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Radical Islam in Southeast Asia and its Challenge to U.S. Policy

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INTRODUCTION

A generation ago, few knowledgeable observers of the religious and political scene in Southeast Asia would have expected to see articles entitled "Islamic Terrorism in Southeast Asia" or "Jihad Archipelago." At that time, Islam in Southeast Asia had a greater reputation for pluralism, flexibility, and tolerance than that found in the Middle East. Even today, the picture of a fanatical, rigid, and militant Islam does not characterize the vast majority of Muslims in the region. Compared to earlier years, there is no doubt that today's Southeast Asian Muslim is more aware of the rest of the Islamic world, practices his religion more faithfully, and senses that Islam is a target of outside forces that want to weaken its place in the world. The Southeast Asian Muslims now more fully identify themselves with the global Islamic community.

Within a framework of greater religious fervor, radical or extremist Islam in Southeast Asia reaches the headlines through dramatic acts such as the Bali bombing of 2002 and violence and kidnappings in the southern Philippines. However, although this form of Islam is followed only by a small percentage of Muslims in the region, it is complex in its antecedents, reasons for being, methods of expression, and goals. Even the definition of the meaning of radical Islam in the context of the region has been open to debate. To understand its scope and to provide some direction to American policymakers and the general public, we need to address five questions:

1. What do we mean by radical or extremist Islam in Southeast Asia?
2. How did radical Islam develop in the region, and how has this historical development framed contemporary events?
3. How has radical Islam manifested itself in the region in recent years?
4. Why have a minority of Muslims turned to extremist Islam, and to what extent have their goals and methods resonated in the general Southeast Asian public?
5. Given these factors, what role can the United States play in containing or reducing the more virulent aspects of extremist Islam and how they reverberate in the general public in Southeast Asia?

In this analysis, it is useful to differentiate between separatist ethno-religious activities and the actions and beliefs of Islamic radicals in majority Muslim states. In the former case, the principal examples of Muslim minority separatism have been found in the southern Philippines and south Thailand, although there has also been long-term conflict involving Muslim minorities in the Arakan region of Myanmar (Burma). In recent decades, each of these regions has experienced significant violence involving Muslims. As will be illustrated later in this paper, these separatist movements differ from other Islamic groups in the region in terms of reasons for their existence, goals, and operations. At times, elements within them have organizational and ideological ties to extremist groups in other parts of the Muslim world. This paper will emphasize two of the three Muslim majority states in the region: Indonesia and Malaysia. Radical Islam has played an important role in these countries, but it is relatively quiescent in the third Muslim majority state, Brunei. To this mix we must add Singapore, which has a Muslim population of only about 15%. Radical Islamic elements in the island state have been tied to violent groups in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

WHAT IS RADICAL ISLAM?

Western media have frequently described Muslim acts and behavior as "radical" or "extreme." However, the very definition of radical or extremist Islam has been a contentious issue in Southeast Asia. The classic definition of terrorism emphasizes using or advocating violence against innocent civilians. There is general agreement within mainstream Islam in Southeast Asia that such actions in the name of Islam should be unacceptable. This classification would bring into the extremist category a significant number of national and cross-national organizations across Southeast Asia, many of which have common religious goals and have interacted with one another in the past. Even using the employment of violence as a requisite for being radical presents complications. Many Muslims in the region would exclude from the radical category organizations fighting to defend Islam against external forces perceived to be seeking to weaken or dominate Muslim peoples. Thus, there are many Southeast Asian Muslims who would refuse to define as radical most ethno-religious Muslim separatist minority groups in the Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar, except when they intentionally target innocent civilians. It is argued that these people are only defending their rights against unjust national government policies.

Defining extremism on the basis of positions on religious issues becomes even more tenuous. Radical Islamists are often characterized as seeking to establish an Islamic state based upon the Sharia (Islamic law). However, significant numbers of Muslims in Southeast Asia would like to see the establishment of an Islamic state and the incorporation of Islamic law into the state legal system. Mainstream political and religious leaders throughout the region have supported both principles. Malaysia and Brunei have stated that Islam is the official religion of the state, and their leaders have asserted that they are guided by Islamic principles. Islamic religious courts are allowed in Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. Positions that generally are not seen as mainstream call for the imposition of harsher forms of Islamic criminal law, the establishment of an Islamic state that is exclusionary and does not grant fundamental rights to non-Muslims, and the employment of violent extralegal means to achieve religious goals.

The question as to who is a radical or extremist Muslim has been further complicated by efforts of the Malaysian and Indonesian governments to control and expunge "deviant" or unorthodox interpretations of Islam. While some individuals and organizations so characterized have been marginal theologically or militant in their programs, political opponents have charged governments with using "deviation" as a means of criticizing political challengers. Additionally, Sunni Islam is the dominant interpretation of the faith in Southeast Asia, and state and religious authorities have defined some aspects of Shi'ism to be unacceptable. In the past, the Indonesian government has arrested individuals for writing and speaking favorably about policies of the late Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Malaysian authorities have discouraged conversion to Shi'ism.

Recognizing these subtleties, a useful definition of radical or extremist Islam should include at least one of the following characteristics:

1. Support of violence against noncombatants in the name of Islam to achieve religious goals.
2. Support of an exclusionary Islam that denies fundamental rights to non- Muslims on religious grounds and rejects almost all forms of both religious and political pluralism.

With this definition in mind, it is useful to analyze the history of radical Islam and how it has influenced the present situation.

HISTORY

In the decades prior to World War II, violent activities in the name of Islam in Southeast Asia were relatively isolated. In the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), Dutch colonial administrators feared the influence of Muslims educated in the Middle East and pilgrims (hadjis) returning from Mecca.[1] This "haji-phobia" rose from worries that these individuals brought back with them a radical Islam that would be used against the Dutch. Many Muslim activists in the Indies did favor the establishment of an Islamic state and the full implementation of Sharia law. However, during most of this period, there was little systematic violence instigated by organized Islamic groups in the name of their faith. In fact, the only major armed resistance in the decades prior to World War II in the Indies came from secular communist-led organizations.

There were similar fears expressed by colonial officials in Malaya and the same paucity of organized violence in the name of Islam in the first half of the twentieth century. In nearby Thailand, the Malay Muslims in the south were so isolated and distant from the power structure in Bangkok that they were simply ignored by Thai authorities, although there was limited ethno-religious conflict. Only in the southern Philippines was there violence, and this came in the name of both religious and ethnic separatism and fears of Christian economic and political penetration into traditional Muslim-populated lands. However, during most of the period of American colonial rule, there was general accommodation between the government in Manila and traditional Muslim leaders.

This relatively peaceful pattern began to break down in independent Indonesia in the late 1940s. The first decade after the grant of independence by the Dutch in 1949 brought considerable ethnic and religious conflict from separatists in outlying areas of the archipelago, although the principle secessionists in those years were from Christian areas. From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, a militant organization called Dar ul Islam, centered in West Java, warred against the

[1] von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism.*

central government, first the Dutch and then the Indonesian authorities. Its adherents formed an Islamic state based upon Islamic law and initially the foundation of its leadership was theocratic with religious teachers as its civil authority. Over time, Dar ul Islam followed a pattern familiar among many later radical Islamic organizations. Its organization began to splinter. Some elements were accused of brutalizing the local population and others were described as displaying more secular tendencies and, all too often, elements of the Dar ul Islam became involved in criminal goals and operations. Also illustrative of later religious movements in the region, its development rose out of serious economic conditions. The economic environment of the time was unsettled given the nationalist conflict between the Indonesians and Dutch and the changing agrarian conditions. However, the religious foundations and ideas of Dar ul Islam continue to resonate among Islamic extremists in the 21st century who see the organization as part of their heritage.

Following the collapse of Dar ul Islam and until the 1990s, radical Islam made the headlines in relatively isolated violent actions. After the mid 1960s, Indonesia was under the control of the military-dominated "New Order," and through most of this era, political Islam was not allowed a role in national politics. The national ideology, the Pancasila, rejected any primacy for religion, and organizations were not permitted to espouse Islam as part of their platform. Religion was relegated to the personal, whether it was radical or moderate. Extremist Islam came into the national purview by way of anti-Christian activities and small violence-prone organizations such as Kommando Jihad. Again, these early activities forecast more recent events. Kommando Jihad (which was not called that by its members) was involved in a number of violent actions, in particular the hijacking of a Garuda Airlines plane in the 1970s. Many believe it was a tool of the Indonesian government, although there also may have been contacts with later members of Jemaah Islamiyah, the well-known contemporary Islamic radical group.

Anti-Christian views have a long history in Indonesia where the Christians were often allied to the Dutch colonial regime. Post-independence Christian secessionist movements added to the perception that that they were not loyal to the republic. Tensions between members of the Christian and Muslim communities continued to simmer in the succeeding decades. This anti-Christian sentiment later gave rise to another extremist group in 2000, Laskar Jihad. Thus, while

the period after the collapse of Dar ul Islam in the early 1960s to the 1990s was relatively peaceful, it had the seeds of future problems.

Malaysia experienced relatively little extremist Islamic violence in the decades after achieving independence in 1957. What did take place were largely rural protests in which religion was not the prime factor or actions by Muslim foreigners. The most dramatic examples of the latter were a "suicide" attack on a police station by a Cham-(Muslim refugees from Cambodia) led group in 1980 and earlier desecrations of Hindu temples in Malaysia blamed on Muslims from the Indian Subcontinent. In neither case were the incidents tied to domestic Muslim organizations. Unlike Indonesia, Malaysian authorities were not accused of inciting these groups, although they did use the negative reactions to them to tie violence to more conservative Islamic opponents.

While violence in the name of Islam did not generally characterize Indonesia and Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s, events were taking place in the region and outside it that gave impetus to a renewed sense of Islamic identity and provided fodder to more radical expressions at the end of the 20th century. In the early 1970s, the world oil crisis had two important repercussions among Southeast Asian Muslims. The challenge to the West presented by the Arab-led oil embargo gave a sense of exhilaration to many in the local population who saw it as an example of a renewed Muslim position of world power.[2] Secondly, the new petrodollars that were accumulated after the crisis allowed both private and state Middle Eastern actors to provide the funding to promulgate their views of Islam to the outside world, including Southeast Asia. Much of this aid was in the form of support for the expansion of general knowledge of Islam including aiding religious schools, distributing Korans, and providing scholarships for study in the Middle East. However, this new wealth also presented the opportunity to spread the rigid Wahabbi interpretation of Islam and other Islamic ideas that were to provide the foundation for future religious extremism.

The end of the 1970s brought two more events that were to reverberate in the region and give strength to the Islamic extremists, the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Few Southeast Asian Muslims supported the Iranian model of a clerically led

[2] von der Mehden, *Two Worlds of Islam.*

regime, and Shi'ism had almost no indigenous adherents in the largely Sunni Muslim population of the region. However, the revolution, like the oil crisis, was perceived as another successful illustration of an Islamic challenge to the West. Many activists also were attracted by the establishment of a state and society based upon Islamic principles. The revolution gained sufficient popularity in Southeast Asia that efforts were made to contain its influence by Indonesian and Malaysian authorities, and the activities of Iranian embassies came under close scrutiny.

The Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan brought almost universal condemnation from Southeast Asian Muslims and allowed them to join with activists from other Muslim countries in demanding the ouster of the Soviets. Perhaps more importantly, a number of contemporary Islamic radicals went to Afghanistan where they joined other armed militants from around the Muslim world. There they received military training and became acquainted with radical Islamic ideas. Several activists from Southeast Asia have described this period as life-changing and an impetus for later armed action. However, it is important not to overgeneralize about Afghan War veterans and characterize all of them as somehow allied organizationally or ideologically. For example, the leader of one of Indonesia's largest extremist groups, Laskar Jihad, stated that he met Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan, but did not consider him a good Muslim.

As a backdrop to these events, two other factors in this era were significant in inciting radical Islam in Southeast Asia: the growth of intellectual contact with the world Islamic community and an increasing flow of information about the plight of Muslims in countries outside their own. The last quarter of the 20th century brought a major expansion in the importation into Southeast Asia of Islamic ideas and information from the Middle East and South Asia. Historically, new Islamic thought generally came from pilgrims returning from Mecca and a small number of returning religious students. These ideas tended to be more traditional and tied to less radical thinking. In the 1980s and 1990s, this flow of ideas and information was expanded by an increasing number of translations of contemporary Muslim writers available in bookstores in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Those published in the vernacular included a wide range of leaders of the Islamic revival in the Middle East including A. Shariati, S. Qutb, H. Al-Banna, M. Ghazali, and A.

Maududi.[3] These generated new thinking about the meaning of political Islam and its role in society. This period also experienced a burgeoning of conferences, seminars, and other meetings of Islamic scholars from the region, and many attended similar venues in Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Islamic radicals from across the Muslim world also began to meet clandestinely. Increasingly, some of the most innovative commentators on Islam received their advanced degrees in the West, but more radical interpretations still tended to come out of the Middle East.

This plethora of new ideas and information was able to reach an increasing number of Southeast Asian Muslims because of other changes in the region. Under colonial administration, there was only a small minority of Muslims who were literate in Western or indigenous languages, and the bulk of Islamic religious education was rote learning of scripture in Arabic. By the end of the century, over 90 percent of the Muslim population of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia was literate. Islamic secondary schools and universities proliferated, and Islamic education became compulsory for most Muslim students in public schools. Islamic madrasahs (Islamic schools) were founded, and some were led by more radical Muslims. There was a concomitant expansion of religious literature, both imported and locally authored. With literacy and greater availability of the written word, came the almost universal presence of television, often presenting subjects with religious connotations. All of these factors brought Southeast Asians into a much closer relationship with the wider ummah (Islamic community).

A steady expansion of knowledge of mainstream Islam in Southeast Asia and greater attention to religious practices also came from domestic factors. The expansion of Islamic schools and required courses in Islam in public schools laid a better foundation for understanding the faith. Religious practices, such as prayer and fasting were followed more faithfully, and the wearing of "modest" clothing by women became the norm in urban areas. Externally, Muslim society in Southeast Asia displayed a more Islamic atmosphere.

The expansion of information sources also made Southeast Asian Muslims more aware of what they saw as challenges to the faith in other parts of the world. Certainly, the emotionally charged

[3] See note 2 above.

Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been closely followed in the region, and Muslims there have almost universally condemned the Israelis. The perception of a one-sided support of Israel by the United States has fueled strong rhetoric and action by Islamic extremists in the region. The argument is frequently made that while there is Islamic terrorism, Israel is equally guilty of terrorism against Palestinians. Southeast Asian Muslims have also been critical of what has been characterized as Western bias regarding Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, and other Muslim-populated states. These "attacks on the faith" fueled radical Islam throughout the region.

CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENT FOR ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

During the past two decades, many of these elements combined to give impetus to new, more radical, and violent forms of Islamic organizations. They were strengthened by three major factors: a growing impatience with the process of change as envisioned by Muslim activists, the economic crisis that hit Southeast Asia in the 1990s, and events in the Middle East.

It should be understood that by the end of the 20th century both governments of majority Muslim states and the primary leadership of Muslim minority organizations proclaimed moderate Islamic positions. Malaysia is ruled by a Malay Muslim-dominated coalition which espouses a moderate interpretation of the faith fashioned to meet the needs of the modern world and employs a wide range of legal and political means to limit the influence of radical Islamic ideas and organizations. Through most of the years of "New Order" rule in Indonesia, Islam was not allowed a political role. The new democratic electorate that followed chose a parliament in which Islamic parties have been in the minority in two national elections and radicals received a very small percentage of the national vote. The first directly elected president of the republic came from a secular military background. The leadership of the largest political organizations among the Muslim minorities of Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines have rejected radical Islam and sought compromise with their national governments.

To the extremists, there appeared insufficient movement towards the Islamic goals that they espoused. This emphasis upon moderation meant that those with a more radical agenda also perceived that they had little room to advance their policies through an evolutionary democratic

process. Their impatience with progress towards their goals and frustration with the political system led them to turn toward extraconstitutional means of change. In Indonesia the new democratic government established in the late 20th century brought opportunity and further dissatisfaction. The unstable political conditions surrounding the fall of the "New Order" and the fragile nature of the infant democracy appeared to provide the opportunity to move the extremists' more radical Islamic agenda. However, the failure of political parties with more Islamic platforms to achieve control of the new government was decried, and many radicals sought other means to advance their agenda.

This unfavorable political environment was paralleled by the Asian economic crisis of the late 20th century which severely damaged local economies. The most severely hit was Indonesia. Under the "New Order," the republic had moved forward economically on many fronts. However, the system was also characterized by a much greater dependence upon foreign capital, high levels of corruption, and a weak financial structure. The economic crisis brought high levels of unemployment, a major increase in the number of Indonesians falling below the poverty line, a significant drop in the value of the currency, the closing of more than 60 banks, and a budget deficit that did not allow the government to meet the normal needs of the people.

These conditions led elements of the population to seek scapegoats and weakened support for government institutions. Local Chinese were seen as tied to the corruption of the old regime and became targets of mobs. Tensions between Christians and Muslims increased, and Muslim groups accused foreigners as being part of a world capitalist system that exploited Indonesians. The adverse effects of globalization became a significant political issue. The perceived failure of Western values and methods to meet the needs of the average Indonesian was forwarded by Islamic radicals as another reason to reject more moderate democratic means of governance.

Finally, conditions in the Middle East have been exploited by radicals in Southeast Asia whose positions on the region tend to resonate with the general population. During recent decades, Muslim activists in the region have strongly criticized the character of many regimes in the Middle East and what they see as American support of these governments. Democratic critics attack what they see as the dictatorial aspects of the Egyptian, Saudi, and Pakistani regimes.

Some religious activists accuse these and other governments of being opposed to true Islamic values. Both radical and moderates charge the United States with supporting these regimes and acting hypocritically with regard to advancing democracy in the Islamic world.

However, a more emotional and significant factor has been criticism of what is perceived as attacks upon Islam in the Middle East. The Palestinian intifada and continued violence involving Israel is highly publicized in the media in Muslim Southeast Asia. As will be analyzed later, the war in Iraq has brought strong condemnation by radical and moderate Muslims alike and provided radical Muslims with a cause which resonates powerfully within the general Islamic community. As will also be detailed, the "War on Terror" has been seen by a significant portion of this population to be a "War on Islam."

In sum, the last half of the 20th century provided a fertile ground for Islamic radicalism, although its underpinnings were established earlier as Southeast Asian Muslims became more aware of their religion and conditions across the Islamic world. By the end of the 20th century, this extremism was developing a theological and ideological foundation that provided the rationale for contemporary acts of religiously based violence. Intellectually, these roots lay in Middle Eastern sources brought through imported literature, travel and study abroad, and the influence of radical individuals from that area teaching and lecturing in Southeast Asia. Within the region, religious schools sprang up that became centers for more radical thinking and the producers of members of extremist Islamic organizations.

Important in molding the radical agenda was the Wahabbi-Salafy school of thinking originating in Saudi Arabia, but influential elsewhere in the Middle East and South Asia.[4] Salafy belief rejects innovation, superstition, and what they see as "un-Islamic" additions to Islam as it was originally constructed. In Southeast Asia the more purist elements strongly oppose political organization and activism and do not agree with extremist calls for aggressive jihad and the overthrow of governments. However, a more militant form of Salafy thinking became active in Indonesia in the early 1990s and formed the foundation for several extremist groups. It tended to reject religious and political pluralism and criticized "un-Islamic" beliefs and practices of other

[4] ICG, "Indonesian Backgrounder: Why Salafism."

Muslims. Also significant in influencing Southeast Asian militants were those who articulated the religious ideology of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and others who rejected what they considered to be "un-Islamic" authority.

While variations exist among the multitude of radical elements in Southeast Asia, there is general agreement on many issues. They seek the establishment of an Islamic state, many arguing that present governments are inefficient, corrupt, and "un-Islamic." However, there is not consensus on how that is to be formulated. Some would prefer one composed of Muslims from throughout Southeast Asia, while others are more nationalistic. There are those who seek to form a new Caliphate for the region. All assert the need to have all Muslims ruled by a system based upon the Sharia. There is little support for democratic pluralism and many reject the concept of religious pluralism. Many would state that Allah is the source of all power and wisdom, and that it is against the foundations of Islam to proclaim that authority resides in the people. There is also a strong anti-Christian viewpoint articulated by the great majority of these groups, and Christian churches have been a prime target of more militant Islamic extremists.

Following Wahabbi tenets, there is a general call for a more pure and austere life, although not all follow their own teachings. Part of this agenda is strong criticism of what are seen to be questionable values inherent in Western life and teachings. Thus, targeting nightclubs, cinemas, shopping malls, hotels where Westerners reside, and other artifacts of Western culture is simply perceived as part of an effort to purify. Finally, these groups have become increasingly opposed to the United States. Originally, this antipathy was based upon U.S. support of Israel and the view of America as the fountainhead of sinful Western culture. Opposition has been strengthened by the Iraq War and the "War Against Terrorism."

CONTEMPORARY VIOLENT MANIFESTATIONS OF RADICAL ISLAM

It is possible to delineate three forms of violent contemporary manifestations of radical Islam in Southeast Asia:

1. Sectarian conflict

2. Islamic minority movements
3. Violent Political Islam

While each of these manifestations tends to have distinct aspects in terms of the forces that mold their goals and programs, individuals and organizations have frequently declared their adherence to more than one foundation for their programs. For example, there have been reported contacts between the regional Islamic organization Jemaah Islamiyah and secessionist groups in both the Philippines and southern Thailand. As well, there are strong sectarian strains in minority movements in these countries and among members of political Islam groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah.

SECTARIAN CONFLICT

As previously noted, sectarian conflict has a long history in Southeast Asia. However, in recent years, Christian-Muslim discord in Muslim majority countries has largely been limited to Indonesia. Some Christians in Malaysia have complained about laws intended to prohibit conversion from Islam and difficulties in obtaining building permits for churches. However, in recent years, Christians and adherents of Buddhism and Hinduism have rarely been physically attacked by Muslim extremists. The same has not been true in Indonesia, where a reinvigoration of anti-Christian tensions occurred in the early 1990s. Anti-Christian views were not only expressed by radical Muslims. Violent anti-Christian groups had at least the tacit support of elements of the "New Order" government and military. Leaders of moderate Muslim organizations have also spoken and written about Christians in Indonesia in derogatory tones. Some missionary publications have strengthened this animosity by printing negative comments about Islam.

The economic crisis of the late 1990s and the revival of a democratic Indonesia after 1998 coincided with a major increase in sectarian violence in Indonesia. The unstable conditions of the period exacerbated already existent communal tensions. The sectarian violence of this time differed from past cases in several key ways. The levels of violence have been greater than at any time since the early years of independence. Anti-Christian Muslims have been better organized

and received greater support from those in authority. Leadership of the major organization involved in anti-Christian activities has expressed a religious ideology influenced by radical foreign roots.

Death and destruction from sectarian violence in Indonesia has been far larger than the combined acts of all of the terrorist incidents involving other Islamic radicals in Southeast Asia. Exact numbers impacted by this violence are difficult to come by, but during the past decade there have probably been at least 5,000 people killed and approximately 500,000 displaced. Bombings, killing, arson, and other destruction have been carried out by both Christians and Muslims, much of it the responsibility of organized groups.

The major fomenter of violence on the Muslim side was Laskar Jihad and its thousands of militia.[5] Laskar Jihad officially lasted only two years, from 2000 to 2002, when political and religious pressures brought its voluntary demise. During this period, it became the largest private group of Islamic militants in Southeast Asia. Its militia was active primarily in parts of East Indonesia where it claimed that it was reacting to Christian attacks on Muslims.

Laskar Jihad also differed from other anti-Christian organizations in terms of its more radical but not necessarily unified Islamic ideology. Its leader, Ja'far Umar Thalib, was educated in religious schools in Indonesia and Pakistan and served in the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan for two years. In his schooling he came under the influence of Wahabbi-Salafy teachers. He does not describe himself as an Islamic radical intellectually and has not called for replacing the Indonesian government with an Islamic state. He also has explained that while he does not agree with U.S. foreign policy, he does not reject American material goods, including Coca Cola. However, he and other Salafy adherents in Laskar Jihad reject the Western democratic model, call for the literal interpretation of the Islamic texts, the implementation of a stricter enforcement of Islamic law, and have supported the concept of jihad against Christians in Indonesia. In sum, it would appear that many of the organization's positions and actions put it outside the mainstream of Indonesian Islam.

[5] Davis, Laskar, "Jihad and the Position"; Sirozi, "The Intellectual Roots"; van Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism."

Yet, the question has to be asked, "How is it that the violent Laskar Jihad did not receive the international attention of groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and, in fact, was not put on the American list of terrorist organizations?" Leaving aside the U.S. decision, there were several reasons why Laskar Jihad was not so targeted. The attacks of its militia were usually against domestic opponents in relatively isolated parts of the archipelago. Westerners were left alone, unlike the bombing of the nightclub on Bali in 2002 and the Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta in 2003, carried out by associates of Jemaah Islamiyah. Nor were the targets all innocent victims given the depredations of Christian groups against Muslims. There is little clear proof of any formal liaison between Laskar Jihad and either Jemaah Islamiyah or al-Qaeda, although some have noted similarities between the organizations. Laskar Jihad attempted to differentiate itself from these groups. Its leader has not regarded Bin Laden as a good Muslim and has argued that suicide attacks against civilians are un-Islamic.

Finally, there has been a lengthy relationship between Laskar Jihad and the government and Islamic authorities. Muslims have expressed considerable antagonism against anti-Muslim actions by Christians in East Indonesia and sympathy for the Laskar Jihad militia sent to fight them. There is general agreement that elements of the Indonesian military supplied arms, training, and perhaps personnel to the Laskar Jihad forces. Traditional Muslim leaders and some members of Islamic parties in Parliament expressed support for the organization, although ultimately, key religious leaders turned against Laskar Jihad's methods. When Ja'far Umar Thalib was arrested, he was visited in prison by sympathetic politicians, including the then vice president of the republic. Although Laskar Jihad has been formally disbanded, to this day sectarian conflict between Christians and Muslims continues, with both sides responsible for death and destruction. While such activities are regularly reported in Christian missionary sources, they do not generally resonate in the international community and are not usually viewed as part of radical Islam.

ISLAMIC MINORITY MOVEMENTS

Muslim minorities have been in conflict with numerous governments during the past several decades, most particularly in the Philippines and southern Thailand. However, it would be

inaccurate to equate most of the efforts of these peoples to achieve autonomy or independence as a manifestation of radical Islam. In the first place, their resentments toward local and national authorities are multifaceted, with religion being only one of several issues. Secondly, only a small number of these minorities adhere to extremist religious views, and the leadership of the largest secessionist organizations have maintained a moderate religious stance. Three often interrelated factors have generally been responsible for these conflicting relations.

Ethnic Differences

Muslim minorities in southern Thailand, the Philippines, and Myanmar have differed ethnically from majority populations. The Muslims in the southern provinces of Thailand are ethnically Malay rather than Thai, and they have a distinct history and customs. The derogatory word used by Thai Buddhists for these Malay Muslims is "Khaeg" or "guest." The inhabitants of the southern Philippines have the same ethnic Malay base as the majority population but come from different tribes with their own dialects and customs. The Moros in the southern Philippines view Islam as an integral part of their ethnicity. The Muslim minority of the Arakan region of Myanmar is not considered an indigenous people by the present government, which is part of its political strategy of marginalization. These differences have led to a history of ethnic bias and have hindered the integration of Muslim minorities into the general society. In the past, the Thai government employed harsh methods to assimilate the Malay Muslims into the Kingdom and attempted to weaken Malay language and customs. Similar efforts were made by Burmese authorities, while in the southern Philippines the transmigration of Catholic Filipinos into formerly Muslim areas had similar results.

Sectarian Differences

The Rohinga in Myanmar and Malays in southern Thailand are small minorities in majority Buddhist nations, while the Muslims in the southern Philippines face a similarly dominant Christian population. Historically, all three are confronted by efforts of elements of the majority religion to weaken their Muslim religious loyalties and institutions. There has been a perception among these Muslims that the dominant religion has attempted to marginalize them.

Economic and Political Repression

Minorities in all of these countries have perceived that the central government has facilitated their economic and political marginalization. Just as many people were sympathetic to the communist cause in Southeast Asia more for economic reasons than ideology, economic and political factors can overshadow theology today among Muslim minorities. Government repression in Myanmar led hundreds of thousands of Muslims to flee to Bangladesh. Thai authorities largely ignored the Malay Muslims in the south until the 1960s. Up to that period, there were almost no Malay Muslim members of the political, bureaucratic, or military elite; and the industrial, commercial, agricultural, and communications infrastructure was almost non existent. Later the government in Bangkok launched major reforms in education, communications, and political participation, but many Muslims in the south still perceive that they do not receive equal treatment and respect from the Thai Buddhist majority.

For decades Muslims in the southern Philippines have complained of the influx of Catholics from other parts of the archipelago, and they saw themselves become a minority within their own territory.[6] While they perceived that their own economic needs were neglected, they also experienced the usurpation of their lands and the domination of their economy by people from other parts of the Philippines. The two provinces with the highest Islamic violence are ranked by the United Nations as 73rd and 76th in development of the 77 Philippine Provinces.[7] On the island of Basilan, 71 percent of the people are Muslim but 75 percent of the land is owned by Christians.[8] In addition, many Muslims have objected to what they believed to be a lack of respect for their customs and religious institutions and have rejected efforts to be integrated into the national society. Similar to experiences in southern Thailand, there have been changes in recent decades, including recognition of Muslim religious institutions, increased autonomy, and attempts at economic and social development. However, existing disparities with other parts of the archipelago and the continued influx of Catholics from the north have reinforced discontentment.[9] The experiences in both Thailand and the Philippines give credence to the old

[6] Stark, "Muslims in the Philippines;" McKenna, "Muslim Rebels and Rulers."
[7] Baker, "UNHCR Mindanao Consultancy Final Report."
[8] Donnelly, "Terrorism in the Southern Philippines."
[9] Stark, "Muslims in the Philippines."

theory in political science that it is not the specific level of economic and social development that can lead to violence. Rather, it is the perceived, relative deprivation between groups that prompts unrest.[10]

It is not unusual for governments to portray insurgencies in the harshest light, in this case to define Muslim minority movements as radical Islamic extremists. In all three of the conflicts with the central government, the dominant organizations have rejected that characterization. The Rohinga Patriotic Front of Myanmar, the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) of Thailand, and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) of the Philippines all at one time fought against the central government. Each of them also has supported the religious rights of their people, but their leadership has not espoused radical Islam or aligned itself with outside Islamic extremist groups. However, within each of these minorities there exist splinter groups that can be placed in the radical Islamic category.

In Myanmar, the Rohinga Solidarity Organization split off from the Rohinga Patriotic Front and has espoused a more strict Islamic position and aligned itself with known extremist groups in Bangladesh and Pakistan. At one time it had some members who sought training in Afghanistan. The Patanni United Liberation Army (PULA) broke from the more moderate PULO and renewed insurgency. In the Philippines, a splinter group of the MNLF, called the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has continued to be in conflict with the Philippine government. It seeks the establishment of an Islamic state based upon Sharia law, and Islamic law principles are used to guide its activities. On the other hand, the MNLF has more Moro nationalist goals and has been administered in a secular fashion.[11] There is a difference of opinion as to how the MILF should be characterized. From time to time it has negotiated with Manila authorities, and the bulk of its violent activities has been traditional guerilla actions against government forces. It rejects the methods and goals of the other organization at war with the government, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which it terms "un-Islamic." However, it has also killed and kidnapped civilians, primarily Christians, and it has been accused of ties to foreign extremist elements such as Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaeda.

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[10] Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*.
[11] Chalk, "Separatism in Southeast Asia," 247-48.

The ASG can more easily be defined within the Islamic radical camp.[12] The one caveat would be its criminal actions, which taint the group's Islamic credentials. The Philippine government considers it a primarily criminal organization with little loyalty to Islamic ideals. The ASG also calls for the establishment of an independent Islamic state based upon the Sharia. Its name comes from Abdul Rassool Sayyaf, an Afghan mujahideen leader with possible ties to Bin Laden. Although the organization was originally relatively small and has splintered and weakened in recent years, its violent activities have been widely publicized. If not directly linked, there have been accusations of association with al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah, particularly in its formative years.

Until the early years of the 21st century, it was thought that the conflict in southern Thailand had been contained and a compromise with Muslim dissidents was possible.[13] The mainstream PULO was cooperating on a series of fronts with the Thai authorities and Muslims attained high positions in the national government, including that of foreign minister. Several intertwining factors have reinvigorated divisions between the Muslim minority and Thai authorities. There is considerable evidence of efforts by a range of external extremist groups to influence more militant groups in the region. There is a long history of cooperation involving Malaysian Islamic nationalists who were sympathetic to the problems of their fellow Muslims. The Malaysian government has been more active recently in controlling the border, but some interaction between the two communities continues. Local Muslims who traveled to the Middle East brought back with them radical ideas which reinforced Islamic militancy. This included both Shi'i and Wahabbi influences which resonated with those who considered previous cooperation between the majority Muslim organizations and the Thai government to be antithetical to Islamic interests. In many cases, foreign-educated radicals operated out of local religious schools. These ideas also gave support for those who sought a more narrow Islamic portrayal of the local secessionist movement. Finally, radical groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah are accused of being active in southern Thailand and among Thai Muslims elsewhere in the kingdom.

[12] See notes 8 and 11 above.
[13] Searle, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts."

This situation may have remained at a relatively low level of conflict if the Thai government had not decided to employ an iron fist in 2003 and 2004 in the south.[14] This tactic led to numerous arrests, including many allegedly innocent individuals and aggressive actions by the Thai military under martial law. This culminated in violence in October 2004, which resulted in the death by suffocation in military trucks of some 80 Malay Muslim prisoners. These events led previously quiescent groups and individuals to take a more militant stance and gave impetus to the radicals.

It should be underscored that most Muslims in Southeast Asia do not characterize as radical Islam the militant actions of fellow believers in these minority region. While condemning criminal acts and violence against innocent civilians, they see these conflicts as ones between subjugated peoples and oppressive regimes.

VIOLENT POLITICAL ISLAM

The form of radical Islam most highly publicized in the West has not been these aforementioned sectarian and minority types. Rather, it has been largely centered in Muslim majority states, often with tentacles reaching into non-Muslim states. While the numbers killed and the property lost by organizations espousing violent political Islam have been far smaller than that instigated by sectarian and Muslim minority groups, its seeming greater importance to the West rests on two factors. Their targets have frequently been Westerners, and their ties to international organizations such as al-Qaeda are more apparent. These groups generally have several common characteristics. They demand the establishment of an Islamic state based upon a narrow interpretation of the Sharia. They tend to reject political and religious pluralism and the democratic process. While not rejecting modernization, they see the West, and particularly the United States, as the enemy of Islam. Finally, there is evidence of transnational contact across Southeast Asia and, in some cases, with the Middle East.

There have been four significant organizations in Southeast Asia that fall into this category, notably the Kulpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM), the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders

[14] Albritton, "Thailand in 2004."

Front or FPI) of Indonesia, the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). The Malaysian government charges that the KMM has been involved in bombings and other violence and has close ties with regional radical groups.[15] There are also accusations that the KMM has been involved in criminal activities to finance violence. It was always a very small organization of perhaps no more than 100 members. There have been allegations that some arrests of purported members were more related to domestic politics. There are different questions regarding the Defenders Front. It frequently speaks for Islamic causes, has called for jihad against the United States, has attempted to harass foreigners, and has attacked discos, cinemas, and other "un-Islamic" venues. Like Laskar Jihad, it received support from elements of the Indonesian military and has involved conservative Muslim spokesmen. However, many observers consider it a primarily criminal organization identified with extortion and other forms of racketeering. In both Malaysia and Indonesia, there have also been other small, more shadowy groups that tend to dissolve or become amalgamated into other organizations.

Far more significant have been two interrelated groups, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the militant wing of the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). The MMI has two faces, one that publicly rejects violence and has a number of highly respected academic and religious leaders, and the other that is associated with a more radical agenda and with the JI. The MMI was founded in 2000 by now-arrested Abu Bakar Ba'syir, a long-time radical and alleged leader of the JI. In conjunction with the JI, militants within the MMI have been implicated in numerous bombings of Christian churches and other buildings. Reportedly there is disagreement within this group as to the advisability of hitting Western targets and the dangers of retribution. In its national congress, the MMI has attempted to disengage itself from groups like the JI and argued that it is "committed to struggling for the application of the Sharia in Indonesia through legal, constitutional means." [16]

The most notorious radical Islamic group in Southeast Asia is Jemaah Islamiyah, and extensive analysis on the JI does not have to be repeated here.[17] It was formed in the mid 1990s but with roots that go back into the 1980s. It is self-admittedly not meant to be a mass organization. With

[15] Liow, "The Mathathir Administration's War."
[16] Wahyuni and Poer, "MMI National Congress," *Jakarta Post.*
[17] S. Jones, "Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast;" Abuza, "Tentacles of Terror."

the arrests of several hundred individuals accused of being associated with the JI, it is now even smaller. In common with other radicals, the JI has called for an Islamic state based upon the Sharia and criticized governments in the region as being "un-Islamic." It has demanded that its members maintain high levels of Islamic morality and follow Islamic norms in all aspects of their lives.[18] Some within the group want to form a Caliphate. However, the organization differs from most other Islamic radical groups on several important points. The JI has had closer ties with al-Qaeda in the past, although the nature of present contacts remains murky. It developed a network of cells in many states in the region, including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and reportedly had overlapping membership in many other radical organizations in the area. While it has attacked local populations in the area, the JI has targeted Westerners more than other Islamic extremists. The JI was in all probability responsible for the Bali and Marriott bombings, is accused of planning to kill Westerners in Singapore, and members of the JI have been linked to individuals involved in 9/11 and other attacks on American interests. Major campaigns against the JI, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore, have at the very least weakened it, although knowledgeable observers generally believe that it is still quite capable of launching new acts of violence.

RADICAL ISLAM AND U.S. POLICY

The presence of radical Islam in Southeast Asia has implications for U.S. foreign policy on many fronts. Obviously, the "War on Terrorism" needs to take place across the globe. Southeast Asia is not only home to numerous groups of Islamic extremists, but it has also been a meeting place for those planning violence in the West itself, including 9/11. Secondly, Southeast Asia has been the venue for deadly attacks aimed at Americans, the most publicized of which were the Bali and Marriott bombings. There are ongoing fears that these radicals intend to continue, and there have been lengthy periods over which the State Department has issued warnings against Americans traveling to Indonesia. At issue are not only these direct threats to American citizens, but also of importance are the implications for nations we value as friends and possible allies in the conflict.

[18] van Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism."

Radical Islamic violence can have serious political and economic implications for many Southeast Asian governments. It is highly unlikely that these groups could take power in any country in the region. They do not have the organization, resources, or public support to accomplish their goal of replacing present systems with their vision of an Islamic state. However, the radicals can cause serious instability in those parts of the region where they are involved in insurgency or other violence and can have a negative impact upon national economies. Governments have been forced to employ scarce resources to meet the extremist challenge that could have been used for more productive projects. We have also seen the economic repercussions from violent actions by these radicals, particularly in Indonesia. The 2002 Bali bombing had serious consequences on the republic's tourist industry, an important resource for scarce foreign currency. Warnings by foreign governments to their citizens against visiting Indonesia further weakened the country's efforts to come out of the Asian financial crisis of the 1990s. The drop in foreign investments after these violent acts can in part be laid to fears about the economic stability of the republic and safety of expatriates.

Thirdly, the United States administration has argued in favor of the expansion of Western democracy and asserted that democracy can be an important weapon in the "War on Terrorism." However, the very effort to contain radical Islam in the region has serious implications for the retention of democracy. Governments have employed a variety of means to control the rise of radicalism that puts restraints on free expression and association. Methods employed against other dissidents in the past and now used against Islamic radicals have been criticized by domestic and international human rights organizations. Many countries of Southeast Asia have experienced problems associated with a poorly trained and disciplined military. In spite of this, governments have at times allowed the military the freedom to employ harsh policies in areas subject to extremism. Many of these programs and actions have also come under severe criticism from human rights groups. Thus, there is the danger of weakening the very democratic process that the U.S. argues is essential to control extremism.

Finally, the United States faces a problem in explaining its positions vis-à-vis Islam and its relations with Muslim countries. Far too often the rhetoric of extremist Islam in Southeast Asia on these issues resonates positively with the general public and can provide a certain public

legitimacy for actions by these groups.

The two issues presented by Islamic radicalism that have the greatest implications for the future are the danger of violent acts against U.S. interests in the region and the degree to which significant elements of the radical agenda resonate within the Muslim population of Southeast Asia. As noted, radical Islamic violence has important consequences for American citizens and friendly governments, and we must expect U.S. citizens and interests to be continued targets in the coming years. However, these acts need to be put into perspective. Most of the bloodshed associated with radical Islam has not involved significant American economic or military targets, although these violent acts have affected the economic and political viability of friendly governments. However, the greatest death and destruction wrought by violence-prone Islamic radical groups in recent years has been associated with conflicts involving domestic sectarian and Muslim minority issues. Noteworthy is the fact that the death of less than 300 Indonesians and Westerners in the Bali and Marriott bombings has been given far more publicity in the West than the deaths of thousands of Southeast Asians in sectarian and ethno-religious conflict.

Secondly, extremist political Islamic organizations have been small in membership and have been weakened in recent years. This is true of the KMM in Malaysia, Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines, and Laskar Jihad and the Islamic Defenders Front in Indonesia. The JI has seen significant numbers of its members arrested and has probably been fragmented organizationally. Malaysia and Singapore have utilized an extensive arsenal of police powers originally developed to control communism in their countries. Dissent of many types has been contained by these states for many years, and they have been relatively effective against Islamic extremist organizations. Indonesia originally was less active in this endeavor, but has increased its concern and capabilities in recent years. Police and intelligence cooperation among states in the region has progressed considerably in the past several years, although much more is needed. It is also noteworthy that there has been a diminishment in the support given by the local military to some radical groups, particularly in Indonesia.

However, significant problems remain, particularly with regard to relations between Muslim minorities and local and national authorities. There has frequently been a lack of understanding,

economic support, and respect on the part of the dominant society. Military activities in these areas have often led to seemingly unjustified actions which have exacerbated tensions. The recent activities of the Thai military in southern Thailand are only the latest example. Finally, it needs to be emphasized that it does not take a large organization to launch deadly attacks as evidenced by the bombings in Bali, Madrid, and London.

Perhaps the more serious long-term challenge to American foreign policy may be the extent to which the agenda of Islamic extremists resonate within the general Muslim population. What follows is in part based upon polls taken in Southeast Asia, and it is important to recognize that the methodology of polling in the region may not be as sophisticated as it is in the United States. At the same time, there is a certain consensus among the many polls taken. There are two major facets of radical rhetoric that are mirrored in popular opinion, the role of Islam in the state and criticisms of Western policies and values.

There is general agreement among Muslims that the state should be based upon Islam and the Sharia, although what that exactly means is not always well articulated. Polls taken in Indonesia in 2001 and 2002 replied positively, by 57.8% and 67% respectively, to the statement, "Agree that Islamic government, i.e., government based on the Qur'an and Sunnah under the leadership of Islamic authorities, such as ulama or kiai, is the best for a country like ours." By 2002, 70.8% agreed that "the state should require all men and women to abide by the Sharia."[19] A 2004 poll in Indonesia conducted by the U.S.-funded Freedom Institute found 59% supported whipping of adulterers, 40% said thieves should have their hands cut off; and 50% opposed Christian churches in Muslim majority areas.[20] In Malaysia, the conservative Muslim opposition party, PAS, has called for an Islamic state and strict Islamic penal laws. At the same time, there is disagreement between the Malaysian and Indonesian populace as to the desirability of the government enforcing Islamic practices such as fasting and prayer, with the latter more flexible.

Southeast Asian Muslims are critical of what they see to be a weak moral climate in the United States and the West. In 2002, a Pew Poll found that 73% of Indonesians replied "bad" to the

[19] Liddle, "New Patterns of Islamic."
[20] "Survey Shows Support," *Financial Times*.

question, "Is the spread of American ideas and customs bad?" While most Southeast Asian Muslims support the concept of democracy, there are frequently critical comments about the consistency of American policies that support dictatorial regimes in Muslim majority countries. They also perceive Western failures with regard to secularism, weak family values, and overvaluation of materialism.

The second issue where the opinions of extremists and the general populace tend to meet is with regard to criticisms of U.S. foreign policy. Polls among Muslims in the region show a consistent rejection of many foundations of American policy. U.S. support for Israel, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and conflicts with Iran and Sudan have all lacked public support among Southeast Asian Muslims. After the Iraq War was initiated, favorable ratings of the United States fell precipitously in Indonesia, and even after major American tsunami aid, favorability was still well under the pre-Iraq War era. This rejection of U.S. policy in the Middle East is reflected within the moderate political elite. This criticism has not been limited to Muslims. It is frequently stated in terms of anti-imperialism and opposition to unwarranted aggression. This has facilitated a partnership between more secular politicians and their Islamic party counterparts. Others have questioned the methods employed by the Americans against radical violence in the area. U.S. efforts are seen as expressions of dominance, and State Department warnings are criticized for weakening local economies.

There is considerable suspicion of American motives regarding Muslims. In an atmosphere that reinforces conspiracy theories, polls in Indonesia show significant percentages of the populace believing that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was associated with radical Islamic violence, that there is a real danger of U.S. military action against Indonesia, and that the "War on Terror" is really a "War on Islam." Leaders like the former Malaysian prime minister, M. Mahathir, have asserted that the "War" alienated Muslims. However, there has been some decline in these negative attitudes in Indonesia. For example, a Pew Poll in 2002 found that 64% of Indonesians polled opposed the "War on Terrorism." By 2004, only a minority opposed the "war," although only 40% stated that they supported the "global war on terrorism."

As has been noted, these views have not led the great majority of Southeast Asian Muslims to vote for or otherwise materially aid radical Islamists. In Indonesia, where they have had the opportunity to freely vote their views, they have rejected radicalism, and even more moderate Islamic parties have been unable to gain a majority in Parliament. In Malaysia, where choices are somewhat more restricted, candidates of the party supporting stricter implementation of the Sharia have been losing strength. However, attitudes regarding American policies in the Middle East and suspicion of U.S. motives towards Islam have made it politically more difficult for the Indonesian government to implement some efforts against radicals. The Malaysian government has combined continued criticism of American foreign policy in the Middle East with cooperation on intelligence and security issues.

Given the role which radical Islam plays in Southeast Asia today, what should be U.S policy? Prior to presenting more detailed recommendations, it is essential that the policymaker make distinctions regarding the differing facets of Islam in that region. Islam is not monolithic, and political Islam need not be antithetical to American interests. First, it is important to recognize that the character of Islam in Southeast Asia differs in significant ways from that of the Middle East. Its history and culture has produced a more flexible, syncretic, and tolerant version than that found in the Arab world. Particularly important is the fact that Muslims in Southeast Asia have generally had experience with a more pluralist society that has had to deal with ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. This makes the imposition by extremists of one monolithic interpretation of Islam quite difficult, and some Muslim intellectuals have commented upon the incompatibility of implanting Arab norms in the more pluralistic Southeast Asian scene.

Secondly, not all political Islam is antithetical to democracy and American interests, and it is inaccurate to define it as necessarily militant. This is not a replay of the war with communism. In actuality, there is considerable variety in how political Islam is interpreted in Southeast Asia today. While it is necessary to contain versions that exhort violence and reject religious and political pluralism, other types need to be accepted and even encouraged as part of the political system. Both Malaysia and Indonesia have political parties with Islamic agendas which also maintain democratic principles.

Thirdly, there are differences in the historic forces that have driven the secessionist agendas of Muslim minorities and those that have framed political Islam in Muslim majority states. In the former, dissatisfaction has developed from a long history of perceived economic, political, cultural, and religious exploitation. Islam is one important element of an intertwined series of issues. That has led to tension and conflict. As noted earlier, Muslims in the region have a great deal of empathy for these minorities and find it difficult to criticize their activities or describe them as extremists. However, it is important for the United States to analyze and publicize those groups that are involved in unacceptable actions, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group, and to determine where undesirable external radical Muslims are attempting to exploit the real dissatisfaction of these minorities.

With regard to more specific recommendations for U.S. foreign policy, technical reforms are usually a good deal easier than attempts to implement societal changes. It also needs to be underscored that some proposals that have been offered lack political viability, while others may be quite long-term or narrow in focus and impact. In the first instance, there is no question that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is a highly emotional catalyst for radical political action. However, to expect significant changes in the direction of American policies towards Israel, Iraq, or Iran in the near future, as called for by a majority of Southeast Asian Muslims, is to be politically naive. The best that can be anticipated is to develop a clearer understanding of how American actions and statements resonate among Muslims and to maintain a dialogue that attempts to explain the rationale for the U.S. agenda. Given the depth of feeling among many Southeast Asian Muslims regarding the Israeli-Palestinian and Iraq situations, major shifts in opinion are unlikely.

The U.S. government and private foundations are presently involved in programs to upgrade the teaching and curricula of Islamic educational institutions, and these efforts need to be continued. Many of these schools have weak standards and project narrow visions of Islam. Ideological changes in the more radical Islamic institutions are probably beyond the efforts of American private and public aid. However, support can be given to selective institutions and to national efforts to improve religious education.

There is also the necessity to develop educational programs in the United States dealing with Southeast Asia and Islam in order to better supervise projects overseas and to understand problems in the region. Unfortunately, American higher education is lagging in producing specialists in these areas. This is particularly true in social sciences such as political science, sociology, and economics. The development of knowledge is not only necessary to achieve greater public understanding, but it is essential to increase our expertise for national intelligence. Also changes in American handling of visa requirements are vital to comprehending what is taking place in Southeast Asia and to increase the dialogue between our citizens and Muslims. Present policies are deterring Muslim students from coming to American institutions of higher education and making it difficult to bring in Muslim scholars to lecture and to better know the American culture. Young Muslims mistakenly see a conspiracy to keep them out of the United States. It is vital that we increase intellectual interchange. [21]

The United States is already active in supporting police and intelligence organization operations in Southeast Asia. Because Singapore and Malaysia both have sophisticated security infrastructures, it has been possible to work with them effectively. After a slow start due to Indonesian reticence, real progress has been made in cooperation with Jakarta. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has attempted to coordinate intelligence and security in the region, and the United States should encourage this. However, ASEAN has not always been an effective tool for cooperation on these issues,[22] and U.S. foreign policy needs to be more active to help bolster ASEAN'S capabilities. This should be continued and expanded, although care needs to be taken not to have it appear that the U.S. seeks to dominate the process. A problem that will take tact and patience is that of the region's judiciary. Courts in many countries of Southeast Asia have not been sufficiently independent of political pressures, and corruption is certainly not unknown. This environment has affected alleged radicals in two very different ways. In Indonesia, the courts have been reluctant to agree to the harsher punishment called for by its neighbors and the U.S. government. Yet in Singapore and Malaysia, it is charged that security laws severely limit the legal rights of defendants, and that the courts acquiesce to these conditions.

[21] Stanley Foundation, "Political Islam and Counterterrorism."
[22] M. Jones and Smith, "From Konfrontasi to Disintegrasi."

Developing a better-trained, armed, and disciplined military in Southeast Asia is another problem. It does not affect all countries. For example, Malaysia and Singapore have well-trained and modern armed forces. There have been difficulties in working with some other states where the military has been particularly sensitive to what they have seen as external meddling or attempts to dominate a relationship. The United States also has not always fully understood the political and constitutional contexts within which the military may operate. This has been true of American military cooperation programs with the Philippines. Finally, Congress has imposed impediments to aid, most particularly with regard to Indonesia. The Leahy Amendment, initiated after human rights abuses by the Indonesian armed forces, has been in place since 1992. It prohibits U.S. military aid in the form of arms and training. Given past experiences of significant lapses in discipline within the Indonesian armed forces, this is unfortunate.

Much of Muslim Southeast Asia faces serious economic and social development problems, and it is important that these be addressed with the same seriousness as has been given counterterrorism measures in the area. Violence and radical ideology are at least in part fostered by these unhealthy conditions. The appearance of an overweening emphasis upon police, military, and intelligence efforts give the impression of a lack of interest in fundamental problems that face the average Muslim in the region.

Finally, quiet diplomacy is required to commit the leadership of countries with Muslim minorities to better meet the needs of these peoples. Minorities in Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines have lagged behind the majority populations in education and economic development. Little is to be expected from authorities in Myanmar, but there have been major improvements over the years in Thailand and the Philippines. However, continued disparities will only inflame tensions. Manila and Bangkok need to deal more equitably with their Muslim population and forego the kind of iron fist programs launched by the Thai government in 2004.

The political environment of Southeast Asia today provides the United States with a unique opportunity to work cooperatively with Southeast Asian leadership to counter the more unacceptable elements of radical Islam. Moderate governments have been elected in Indonesia and Malaysia and show a willingness to work with the United States. Radical Islam has not been able to capture minority Muslim movements and their leadership remains religiously moderate

for the present. Muslims in the region remain opposed to American policies in the Middle East and still question aspects of Western values. However, organizations proclaiming extremist Islamic platforms have been weakened, in part through government actions and in part from a popular rejection of their violent methods and narrow view of Islam.

At the same time, a delicate balance needs to be maintained in a milieu where Islam has become an increasingly important element in society and personal convictions. The United States needs to emphasize cooperation and be constantly aware of the pitfalls of appearing too aggressive in its criticism and leadership. Muslims throughout the region consider themselves the targets of external forces that seek to weaken their faith and values. The United States cannot afford to appear to be the enemy of Islam.

GLOSSARY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Abu Sayyaf Group (ABG): Violent Islamic organization in the southern Philippines frequently charged with criminal activities

Al-Qaeda: Transnational violent Islamic organization which has been associated with Islamic radicalism in Southeast Asia

Dar ul Islam: Indonesian Muslim organization active in late 1940s. Attempted to establish an Islamic state and fought Dutch and Indonesian authorities. Influential with later Islamic radicals

Front Pembela Islam (Islamic defenders Front or FPI): Militant Islamic organization in Indonesia, frequently charged with criminal activities

Jemaah Islamiyah: Transnational Islamic organization considered responsible for numerous acts of violence including the Bali and Marriott bombings

Kommando Jihad: Violent Islamic organization active in Indonesia in the 1970s and believed associated with elements of the Indonesian government

Kupulan Militan Malaysia (KMM): Militant Islamic group in Malaysia tied to other radical groups in the region

Laskar Jihad: Indonesian Islamic organization active from 2000 to 2002. Formed to combat Christians, particularly in East Indonesia.

Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI): Islamic organization in Indonesia with violent wing charged with violence and a public wing which rejects violence, but calls for an Islamic state under the Sharia

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF): Militant secessionist organization in the southern Philippines. Still in conflict with the government

Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF): Major Moro secessionist organization in the southern Philippines. Has negotiated peace settlement with the government

Patanni United Liberation Army; Militant organization in southern Thailand still in conflict with the government

Pattani United Liberation Organization: Major organization representing Muslims in southern Thailand. Moderate in its policies.

Rohinga Patriotic Front: Main organization for Muslims in the Arakan region of Myanmar

Rohinga Solidarity Organization: Militant Arakanese Muslim group

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