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in March 1970. From this point all of non-Communist Indochina was beset by a revolutionary challenge, which was successful in 1975.

Conflicts which result from revolutionary challenges to internal social and political orders tend not to stay self-contained. Whether a particular challenge is incipient or fully fledged it gives rise to a form of civil war, and the dynamics of this bitter activity — especially where ideological issues are involved — encourage contending internal parties to seek access to external support. In terms of geographic scale, such outside involvement in support of internal revolutionary challenge within South-east Asia has not been widespread in any substantial sense. For example, internal revolutionary challenge in Burma, Malay(sia), Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines has not been serviced significantly by regional parties or governments, if one represents China as external to South-east Asia although marching with it. External support has been more readily forthcoming for regimes subject to revolutionary threat.

Although Vietnam's Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, admitted his government's past support for revolutionary movements in Thailand and Malaysia during visits to those countries in 1978, decisive regional backing for such internal challenge has depended on facility of access and has obtained, primarily, in Indochina, where extra-regional interests have also been engaged heavily. The most striking example of such support was provided by the Vietnamese Communists during the course of the Second Indochina War. A client revolutionary movement in Laos was stiffened and sustained in order to ensure control of the eastern uplands of the country which provided logistical links between North and South Vietnam. A primary interest was the prosecution of the war South of the 17th

Parallel, which took priority over any fraternal party obligations. Thus, in the case of Kampuchea, the Vietnamese Communists saw more practical advantage in reaching a working accommodation with the conservative and ostensibly neutral government of Prince Sihanouk rather than in promoting the political interests of the fledgling Kampuchean Communist Party. It was only when Prince Sihanouk was deposed in March 1970 by a right-wing coalition, which threatened Vietnamese Communist use of logistical and sanctuary facilities within Kampuchea, that support for this neighbouring revolutionary party was forthcoming.

External support for internal revolutionary challenge has been bestowed also, primarily and with most effect, in Indochina. The geopolitical position of China has been most important in this respect. After October 1949 it was possible for the insurgent Vietnamese Communists to be assisted materially across a common border. And after July 1954 such material assistance was more easily conveyed, with access possible by sea as well as by land. China's provision for the Communist Party of Burma has also been of significance; but it has been of a limited order which has enabled that revolutionary party only to sustain itself militarily in the North-east of the country, and not to pose a decisive challenge to the government in Rangoon. With the intensification of Sino-Soviet conflict and the onset of China's attempt to rally South-east Asian governments in a countervailing united front, its support for revolutionary challenge has become increasingly ritual in character, if sustained in principle.

Revolutionary social challenge to incumbent governments within South-east Asia has been a persistent feature of the region and a continuing source of internal instability. Nonetheless, its ability to attract significant regional and extra-regional support has been restricted in geographic scope and has depended, in great part, on facility of access. The radical Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of East Timor, which declared the establishment on an independent republic in the former Portuguese possession in November 1975, was speedily overthrown by Indonesian military intervention across a common border; it was beyond the reach of external assistance. Internal revolutionary challenge has only succeeded, so far, where such assistance has been forthcoming in a practical manner. In the main, substantive assistance has come from external forces and has been forthcoming where the outcome of internal conflict has been perceived

to have importance beyond the bounds of the region. Indeed, it has been that very fact of external intervention which has been of major significance for regional conflict.

Co-operative regional responses to conflict arising from such internal challenge have assumed three primary forms: *ad hoc* military co-operation; political and economic co-operation; and formal alliances with external powers.

(1) Specific *ad hoc* bilateral military co-operation has been undertaken among ASEAN states with the object of striking at centres of insurgent activity along common borders. Such co-operation between the armed forces of Thailand and Malaysia, and also between those of Malaysia and Indonesia, has been conducted outside the formal framework of regional organization. It has taken the form also of maritime surveillance (which is equally relevant to the control of piracy and smuggling), of combined military exercises and of a measure of standardization of equipment and operational procedures, as well as exchanges of intelligence.

(2) A regional organization like ASEAN does not have a military function. Nonetheless, the five member governments share a sense of common predicament in relation to internal security: indeed it is their primary security concern.

(3) Formally structured alliance arrangements designed to provide for both external and internal security have been on the wane. The South-east Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) was disbanded in June 1977, though the alliance obligations remain, in principle, in force. The Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement which had relevance for the internal security of Malaysia and Singapore was superseded in November 1971 by a Five-Power (consultative) Defence Agreement with an external security function only. Its limited external military underpinning has eroded with the passage of time, although interest in its revival was generated following an initiative by Australia's Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, in September 1980. The Mutual Security Agreement between the Philippines and the United States in 1951, and the revised bases agreements of 1979, provide a nexus for military assistance, while the residual obligations of the United States to Thailand under the Manila Pact of September 1954 have been disinterred and used to justify increased arms supplies. An unpublished exchange of letters remains the basis for Britain's deployment of a battalion of Gurkhas in Brunei, at least until the end of 1983, when that state reverts to sovereignty.

Separatism and Irredentism

Political boundaries in South-east Asia have tended to follow a colonially inspired pattern of demarcation arrived at for reasons of administrative convenience. State forms have been stamped out in a part of the world distinguished by its great social diversity. As a result of a combination of colonial policy and ethnographic circumstances the successor states of the region have included within their bounds territorially-based minorities, some of whom have been unwilling to reconcile themselves to political dominance from culturally alien centres. Regional minority dissidence has been most marked in Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines. In some cases such dissidence has severely tested the soundness of the successor state, and has also been a factor in generating tension between regional states. Once again, the issue of external — including regional — support has been critical to the significance of the conflict. This type of conflict can become joined to revolutionary social challenge. For example, alliances of varying quality have been struck between Communists and dissident minority groups in virtually every state in the region. At times this has affected relations between Burma and Thailand, Thailand and Malaysia, Malaysia and Indonesia, and Malaysia and the Philippines.

Separatism has been a recurrent source of conflict within South-east Asia, if not the most dominant politically. Regional states have dealt with the threat which it poses bilaterally and, to an extent, within regional organization. Once again it should be pointed out that this kind of conflict has assumed its most far-reaching consequences when support has been extended (even if informally) by a major power.

Undoubtedly, minority dissidence expressed either in demands for autonomy or independence has caused friction between regional neighbours. Thai tolerance of the cross-border activities of Burmese minorities has been responsible for a recurrent downturn in relations. The attendant friction (much reduced after the end of the Second Indochina War) has never made a political impact beyond the bilateral relationship and has not engaged the interests of third parties. The same general conclusion applies concerning difficulties in the relationship between Thailand and Malaysia over the separatist activities of Moslems in the southern provinces of Thailand which abut the northern and dominantly Moslem provinces of Malaysia. This particular source of conflict does have a wider dimension in so far as it has

engaged the interests of Moslem governments within the framework of the Islamic Conference. However, the limited effectiveness of Moslem separatists operating within Thailand has restricted opportunities for external exploitation. A more significant example of external support for separatist-based conflict has obtained in the case of the southern Philippines. Open rebellion on the part of the Moslem community dates from October 1972, shortly after the declaration of martial law by President Marcos. This rebellion has been sustained by external support initially provided within the region from the neighbouring territory of Sabah, a constituent state of the Federation of Malaysia. This support came partly as an act of reprisal because of the past prosecution of a Philippine claim to Sabah. The internal rebellion has also attracted external support from Islamic states, especially and importantly in financial form from Libya. A significant regional consequence has been the strain imposed on relations between ASEAN partners.

Attempts by cultural minorities to secure separate political identity have neither been remarkably successful nor engendered major regional conflicts within South-east Asia. A primary part of the explanation for this limitation of conflict arises from the fact that separatism is not an easy enterprise to undertake. Singapore's independence from Malaysia was an involuntary act; it represented rejection, not successful separatism.

Separatism is endemic to South-east Asia as a source of conflict, but the intensity of that conflict has been limited in impact, even if it has strained the resources and tested the integrity of states such as Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines. Despite the serious domestic weaknesses which are characteristic of virtually all South-east Asian polities, dissident cultural minorities have not demonstrated sufficient capability to exploit these weaknesses to full advantage. The success of such an enterprise would seem to depend on decisive external support which has not been forthcoming.

Irredentism, of a kind, has enjoyed a better record within the area. For example, the unification of Vietnam can be placed within this category, as can Indonesia's incorporation of the western half of the island of New Guinea, if not that of East Timor. None of these episodes, however, arose from the inability of an alienated cultural minority to reconcile itself to the entrenched political dominance of a resented cultural majority. The two examples cited represent aspects of partially frustrated decolonization.

The example of West New Guinea merits limited discussion because the conflict involved assumed more than just a regional dimension. From the mid-1950s the Soviet Union had begun to engage in political competition with the United States in Asia. An obvious prize in South-east Asia was Indonesia, which was in serious dispute with her former colonial master, Holland, over the disposition of the western half of the island of New Guinea, which had been set aside in the transfer of sovereignty in 1949. The unwillingness of the United States to apply the same kind of pressure on Holland which had been a decisive factor in precipitating the transfer of sovereignty, and her initial partiality for the regional rebels in the late 1950s, encouraged a developing association between Indonesia and the Soviet Union whose nexus was the provision of arms. An enhanced Indonesian military capability lent credibility to a practice of coercive diplomacy and brought with it the prospect of armed confrontation whose outcome could have worked to both internal Communist and Soviet advantage. This prospect prompted American diplomatic intervention to contain and resolve the conflict. In these circumstances the conflict had its source in Dutch denial of the nationalist claim to the total territorial inheritance of colonialism, but it was brought to a point of crisis through external involvement.

It should be pointed out that the eastern half of the island of East Timor, which was forcibly incorporated into Indonesia, was never a part of the Netherlands East Indies: it had been colonized by Portugal. Indonesia's military intervention was in no sense an act of irredentism, although it may have been intended to deter any separatist tendencies elsewhere within its distended archipelago. It represented an attempt to deny the establishment and consolidation of a government of incompatible political philosophy within the ambit of the Indonesian state.

Nation-building and Alien Minorities

South-east Asia is distinguished by an immense cultural diversity which is made up, in part, of minorities without territorial roots within its post-colonial states. Most of these minorities are ethnic Chinese, most of whose antecedents migrated from Southern China from the nineteenth century onwards. Significant minorities from the Indian subcontinent settled in Burma, Malay(si)a and Singapore, while Vietnamese moved into Kampuchea and Laos under French

dispensation and also, in smaller numbers, as refugees into the north-east of Thailand during the course of the First Indochina War. Lao and Khmer refugees from successive Indochina Wars as well as Vietnamese 'boat people', have also sought sanctuary in Thailand.

In the main, alien ethnic minorities serviced the needs of colonial economy and administration and attracted the resentment and envy of the autochthonous people as a consequence. The degree of such resentment and envy was governed, of course, by individual state experience and, in this respect, cultural differences between regional states gave rise to differing degrees of acceptance of such minorities.

Policies of discrimination against alien minorities justified in the nation-building interest have affected relationships among regional and external states. A major local source of conflict arising from intra-regional migration has been Kampuchean resentment of Vietnamese settlement facilitated by colonial rule. In Kampuchea deep-seated racial hatred exploded with the killing of Vietnamese residents in April 1970, in the wake of the deposition of Prince Sihanouk and with the onset of armed intrusion by the Vietnamese Communists. Looked at in perspective, the gory episode in April 1970 was a subordinate dimension of a wider conflict rooted in the prospect of a unification of Vietnam on Communist terms. Tensions between Thailand and Vietnam over the repatriation of Vietnamese minorities have also been encompassed by this conflict.

The treatment of alien minorities by national governments has not evoked a uniform external response. In the case of Burma, her government adopted discriminatory measures against her large Indian minority in the early 1960s, resulting in a major repatriation. Subsequently a largescale exodus of Moslem residents of Bengali origin took place during 1977-8. In both these cases the issues between the governments concerned were settled on a bilateral basis without other political interests being engaged. Indian-Burmese relations were not subject to evident deterioration as a consequence of the application of nationalization measures to the retail trade, although Indian restraint was almost certainly governed by her embittered relationship with China.

A more evident source of conflict and consternation in bilateral relations has been seen regarding overseas Chinese residents. The policy of the People's Republic of China towards these overseas communities changed in the mid-1950s with the negotiation of a treaty with Indonesia designed to resolve the contentious issue of dual

nationality. Beijing's intention was to improve government-to-government relations by denying openly any legal obligation towards those residents of Chinese origin who had assumed the citizenship of their host country. Indeed, overseas Chinese were actively encouraged to assume such citizenship and to obey the laws of their adopted lands. In practice, the attitude of Chinese governments towards the overseas Chinese communities has tended to vary according to political circumstances. At times it has been found politic to overlook the most cruel treatment — for example, in the case of Kampuchea after April 1975 — while on other occasions their condition has been a matter of public controversy with the host government.

A bitter exchange over the alleged persecution of the resident Chinese community in Vietnam occurred in 1978. This issue, however, was not a source of conflict in itself.¹ It served to impair further an underlying relationship between China and Vietnam which had begun to deteriorate before the end of the Second Indochina War. In the circumstances the issue was more a symptom than a source of conflict.

In the case of the Chinese community in Vietnam, their alleged persecution became an issue which accelerated the momentum of conflict. It involved a matter of identity in so far as their ethno-cultural distinctiveness and affinity with people across the northern border made them suspect as a potential fifth column. The relationship between the overseas Chinese community and their mother-country became a weapon in the wider conflict over the pattern of power in the region as the government of Vietnam sought to represent all overseas Chinese in South-east Asia as insidious agents of Beijing. To some extent this charge was given greater credence by a revision of interest in the overseas communities by the Chinese government from early 1978. Regional states with significant resident Chinese communities were given cause for some apprehension, as indeed they were also when China exhibited a willingness to use force in her conflict with Vietnam in February 1979. The Vietnamese policy of encouraging, at a profit, the exodus of ethnic Chinese across the South China Sea was intended to reduce an undesirable alien presence and, probably, to demonstrate China's inability to protect them. In some of the countries of South-east Asia it had the effect of intensifying inter-communal friction and also introduced an element of strain into intra-ASEAN relations.

Since her revolution China has never enjoyed the luxury of dealing with states to her south to the exclusion of other concerns. It has been

those other concerns — namely, threats posed successively by the United States and the Soviet Union — which have governed Chinese policies. In this respect China's response to discriminatory treatment of overseas Chinese residents — whether citizens or not — by regional governments has been determined by extra-regional factors, most recently by the spectre of an assertive Vietnam rejecting Chinese leadership for an unholy alliance with the Soviet Union.

Historical Antagonism

South-east Asia assumed its present political-territorial form as a direct result of colonial domination. That domination contained and subordinated antagonisms between pre-colonial kingdoms which comprised political rivalries and also deep-seated differences of culture and identity. Where colonialism served to sustain state identity rather than to merge it with others in a wider administrative framework which became the basis for post-colonial succession, such antagonisms have survived in most conspicuous and politically relevant forms.

It is in the mainland of South-east Asia that such a phenomenon has assumed major significance as a source of conflict. In the maritime part of the region, including Malaysia, the transfers of sovereignty have had the effect of establishing states which had never existed in that form before the advent of colonial rule. Only minuscule Brunei, which is now a fraction of her former size and which survived because of colonial "protection", has experienced conflict arising, to a limited extent, from her pre-colonial identity. And even mainland states such as Burma and Thailand, which were antagonists before the advent of colonial rule, have experienced a post-colonial relationship marked by alternating tensions and accommodation rather than by a sustained revival of historical conflict. Kampuchea's relationship with Vietnam provides the striking regional example of such a revival, which might suggest that Communist rule reinforces traditional conflicts.

The experience of Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea in the 1830s, when an attempt was made to eradicate a traditional culture and to supplant it with an alien one, has left its legacy. Although it became conventional wisdom during the rule of Prince Sihanouk to label Vietnam and Thailand equally as political predators, it was Vietnam who was regarded with more apprehension. Fear of Vietnam — above all, a Communist Vietnam — was an abiding theme of

Prince Sihanouk's foreign policy, even when expressed in the form of political accommodation. This fear was inherited by both his right-wing and left-wing successors. Indeed, the restoration of historical antagonisms appeared as virtually an article of faith in the public rhetoric of the Kampuchean Communist government which came to power in April 1975.

Correspondingly, a similar pattern of relations has developed between Vietnam and China. At the onset of French colonial rule Vietnam was a formal vassal of China, if not subject to her direct political control. Over a number of centuries the two states had engaged in intermittent warfare, with Vietnam seeking to defend her independence from a dominating China. For China, a critical element in her conflict with Vietnam at the end of that decade was the burgeoning relationship between the governments of Hanoi and Moscow. Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea was perceived as serving the Soviet interest. However, the openly expressed desire by the Chinese leadership to put Vietnam in her place suggested a view of her southern neighbour which had its source in pre-colonial experience.

Although Thailand and Vietnam have never shared a common border their post-colonial relationship has also been shaped by historical experience of competition — in this case between culturally distinct peoples — for influence and advantage in the interposing states of Laos and Kampuchea. This competition resulted in an acceptable balance of advantage just before the coming of French colonial rule. From the viewpoint of governments in Bangkok the recent eradication of the "buffer" function of eastern neighbours by a vigorous Vietnam has posed a major threat to security and has encouraged active, if not open support for internal opposition to its dominance within Kampuchea.

Colonialism has had a major impact on the history of South-east Asia. Yet, in historical perspective, it represents only an interlude. The accompanying revival of some pre-colonial antagonisms has had an undoubted effect on the course of conflict within the region. If traditional Kampuchean-Vietnamese and Thai-Vietnamese antagonisms, as well as those between Vietnam and China, have been a source of conflict, the competitive engagement of external interests has served to fuel its furnaces. Indeed, it has been such competitive engagement combined with the revival of historical antagonisms which has served to make mainland South-east Asia the epicentre of regional conflict.

Legacies of the Transfers of Sovereignty

The transfer of sovereignty from colonial powers to independent governments was a mixed experience for South-east Asia, and the impact and the legacy of those transfers has varied from state to state. One such legacy, which has been cited above, has been the determination of state boundaries. This inheritance has not been uniformly well received: post-colonial boundaries have been challenged in the form of irredentist claims, for example. One such claim has been made by the government of the Philippines to the Malaysian state of Sabah, and this has yet to be relinquished in acceptable legal form. Conflict over this issue has tested the cohesion of ASEAN and has persisted, ironically, because of Moslem rebellion in the southern islands of the Philippines. Boundary issues have been a factor also in relations between Brunei and Malaysia; and between Malaysia and Thailand there has existed a latent tension arising from a boundary settlement determined by British colonial power in 1909. Boundary demarcation has also been a source, if not the root, of conflict between Kampuchea and Vietnam, and between Vietnam and China.

Conflict over state boundaries has assumed an important maritime dimension. The attractions of off-shore oil deposits have generated competing claims around the littoral, and over the islands and continental shelf of the South China Sea. In this context one notable legacy of the transfers of sovereignty has been the projection of Indonesia's archipelagic claim across the South China Sea as a consequence of an Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 whereby off-shore islands were placed under Dutch and, ultimately, Indonesian jurisdiction.

The transfers of sovereignty have also affected intra-regional conflict when the colonial power has been reluctant to give up its position. Dogged colonial rule was demonstrated in the case of the Netherlands East Indies and in that of French Indochina where independence was attained only after violent revolutionary struggles. Where the attainment of independence involved such struggle, political attitudes of suspicion and hostility have been engendered towards neighbouring states which have not undergone the same experience and which have even been involved, in some way, in seeking to frustrate nationalist goals.

This experience of socialization on the part of Indonesia affected the outlook of the government of President Sukarno which could not

comprehend the legitimacy of the Federation of Malaysia either at its conception or its subsequent establishment.

In general terms political boundaries bequeathed by colonial rule have not been an acute source of regional conflict in themselves even where less than well defined. The actual experience of the transfer of sovereignty has had a greater impact in particular circumstances. For example, the wider issue of regional order, which requires the acceptance of shared assumptions among the resident states, has undoubtedly been prejudiced by Vietnam's bitter and protracted experience of attaining independence.

These sources of conflict are in no sense mutually exclusive; they exercise influence in an inter-locking manner. What is most evident about their impact, however, is that, where acute, it conforms to a general global pattern. In other words, although they are rooted within the region, such conflicts take on special significance when the interests of major external powers become competitively engaged. Such is to be expected in the case of South-east Asia, where resident powers capable of assuming a regulating role in regional relationships are conspicuously absent.

Note

1. For a discussion of this issue see Bruce Grant, *The Boat People, an "Age" investigation* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin Books, 1979), Chapter 4.

Regional Association Sources of Conflict

Perhaps the most striking example of the revival of traditional antagonism, albeit in modern form, has been demonstrated in the case of Cambodia. This country, independent according to national legend in 1953, is the diminished legatee of the once great Khmer Empire. The apogee of Khmer dominance was in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. But from about the middle 1300s it was subject to territorial encroachment and challenge by the T'ai (Siamese), who by 1431 forced the Khmer to abandon their capital site at Angkor. Imperial decline in the west was accompanied from the seventeenth century by encroachment from the east by the Annamites (Vietnamese), who eventually annexed the Mekong delta region. By the nineteenth century Cambodia was wedged between competing antagonists and preserved only a semblance of independent existence. Only the intervention of France in 1863 and the establishment of a protectorate prevented the piecemeal territorial erosion of what remained of the Khmer state.

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Following the fall of metropolitan France in June 1940, Thailand with Japanese encouragement and support reasserted claims to rice-growing provinces restored to Cambodia by France in 1907. This episode served not only to undermine the reputation of the “protecting” power but also to sustain the national image of the predatory Thai. This image was reinforced for Cambodia after the attainment of independence when relations with Thailand were shaped by old fears and new anxieties.

Thailand was to align itself with the Western powers in the years after the Second World War and in 1954 became a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Cambodia, however, because of internal political circumstances and her geo-political situation was attracted to the idea and practice of non-alignment which was widely expounded in the wake of the 1954 Geneva Conference by India’s first Prime Minister. Thus Thailand and Cambodia came to be divided by past history and the cold war. Thailand and Cambodia’s easterly neighbour South Vietnam both came to look on Cambodia’s international position with resentment based on traditional attitudes and concern at what they regarded as a certain point of entry for communist activity. As Cambodia improved and harmonized its relationships with communist countries, in part a consequence of political difficulties with her aligned neighbours, the state of conflict intensified. The ousted Cambodian Head of State, Prince Sihanouk, frequently publicized his version of Thai encouragement and support for anti-government forces and has made no secret of his sensitivity to the personal slights and insults which he has received at the hands of Bangkok. Symptomatic of the mutual antipathy between the two countries was the extended dispute over the possession of the ruins of an ancient Khmer temple situated along their common northern border. This dispute, which was responsible in part for a total rupture in diplomatic relations in October 1961, was decided in favour of Cambodia by the International Court of Justice in June 1962. The degree of personal feeling involved in the hostile relationship was demonstrated fully in December 1963 when Prince Sihanouk proclaimed a national holiday to celebrate the death of the Thai Prime Minister, Marshal Sarit.

Thai-Cambodian relations have for the most part been sustained on the basis of mutual invective fed by border incidents and territorial transgressions. It should be pointed out, however, that this state of hostility has been shaped also by foreign policy needs. More recent

experience of both countries has led to a significant modification in the hostility pattern. Cambodia, having experienced a measure of fall-out from China's Cultural Revolution and subject to increasing territorial intrusions by communist Vietnamese, showed signs of willingness to coexist more readily with a Thailand equally flexible in the face of a need to adjust to an unpredictable measure of American disengagement from the mainland of Asia. With the Vietnamese communist challenge to Cambodia in 1970, the government of General Lon Nol repaired relations with Bangkok. It also countenanced the prospect of Thai military assistance.

Cambodia's relations with South Vietnam had, until recently, been no better than those with Thailand and, because of the regular spill-over of the conflict in Vietnam onto Cambodian territory, had tended to be appreciably worse. Historical experience, cultural differences and the role of the Vietnamese minority introduced during French hegemony laid a foundation for bad feeling. Although Cambodia does not now proclaim irredentist designs on territory under the formal jurisdiction of the regime in Saigon, there remains a legacy of resentment which centres on the significant Khmer minority which is domiciled across the border. Territorial disputes have occurred over the possession of certain off-shore islands in the Gulf of Siam. However, the most constant irritant in past relations was the violation of the border by South Vietnamese and American military formations engaged in hot pursuit of Vietcong. For its part, the Saigon regime had charged for nearly a decade that Cambodian territory served as an active sanctuary for the Vietcong. This charge came to have increasing substance from the end of 1967, and by 1969, the former Cambodian Head of State was himself complaining publicly of Vietnamese communist intrusions.

It was the furore over this issue which provided the pretext for the deposition of Prince Sihanouk. With the apparent threat to the successor regime and the military intervention of South Vietnam, relations were restored between Phnom Penh and Saigon, and the Cambodians found themselves obliged to tolerate the military presence of former antagonists in common cause against the communists.

One consequence of the political fall of Prince Sihanouk (regarded by the Vietnamese communists as an affront) was to revive the prospect of Thailand and a Vietnamese regime restoring the dual suzerainty over Cambodia which existed before the French Protectorate. In the face of communist challenge by an ethnic foe, historical antagonisms

have been subsumed. If this challenge is successfully met, one could expect a reversion to an earlier pattern of relations with Cambodia seeking to sustain a tenuous independence between two more powerful neighbours.

This brief account of the outline of Cambodia's relations with Thailand and the adjoining part of Vietnam is but one example of a tendency for history and geographic propinquity in Southeast Asia to work against regional co-operation. The UN-sponsored scheme for the development of the Mekong River basin affecting the riparian countries may be seen as an exception to this evaluation. However, the degree of co-operation that has taken place should be seen in the special context of the compartmentalized tangible advantages for the riparian states.

Cambodia and her neighbours present, perhaps, an obvious case of regional discord. There are, however, other intra-regional frictions which have a source that antedates independence. The relations between Thailand and Malaysia have, on the surface, been harmonious and fruitful. Yet, there is a basis of discord between the two countries which might one day disrupt the present state of good relations.

[T]he four northern states of mainland Malaya were transferred from formal Thai control at the beginning of the present century. When Malaya became independent in 1957, the four northern states, which had been returned temporarily during the Japanese hegemony, were included automatically within the new federation and have remained within Malaya and its successor, Malaysia. The population of the four states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Trengganu is predominantly ethnic Malay with a very small Thai minority. The population of the southern provinces of Thailand is also populated in the main by ethnic Malays who share the same religion, language, and culture as the people on the Malaysian side of the international border. The Malays of southern Thailand are thus set apart from the politically dominant Buddhist Thai and feel both a sense of physical and cultural difference from the regime in Bangkok. Following the Second World War and with the restoration of the northern states of Malaya to British administration, there emerged a significant if short-lived Malay irredentist movement which gave the Thai Government serious cause for concern.¹ Such concern has been sustained up to the present and is an important factor in explaining any measure of reluctance on the part of the Thai Government to co-operate with any enthusiasm with their Malaysian counterparts in rooting out the increasingly active remnant of the Malayan People's Liberation Army

which was obliged to seek refuge along the border region by the mid-1950s.

The Thai-Malaysian conflict is latent rather than active in terms of the overall relations between the two countries but it is certainly not overlooked by their respective foreign ministries. An even more striking example of the repercussions of ethnic straddling across international lines of demarcation is the case of Laos. Laos's problems and the consequent conflict arise from the lack of congruency between its French-created form and the mixed sense of identity of its population. Apart from traditionally rooted internal competition between scions of rival families, there is the ethnological and cultural divide between the valley Lao and the more numerous hill tribes who have a much greater sense of identification with counterparts on the North Vietnamese side of the border. And it is this divide based on altitudinal frontier which has provided an effective point of entry for communist direction.² The related regional and international significance arising from the Laotian situation is the correspondence of the present struggle for dominance to the historical struggle between the Thai and the Vietnamese interrupted by French imperial design.

For examples of international conflict arising out of the process of decolonization, there are no better cases in Southeast Asia than the "confrontation" of Malaysia by Indonesia between 1963 and 1966 and the continuing claim by the Philippines to the Malaysian state of Sabah (North Borneo). These two conflicts are of special significance because of their bearing on the progress of regional association.

Indonesia's confrontation of Malaysia is associated with the Sukarno era in which romantic nationalism came to be blended with deep-seated anti-colonial feeling. Indonesia had not objected to the independence of Malaya which occurred in August 1957. At the time Sukarno was engaged, with the assistance of the army, in overturning constitutional democracy. Malaya, however, was not regarded with undue benevolence, in part because its experience of obtaining independence was completely alien to that of Indonesia. The question of the Emergency and the need to crush a communist insurgency meant little in the Indonesian order of things. Independence against the Dutch had been achieved only after violent and bloody struggle. As a consequence of totally different political cultures, independent Malaya was regarded with patronizing tolerance. Such regard was to turn to irritation when it came to be believed in Djakarta that assistance and sanctuary was being provided for some of those engaged in the

1958 regional risings against the Republic Government. Personal annoyance crept into the relationship when the Prime Minister of Malaya Tunku Abdul Rahman attempted to mediate in the Indonesian dispute with Holland over the disposition of the western half of the island of New Guinea.

When confrontation came it was directed against Singapore also. The Indonesians had long felt resentment at the economic role of the entrepot, whose predominantly Chinese population in association with overseas Chinese in Indonesia controlled the major portion of the legal and illegal trade of the Republic.

The above factors were some of those that served as a backdrop to the announcement of confrontation in January 1963, nearly two years after the Malayan Prime Minister had first made public the prospect of a wider federation to include Singapore and the British Borneo territories. It was an incident in North Borneo which provided the pretext for forthright and active opposition to the Malaysia scheme.

An internal uprising in the British-protected state of Brunei in December 1962 sparked off official Indonesian support for the "people" of North Borneo, who, it was claimed, were resolutely opposed to the formation of Malaysia. The actual story of confrontation as it affected Malaysia together with accompanying diplomatic encounters has had its chroniclers and does not need repetition here.³ More relevant in this context are the roots of the conflict. Of special significance was Sukarno's resentment that a colonial power could decide the territorial configuration of a part of Southeast Asia vital to the security of Indonesia without its participation or approval. Related to this attitude was the Indonesian experience in attaining independence. There was a belief that genuine independence could not be granted by a colonial power but had to be taken forcibly. Malaysia seen in terms of these values appeared as a puppet; a neo-colonial construct designed to preserve and perpetuate the interests of the British. In the event, confrontation led to a temporary augmentation of the British military presence.

Resentment of the augmentation of territory by Malaya is believed also to have derived from personal ambitions to enlarge Indonesia beyond the territorial bounds of the former Netherlands East Indies. Evidence to support this view has been taken from the record of a conference held in June 1945 to discuss the form of the as yet unborn Indonesia. At this conference, Sukarno made public his dream of a greater Indonesia to include not only the Dutch colony but also

British North Borneo, Malaya, and even the Philippines.⁴ Symptomatic in this episode in relation to the period of confrontation was a long-standing Indonesian desire to be considered the dominant power in, at least, the maritime part of Southeast Asia by virtue of its historical myths, size, and population. The formation of Malaysia coincided also with political conditions within Indonesia which had gestated a style of rule in which national chauvinism was given full expression.

Confrontation moved into lower gear following the abortive coup of 1 October 1965 and was eventually brought to a halt following a dramatic change in internal political circumstances which had promoted its prosecution.⁵ The initial reconciliation between Djakarta and Kuala Lumpur involved a certain euphoria expressed in emphasis on ties of blood and culture across the Strait of Malacca. The rhetoric of reconciliation was soon to give way to a more guarded and cautious mutual relationship.

Co-operation to counter communist insurgency along a common border in Borneo has, however, taken place between Malaysia and Indonesia; they have also participated in wider regional association. At this juncture, it is sufficient to point to the hesitancy with which Malaysia views Indonesia not merely in terms of the recent experience of confrontation but also because of the enormous disparity in almost every respect between the two countries. Even more circumspect is the behaviour of Singapore, now also in limited institutional association with Indonesia. Singapore, which is predominantly Chinese in population, was for nearly two years a part of the Malaysian Federation and experienced the impact of confrontation in the rupture of all trading ties and in the form of terrorist bomb attacks. After confrontation, Indonesia established diplomatic ties with the independent island-republic and trade was resumed beyond 1963 levels. There is, however, more than a measure of apprehension among the members of the Singapore Government about the propensities of Indonesia. It is primarily for this reason that the Singapore Government sought, in advance of the completion of British military withdrawal, to establish a ground-to-air missile defence system. An indication of the underlying state of relations with Indonesia occurred in October 1968 following the execution in Singapore of two Indonesian marines convicted of the murder of civilians in a bomb attack on a bank building. The hangings provoked widespread demonstrations within Indonesia not only against the Singapore diplomatic mission but also