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**911, American Praetorian Unilateralism
and the Impact on State-Society
Relations in Southeast Asia**

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ABSTRACT

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have sharply refocused American foreign policy, elevating homeland security above other concerns. Three factors: the globalized Al-Qaeda terrorist threat; the neoconservative ideology of key Bush Administration officials, and the increasing policy influence of the post-Cold War American military establishment, have combined to generate a policy posture of “praetorian unilateralism”. Thus while seemingly engaged in considerable multilateral activity with Coalition partners in the war on terror, the resources of allied nations are actually being orchestrated by Washington so as to expedite the effective unilateral exercise of American power. The American posture is also praetorian for three reasons: it emphasizes military solutions over other measures; it demands and expects compliance with its policy preferences from Coalition partners; and it is quite willing to “go it alone” if need be. Praetorian unilateralism will be ultimately counterproductive for three reasons: first, the threat of radical Islamic terrorism cannot be neutralized by military measures alone; second, an overly military emphasis would actually inflame global Muslim opinion, further increasing sympathy for Al-Qaeda, and finally, the resulting civilizational enmity between the West and Islam will spill over into Southeast Asia, destabilizing multi-ethnic, multi-religious polities.

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911, AMERICAN PRAETORIAN UNILATERALISM AND THE IMPACT ON STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Introduction

Following the terrorist strikes by Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network against the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on 11 September 2001, the United States declared a war on terror and assembled a Coalition of nations committed to neutralizing the terror threat. The first stage in this war involved the attack on and ouster of the radical Islamic Taliban regime in Afghanistan that had been harbouring Al-Qaeda. Subsequently, in early 2002 President George W. Bush outlined in a series of speeches what the "second stage of the war on terror" would involve. On 11 March, Bush indicated one key thrust of the ongoing war: the provision of training and military aid to enable friendly governments to neutralize terrorist organizations operating within their borders. In this regard Bush highlighted the military assistance being extended to the Philippines, Yemen and Georgia in their fight against Al-Qaeda linked terrorist organizations.¹ On 17 April, moreover, speaking at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Bush reiterated this theme, praising nations that had accepted US aid in the global conflict with terrorism, and pledging that any country "that needs our help will have it".² However, the most important thrust of the second stage of this anti-terror war had been enunciated earlier, on 29 January, in Bush's State of the Union address. Then he had characterized Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an "Axis of Evil" because of their research programmes aimed at developing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and declared his intention to prevent such so-called rogue states from succeeding in developing operational WMD capabilities. Bush indicated that the overall objective now involves not merely disrupting Al-Qaeda cells worldwide, but also forestalling the "danger of the terrorists' teaming up with a small group of nations seeking to develop nuclear and biological weapons".³ As Bush further explained on 11 March, "Terrorist groups are hungry for these weapons, and would use them without a hint of conscience".⁴ On 17 April,

¹ Elizabeth Bumiller, "Bush Vows to Aid Other Countries in War on Terror", *The New York Times on the Web*, available at www.nytimes.com/2002/03/12/international/12PREX.html, 12 March 2002.

² Joseph Curl, "Bush: 'Axis' will follow Taliban", *The Washington Times* (online edn.), available at www.washtimes.com, 18 April 2002.

³ David E. Sanger, "Eye on Iraq, Bush to Set Out War's Next Phase", *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/50761.html, 11 March 2002.

⁴ Bumiller, "Bush Vows to Aid Other Countries in War on Terror".

moreover, Bush repeated his warning that certain “outlaw regimes” were building WMD capabilities and “cultivating ties to terrorist groups”.⁵ So adamant is Bush in eliminating the WMD potential of rogue states that it was reported in April 2002 that America is now making detailed preparations for an armed attack against Iraq, some time early in 2003.⁶

America’s Coalition partners in the war on terror, both the Europeans and the moderate Muslim allies in the Middle East, have warned Washington not to adopt what appears to be a primarily military approach to the campaign. Rather than support an American invasion of Iraq, they argue that the most important next step in the war on terror is a political resolution of the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, which has worsened since the second *intifada* broke out in September 2000. For its part, Washington has warned its Coalition partners that it is quite willing to go it alone in eliminating the terrorist threat. It is the central thesis of this paper that the biggest impact of the so-called “911 incident” has been the re-orientation of American foreign policy towards a posture of what might be called “praetorian unilateralism”. If left unmitigated such a stance would fracture the inter-civilisational consensus between Western and moderate Muslim nations needed to root out radical Islamic terrorist cells worldwide. Moreover, the American propensity to emphasize military solutions to the problems of radical Islamic terrorism is also highly counterproductive. This is because this praetorian approach is gradually generating the civilizational enmity that will only nourish the very enemy – Al-Qaeda – that America is trying to vanquish. As we shall see, this paradoxical civilizational fall-out has already impacted state-society relations within Southeast Asia – an emerging theatre in the war on terror.

The Reason for American “Praetorian Unilateralism”: The Rise of the “New Terrorists”

It is clear that the single most important impact of 911 has been to elevate homeland security as the overriding American foreign policy objective. All instruments of policy: military, diplomatic, financial and economic, have been orchestrated to secure this

⁵ Curl, “Bush: ‘Axis’ will follow Taliban”.

⁶ Thom Shankar, “Pentagon Sees Attack on Saddam Next Year”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/56151.html, 29 April 2002.

objective.⁷ It is in this context that the praetorian unilateralism of post-911 American foreign policy becomes explicable. The *praetorian* element of US policy is clearly and most directly reflected in the strong preference for military approaches to the war on terror. It is also reflected in the fact that Washington – as if conceptualising the international system as a quasi-military hierarchy with itself at the apex – *expects and demands* that Coalition partners to agree with its strategic diagnosis and offer co-operation in exterminating terrorism. The third strand is Washington’s expressed willingness – in line with the classic military principle of “maintaining the objective” - to simply go unilateral if need be. What factors explain the praetorian unilateralism of current US foreign policy? The first relates to the nature of the terrorist threat facing America. The 911 attacks in New York and Washington symbolized powerfully the nature of the new globalized, religiously-inspired terrorism. Globalization - the “multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states and societies which make up the modern world system”⁸ - has vastly augmented terrorist capabilities in several ways. Thanks to the rapid proliferation and decreasing cost of communications technology such as satellite telephones and the Internet, terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda are now better able to control and co-ordinate their operational activities by forming widely dispersed *networks* of operationally self-reliant and shadowy cells that are nevertheless knit together by a shared ideology and doctrine.⁹ In addition, the Internet enables Al-Qaeda to arrange funds transfers around the world far more efficiently than before, while also expediting secure on-line purchases of weapons and explosives. Furthermore, through accessing the abundant information available on the World Wide Web, terrorists can plan effective operations involving ‘kidnapping, bomb making and assassination’.¹⁰ It should also be recognized that the well-educated new terrorists, many of whom seem to possess backgrounds in science and engineering,¹¹ are quite able to “adapt their structure and strategy, including their use of violence, to their environment and to the degree and kind of

⁷ “Emerging Bush Doctrine Reshaping US Strategy”, *Stratfor.com*, 25 Feb. 2002, available at www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_print.php?ID=203273.

⁸ Anthony G. McGrew, “Conceptualizing Global Politics”, in *Global Politics: Globalization and the Nation-State*, ed. by Anthony G. McGrew and Paul G. Lewis, eds. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 23.

⁹ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, ‘Osama bin Laden and the Advent of Netwar’, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Fall 2001), pp. 23-33.

¹⁰ Thomas Homer-Dixon, “The Rise of Complex Terrorism”, *Foreign Policy* (Jan./Feb. 2002), pp. 54-55.

¹¹ Daniel Pipes, “God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?”, *The National Interest* (Winter 2001/2002), p. 16.

pressure that governments can bring to bear against them”.¹² This implies that they are well able to think up creative ways of inflicting mass casualties quite apart from simple reliance on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Hence modern societies must be alert not merely to the threat of WMD use by terrorists, but also to various “Modalities of Mass Destruction (MMD)”. Thomas Homer-Dixon in this connection observes that “modern societies are filled with supercharged devices packed with energy, combustibles, and poisons, giving terrorists ample opportunities to destructive ends”.¹³ He adds that to “cause horrendous damage, all terrorists must do is figure out how to release this power and let it run wild or, as they did on September 11, take control of this power and retarget it”.¹⁴ In this vein, in April 2002, a Brookings study argued that terrorists could kill 10 000 people by targeting nuclear or toxic chemical plants.¹⁵

Quite apart from the enhanced power of globalized terrorism, the *religious-messianic content* of terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda also sharply increases the threat they pose to America. It has been suggested that we are witnessing the “fourth wave” of terrorism. While terrorist groups in the first wave, which lasted from the 1880s to the 1920s, sought political and civil reforms within authoritarian political systems like Czarist Russia, the second wave that encompassed the 1920s to the 1960s was characterized by terrorist organizations seeking national self-determination, like the Irish Republican Army and Irgun in Palestine. Like the first and second waves which overlapped, the latter wave also intersected to a degree with the third wave of terrorism in the 1970s, which was defined by left-wing revolutionary organizations such as the Red Brigades and the Japanese Red Army faction, which saw themselves as vanguards for the Third World masses. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan ten years later, however, it appeared that “religion now provided more hope than the prevailing revolutionary ethos did”.¹⁶ In this context, what Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin call “religiously motivated terrorism”, appears to characterize the latest wave of terror.¹⁷ Of especial importance is the fact that the religious-messianic motivation of the

¹² David Tucker, “What is New about the New Terrorism and How Dangerous is It?”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Autumn 2001), p. 13.

¹³ Homer-Dixon, “Rise of Complex Terrorism”, p. 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Bill Miller, “Study Urges Focus on Terrorism with High Fatalities, Cost”, *Washington Post*, 29 April 2002, p. A03.

¹⁶ David C. Rapoport, “The Fourth Wave: September 11 in the History of Terrorism”, *Current History*, Vol. 100, No. 650 (Dec. 2001), pp. 419-424.

¹⁷ Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, “The Terror”, *Survival*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter 2001-2002), p. 5.

new terrorists appears to encourage the perpetration of mass casualties and indiscriminating terror. Previous terrorist organizations were generally careful to refrain from indiscriminate attacks on civilians, precisely because they recognized that ultimately, ‘wanton violence could be counterproductive’ and they needed popular support to attain their political aims.¹⁸ Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, because it is ideologically predisposed to see all Americans, civilian and combatant alike, as infidels, seems to have little compunction in targeting non-combatants. Moreover, the messianic orientation of the Al-Qaeda leadership appears to explain their lack of discrete, negotiable political demands apart from the stated intent to eliminate Western and American influence from Muslim lands as a prelude to setting up truly Islamic regimes. Hence, as Simon and Benjamin argue, the worrying new characteristic of the new terrorism is “the absence of a plausible political agenda” which is correlated with the “increased lethality of attacks” due to the “absence of constraints on violence”.¹⁹ The 9/11 attacks certainly bear out the messianic modus operandi of Al-Qaeda, and have generated an unprecedented level of American insecurity. After 9/11, it is profoundly clear to Americans that the frontline is no longer far away, but right smack within heartland America. In fact in late April the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) warned that Al-Qaeda might be planning to attack American supermarkets or shopping malls.²⁰ Little wonder then that in a poll conducted around the same time, it was discovered that about half of all Americans still feel insecure, while an “overwhelming majority” – 84 percent – expected terrorist attacks would occur in the US “in the near future”.²¹ In sum, the prohibitive cost to America – physical and political - of another mass-casualty terrorist strike would be unthinkable, and that is precisely why American foreign policy is now geared to an extraordinary degree toward one overriding goal: preserving homeland security.

American Praetorian Unilateralism: A Further Deconstruction

Quite apart from the nature of the new terrorism and the very real threat to American homeland security it poses, the second reason for the praetorian bent in US

¹⁸ Peter L. Bergen, “Picking Up the Pieces: What We Can Learn From – and About – 9/11”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (March/April 2002), p. 172.

¹⁹ Simon and Benjamin, “The Terror”, pp. 5-6.

²⁰ “US Supermarkets May be Next Targets For Terror”, *Straits Times Interactive* (Singapore), available at <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>, 26 April 2002.

²¹ Richard Morin, “Poll: Half of all Americans Still Feel Unsafe”, *Washington Post*, 3 May 2002, p. A07.

foreign policy is adducible to indigenous factors: the neoconservative right-wing ideological mindset extant in Washington circles, coupled with the considerable political clout of the American military. On the one hand, key figures in the Bush Administration have long been standard-bearers for the Republican Right, espousing the ideological view that America has a special responsibility to ensure the preservation and promotion of an international order that reflects American political and economic principles. This is not a new development. In the 1970s, powerful right-wing Republican groups such as the *Committee on the Present Danger* and *High Frontier* lobbied Washington to vigorously confront the ideological and strategic threat from the Soviet Union. Today, successor groups such as the *Project for the New American Century*, which number Vice-President Richard Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld among their supporters, similarly argue that American political, economic and military hegemony is essential to a stable international order, and that “what is right for America is right for the world”.²² Such an ideological worldview is fully compatible with the other indigenous trend, which William Pfaff in particular has discerned: the fact that the end of the Cold War has “left the United States with a huge military establishment of unprecedented policy influence”.²³ Pfaff argues persuasively that the “prominence of military institutions in the United States and the availability of overwhelming force tend to influence the formulation of policy in ways that invite military remedies, even when these may be irrelevant”.²⁴ The ongoing praetorianization of the US foreign policy establishment is not merely reflected in the increasing intervention of the military in the political realm. It is also evinced by the increasing penchant of civilian officials to display an “uncritical recourse to military measures to deal not only with foreign policy crises but with such civil society issues as terrorism and the drug trade.” Hence:

Military considerations and modes of thought have acquired an importance in the country’s foreign relations that has no constitutional warrant, and which encourages the civilian makers of policy to turn to the military for remedies to international problems for which the only real solutions (where they exist) are political.²⁵

²² Paul Rogers, “Right for America, Right for the World”, *The World Today* (Feb. 2002), pp. 13-15.

²³ William Pfaff, “The Praetorian Guard”, *The National Interest* (Winter 2000/2001), 64.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

These military “modes of thought” which engender a praetorian, unilateral mindset are clearly evinced in the post-911 US Coalition-building approach. Certainly, at a superficial level the Bush Administration appears to be adopting a multilateral approach to the war on terror. To be sure, there are pragmatic reasons for this. For instance, the co-operation of Coalition governments is needed in implementing legislation aimed at cutting terrorist funding. Moreover, the US lacks human intelligence on the ground in areas where Al-Qaeda operates, such as Central, South and Southeast Asia, and thus relies on information provided by friendly intelligence services. In addition, in specific theatres of operations in the war, Coalition partners can furnish the manpower needed for mopping up and post-war peacekeeping, as has been the case in Afghanistan.²⁶ More significantly, Coalition partners can also provide a good deal of the funding for post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation, or contribute to multilateral financial aid packages to help poorer nations deal with the poverty that is one of the root causes of terrorism. In this respect, the World Bank in mid-March pledged \$35 million for a social fund set up by Manila to promote development within the Mindanao region of the southern Philippines.²⁷ However, there are distinct limits to this international co-operation. Tony Judt has observed that several months into the war on terror it became clear that “the ‘coalition’ was an inch deep”, and that in essence, “most of its members were not being asked to do anything much beyond lining up behind American military action”.²⁸ This is not surprising, as Defence Secretary Rumsfeld early on made it very clear that it is not so much the Coalition that defines the mission but rather it is *the mission that defines the Coalition*. In a similar vein, Rumsfeld’s deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, pointed out that there “will not be a single coalition but rather different coalitions for different missions”.²⁹ In other words, in the context of the war on terror, Washington’s multilateral machinations are designed to erect a multinational, multidimensional framework integrating political, diplomatic, economic and financial measures with one overriding purpose in mind: to more effectively and efficiently expedite the unilateral exercise of American military power against Al-Qaeda. As the great French strategist Andre Beaufre would have put it,

²⁶ James Dao, “Bush Sets Role for US in Afghan Rebuilding”, *The New York Times*, 18 April 2002, Late Edn., Final, Section A, p.1.

²⁷ Des Ferriols and Ding Cervantes, “Foreign Donors Pledge \$2.8-B in Development Assist”, *Philstar.com*, available at www.philstar.com/philstar/print.asp?article=70797, 13 March 2002.

²⁸ Tony Judt, “The War on Terror”, *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XLVIII, no. 20 (Dec. 20, 2001), pp. 102-103.

²⁹ Joseph Fitchett, “Pentagon in a League of its Own”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/46887.html, 3 Feb. 2002.

America is in fact pursuing a direct strategy emphasizing military power as the primary instrument of policy, with the various resources of Coalition partners orchestrated in support of the main thrust.³⁰

That Washington is in a position to shape the Coalition in the way it desires arises from the sheer asymmetry of the distribution of power in the international system. The United States is the only nation in the world able to exercise preponderant military, economic and political power. While other nations may have regional or even global reach in one of these three dimensions of power, only the United States is currently able to exercise comprehensive power in all three dimensions simultaneously.³¹ This is precisely why the French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine has called America the “hyperpower”. As a hyper-power America enjoys untrammelled military preponderance of the likes not seen since the Roman Empire. There is a very big capability gap between America and its Coalition partners. In terms of defence spending, the latest US \$ 48 billion increase Bush has asked Congress for, would make the US defence budget bigger than the combined defence budgets of all the other countries in the world. Moreover, the EU governments, the only possible collective counterweight to America, would find it politically difficult, given their extensive social welfare agendas, to spend the huge funds needed to catch up militarily.³² Because there is no possible political and military counterweight to the United States in the international system today, Washington is able to pursue its interests if it so wills. Indeed Robert A. Levine, reacting to French criticisms of American policy, put it succinctly when he pointed out that America is going to act unilateral, because it *can* act unilateral.³³ Precisely because an unchecked America may very well act against the global corporate interest, the British historian Timothy Garton reckons that “America has too much power for anyone’s good, including its own”.³⁴ He points out that it “would be dangerous even for an archangel to wield so much power”.³⁵

³⁰ Andre Beaufre, *Strategy of Action* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).

³¹ “Al-Qaeda, Geopolitics and the Crisis of US-European Relations”, *Stratfor.com*, 29 April 2002, available at www.stratfor.com/premium/analysis_print.php?ID=204295.

³² Chris Patten, “European Union Foreign Policy and the Challenges of Globalisation”, Public Lecture organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation and the Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, 5 April 2002.

³³ Robert A. Levine, “Yes, France, America Will Keep Acting Unilaterally”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/47318.html, 8 Feb. 2002.

³⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, “The Peril of Too Much Power”, *The New York Times*, 9 April 2002.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

This uncompromising, unilateral American emphasis on “military considerations and military modes of thought” in countering Al-Qaeda has been evinced in a myriad number of ways. In one sense it is expressed *indirectly* through what America is doing or not doing in the economic and financial spheres. For instance, it is becoming clear that the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), both of which are heavily influenced by the US, are being shaped to directly support US interests in the anti-terror war. Hence those economies that “are integral to US anti-terrorism efforts”, such as “Georgia, the Philippines, Turkey and Uzbekistan”, will have little problem in receiving loans, while “non-critical states will have to fight for IMF funds”.³⁶ More telling evidence of a strong American preference for short-term, military-operational solutions over patient, long-term socio-economic efforts aimed at alleviating the poverty that is a root cause of radical Islamic terrorism, is discernible in the American attitude to foreign aid. Developmental analysts have long decried that the US currently provides the least foreign aid amongst all the industrialized countries – “barely one-seventh of 1 per cent of gross domestic product”.³⁷ Instead of the US \$750 million Washington had earlier proposed for “international assistance” in 2003, experts argue that what was needed was “at least \$ 4 billion to \$ 5 billion annually to finance programs that promote modernization and economic opportunity in the Islamic countries of the Middle East and Central and South Asia”.³⁸ On 15 March 2002, Bush did announce a US \$5 billion increase, spread over three years, in foreign aid to poor nations that support human rights, adhere to strong systems of law and have open markets”. However, Democrats and development experts alike argued that the increase, which would not take effect until 2004, “was too little, too late”, and certainly “paled beside Bush’s proposed US\$ 48 billion increase in military spending”.³⁹ Then on 22 March, at a United Nations gathering in Monterey, Mexico, Bush added that he wished to increase foreign aid by \$10 billion between 2004 and 2006. However, experts still noted that even if fully implemented in 2006, “the US will continue to contribute a far smaller portion of its economy to aid than nearly every other rich country.”⁴⁰ It appears that Washington is consciously or unconsciously heeding the

³⁶ “IMF Marries Lending Policy to US Anti-Terrorism Goals”, *Stratfor.com*, available at www.stratfor.com/premium/analysis_print.php?ID=204311, 30 April 2002.

³⁷ Richard Sokolsky and Joseph McMillan, “Foreign Aid in Our Own Defense”, *The New York Times*, 12 Feb. 2002, Late Edn., Final, Section A, p. 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Elisabeth Bumiller, “Bush calls for 15% Increase in Foreign Aid”, *The International Herald Tribune*, 16-17 March 2002, p. 1.

⁴⁰ David R. Francis, “After Bush Push on Foreign Aid: Getting Results”, *csmonitor.com*, available at www.csmonitor.com/2002/0401/p21s01-wmgn.html, 1 April 2002.

starkly neoconservative, utterly praetorian “advice” of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, that the American “superpower” should “deploy its energies militarily rather than on social work”.⁴¹ In line with such sentiments, the Pentagon in early April 2002 controversially sought its *own* foreign aid budget - separate from the State Department, which traditionally disburses foreign aid - of \$130 million in fiscal 2002. This money was evidently to be spent not on “social work”, but on military-operational requirements: \$100 million was earmarked for foreign nations “in furtherance of the global war on terrorism”, and the other \$30 million for the support of “indigenous forces engaged in activities in furtherance of United States national security aims, including Operation Enduring Freedom and related activities in combating terrorism”.⁴²

Washington’s narrow preoccupation with “military modes of thought” has been evidenced in many other ways: for instance it has approved a \$ 64 million counter terrorism training programme for Georgia, apart from equipping that nation’s armed forces with small arms, ammunition, medical gear and radios.⁴³ In addition, the US is going ahead with plans to give Indonesia \$8 million for training and equipping domestic peacekeepers confronting ethnic, religious and separatist violence and another \$8 million to help train counter-terrorism units. Meanwhile American military engineers are also apparently building a forward operations base in the southern Philippine island of Basilan, and expanding its military presence in that country, as well as in Singapore and Australia.⁴⁴ Praetorian unilateralism is also demonstrated by Washington’s refusal to confer full Prisoner-of-War (POW) status on Taliban and Al-Qaeda detainees, on the grounds that US officials need a freer hand to both extract intelligence about future al-Qaeda operations and expedite prosecution.⁴⁵ On the other side of the coin, while the Bush Administration justified its decision not to ratify the treaty setting up the International Criminal Court ostensibly to eliminate the possibility of American

⁴¹ Margaret Thatcher, “Advice to a Superpower”, *The New York Times*, 11 Feb. 2002, Late edn., Final, Section A, p. 27.

⁴² Bradley Graham, “Pentagon Seeks Own Foreign Aid Power”, *Washington Post*, 8 April 2002, p. A01.

⁴³ Thom Shankar, “Green Beret Vanguard Arrives in the Former Soviet Georgia”, *The New York Times*, 30 April 2002, Late edn., Final, Section A, p. 16.

⁴⁴ “Indonesia Torn Between Stability, US Appeasement”, *Stratfor.com*, available at www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_print.php?ID=204315, 1 May 2002.

⁴⁵ “Guantanamo Mischief”, *The IHT Online*, 25 April 2002, available at www.iht.com/articles/55675.html, 25 April 2002.

commanders and their forces being falsely accused of committing war crimes,⁴⁶ in effect this manoeuvre removes any checks on American commanders adopting legally questionable strategies and tactics in conducting anti-terror operations. Praetorian unilateralism was also reflected in the tacit American support for the Israeli counterinsurgency campaign in the West Bank aimed at destroying the “infrastructure” of Palestinian suicide terrorism against Israel.⁴⁷ In this respect Pfaff argues that the key “figures in the Bush administration, and nearly all of the neoconservative intellectuals who now dominate the Washington policy debate”, have supported Sharon’s hard-line methods against “Palestinian terrorism” and “believe that military force ultimately decides conflicts like this one”.⁴⁸

It must be said, however, that American praetorian unilateralism is being displayed most unequivocally over the Iraq question. In late March 2002, Vice-President Cheney told Senate Republicans that the “question was no longer if the US would attack Iraq”, but rather the “only question was when”.⁴⁹ Washington’s Coalition partners reject this attitude: while the Europeans insist that the United States respect international law and seek a UN mandate for any proposed intervention in Iraq,⁵⁰ key Arab-Muslim allies such as Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia worry that an American attack would inflame the Arab-Muslim street and seriously destabilize the Middle East economically and politically.⁵¹ Such negative sentiments were strengthened when it was proven that there was no evidence to suggest that Mohamed Atta, the alleged leader of the 911 hijackers, had met in April 2001 with an Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague.⁵² Little wonder that Oman, which has for two decades served as an important “logistics and intelligence center for US operations in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea,” declared in early May that it did not want its territory to be used as a staging area for an attack into Iraq.⁵³ Saudi Arabia – the most

⁴⁶ Neil A. Lewis, “US Rejects Global Pact on War Crimes Tribunal”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/56710.html, 6 May 2002.

⁴⁷ Michael R. Gordon, “The Limits of Force”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/54716.html, 15 April 2002.

⁴⁸ William Pfaff, “Let’s See If Bush Stays the Course”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/54419.html, 12 April 2002.

⁴⁹ Daniel Eisenberg, “We’re taking Him Out”, *Time*, 13 May 2002, p. 32.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Howard Schneider, “US warned by Turkey and Jordan on Iraq War”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/50786.html, 11 March 2002.

⁵² Walter Pincus, “No Link between Hijacker, Iraq Found, US Says”, *Washington Post*, 1 May 2002, p. A09.

⁵³ “Oman Statement a Blow to US Plans for Iraq”, *Stratfor.com*, 2 May 2002, available at www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_print.php?ID=204337.

important Muslim ally of the US - indicated likewise.⁵⁴ It is unlikely, however, that American officials are about to be dissuaded from seeking regime change at some point in Baghdad. In April, at an annual Anglo-American conference in Ditchley Park near Oxford in England, US officials insisted that Saddam Hussein must be unseated as “the next step in the war against terrorism”. In unmistakably praetorian, unilateral terms, the officials declared that America needed to send the message to other real and potential enemies that “Washington means to destroy its enemies wherever they are, and will do so whether the Europeans, or the ‘international community’, like it or not”.⁵⁵

The Threat of Civilizational Enmity

Nicholas Kristof has noted that within some Washington circles and elsewhere, there is a feeling that the best way to avoid another September 11 is to forget about winning Muslim hearts and minds and just concentrate on being feared. In this respect, he cites Cicero’s dictum: *Oderint, dum metuant* – Let them hate, as long as they fear.⁵⁶ The great danger of this evident American fixation with a praetorian hard line in the war on terror is that it will inadvertently generate a wider civilizational war between the West and Islam. The threat of civilizational enmity should not be confused with Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis, which has rightly been criticized as virtually ossifying the ideational boundaries between the West and Islam. Certainly, as some scholars have pointed out, considerable cultural, scientific and philosophical exchanges took place between both civilizations down the centuries.⁵⁷ The concept of civilizational enmity put forth here is more contingent, depending for its activation on situational stimuli. David Brown, in developing a paradigm for examining the relations between the state and ethnicity in Southeast Asia, observes that while ethnicity as a sociological category - in comparison to class - seems to “offer a more all-embracing and emotionally satisfying way of defining an individual’s identity”, he cautions against over-reliance on a static, “primordialist” interpretation of ethnic self-definition. He argues instead that a more

⁵⁴ Elisabeth Bumiller, “Saudi Tells Bush US Must Temper Backing of Israel”, *The New York Times*, 26 April 2002, Late Edition - Final, Section A, p. 1.

⁵⁵ William Pfaff, “The NATO Allies are Drifting Apart”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/55005.html, 18 April 2002.

⁵⁶ Nicholas D. Kristof, “Cicero was Wrong”, *The New York Times on the Web*, available at www.nytimes.com/2002/03/12/opinion/12KRIS.html, 12 March 2002.

⁵⁷ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 232.

nuanced analysis must take cognisance of “situationalist” factors. He asserts that in “sociology and anthropology, ethnic attachment has frequently been explained as a response to situational threats from dominating others”, so that individuals react by forming appropriate defensive groups. The perception of the ‘them’ is mirrored by the sense of ‘us’.⁵⁸

Likewise, while the average moderate Muslim - like his Christian and Hindu counterparts - can to some extent be expected to identify himself “primordially” as belonging to a distinct civilization, his sense of civilizational consciousness need not necessarily represent the predominant element of his overall identity set, utterly eclipsing other simultaneously held identities such as being a doctor or lawyer, or a Malaysian or Indonesian citizen. However, should Muslims in different nations perceive that their overarching civilization is being victimized by the Western “other”, and this perception is played up by radical Islamic “civilizational entrepreneurs”, so to speak, moderate Muslims may well become radicalised, “rally around the flag”, and deliberately and more consciously identify themselves as part of a wider Muslim “us” versus the infidel Western-American “them”. For example, in his travels through the shantytowns of Turkey in 1994, Robert Kaplan noted the emergence of civilizational enmity amongst Turks who, in response to media reports, were gradually “revising their group identity, increasingly seeing themselves as Muslims being deserted by a West that does little to help besieged Muslims in Bosnia and that attacks Turkish Muslims in the streets of Germany”.⁵⁹ In similar fashion, the American air campaign against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which began on 7 October 2001, generated a discernible closing of Muslim ranks. In a recent article, for example, Samuel Huntington noted that while in most Muslim countries, many people “condemned” the September 11 attacks, “huge numbers denounced the American response.” He added that the “longer and the more intensely the United States and its allies use military force against their opponents [in Afghanistan], the more widespread and intense will be the Muslim reaction”. Ultimately, “a prolonged [American] response to September 11 could produce Muslim unity”.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. pp. xvi-xviii.

⁵⁹ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York: Vintage, 2000), p.29.

⁶⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Age of Muslim Wars”, *Newsweek (Special Edition)*, Dec. 2001-Feb. 2002, p. 13.

In particular, an American invasion of Iraq without concomitant progress in ending Israeli-Palestinian violence would deepen civilizational enmity between the West (as symbolized by America), and Islam. To be sure, inter-civilizational tensions are already evident: while one of the more insidious political effects of 9/11 has been increasing Islamophobia in Europe,⁶¹ the ongoing Palestinian conflict is deepening anti-Semitism amongst Muslims.⁶² Hence American slothfulness – real and perceived – in helping to set up a Palestinian state would only exacerbate matters, generating “a single big idea in the minds of many young Muslims: America, Israel and the Jews are working together to undermine Islam and dominate the world”.⁶³ Why is the Palestine issue so important to Muslims? Surin Pitsuwan, the respected former foreign minister of Thailand and a Muslim, argues that a strong sense of “primordial” resentment exists among “all Muslims around the world” that their feelings concerning Jerusalem, which after Mecca and Medina is the third holiest site in Islam, have never been seriously accommodated.⁶⁴ Pitsuwan holds that the failure of the international community to seek a just solution to the problem has resulted in “frustration, inadequacy, the sense of being left out, the sense of being done injustice;” sentiments that have been “overwhelming to the point of desperation.”⁶⁵ In today’s globalized world, moreover, Arab satellite television stations such as Al-Jazeera and even Hezbollah have brought home the plight of the Palestinians as never before, and the graphic, violent images from the West Bank have enhanced the sense of personal interest in the conflict. Thus the April street protests that erupted throughout the Middle East in response to the Israeli army’s counterinsurgency campaign in the West Bank, were far more spontaneous and broad-based than ever before; when half a million Moroccans marched recently, many carried placards saying “We are all Palestinians”.⁶⁶ In addition, the governments of Jordan and Egypt, both of which have peace treaties with Israel, have been very anxious about the “public mood”. Thus while King Abdullah of Jordan sent an “explicit letter” to President Bush complaining that he was being “undermined” by events

⁶¹ Grace Sung, “More Distrust with Rising Islamophobia”, *The Straits Times Interactive* (Singapore), available at <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>, 21 April 2002.

⁶² Susan Sachs, “Anti-Semitism is Deepening among Muslims”, *The New York Times Online*, available at www.nytimes.com/2002/04/27/arts/27ANTI.html?todayshdlines, 27 April 2002.

⁶³ Thomas L. Friedman, “Young Muslims get a Twisted Picture”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/56725.html, 6 May 2002.

⁶⁴ Surin Pitsuwan, “Strategic Challenges Facing Islam in Southeast Asia,” lecture delivered at a forum organized by the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies and the Centre for Contemporary Islamic Studies, Singapore, November 5, 2001.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Max Rodenbeck, “Broadcasting the War”, *The New York Times*, 17 April 2002, Late Edition - Final, Section A, p. 23.

in Israel,⁶⁷ President Mubarak of Egypt felt compelled to accuse Israel of conducting “state terrorism” against the Palestinians.⁶⁸ Against this backdrop, there are suggestions that praetorian elements within the Bush Administration sought an international peace conference on Palestine in the summer of 2002 merely as a means of “parking the Mideast peace process while the administration gets on with more exciting and interesting things like Iraq”.⁶⁹ One senior Bush Administration official even told *Time* that the planned conference represented “a detour, and we have to get around it”.⁷⁰ To the extent that the Bush Administration believes that the Muslim ground does not matter in the war on terror, and that military force alone is the answer to the Al-Qaeda threat,⁷¹ the consequences would be far-reaching, affecting state-society relations in not just the Arab world, but as we shall now see, Southeast Asia as well.

The Southeast Asian Impact

Maritime Southeast Asia has re-emerged as a region of prime strategic importance to the United States. About 20 percent of the world’s one billion Muslims live in the area, and Indonesia hosts the world’s largest Muslim population of 170 million. The majority of the populations of Malaysia and Brunei are Muslim, and sizable Muslim minorities reside in the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The existence of this large, potentially sympathetic Muslim population, located in an archipelagic region that defies comprehensive administrative coverage by the central governments in Jakarta and Manila especially, suggests that Al-Qaeda, driven out of Afghanistan, might seek refuge here. In fact, in late April 2002, General Richard Myers, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, asserted while on an official visit to Manila that “links” had been discerned between Al-Qaeda and radical Islamic terrorist organizations in the region.⁷² It appears that Al-Qaeda’s penetration into Southeast Asia occurred in the early 1990s, when Osama Bin Laden’s brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, arrived in the Philippines and served

⁶⁷ Howard Schneider, “Wider Arab Protest Movement Takes Root”, *Washington Post*, 20 April 2002, p. A13.

⁶⁸ Howard Schneider, “Mubarak Condemns ‘Despicable Crimes’ by Israel”, *Washington Post*, 25 April 2002, p. A21.

⁶⁹ Karen DeYoung, “Bush’s Plan needs Aid from Others”, *The IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/56745.html, 6 May 2002.

⁷⁰ Daniel Eisenberg, “We’re Taking Him Out”, *Time*, 13 May 2002, pp. 32-33.

⁷¹ Pfaff, “Let’s See if Bush Stays the Course”.

⁷² Luz Baguiro, “Al-Qaeda ‘may set up base in South-east Asia’”, *The Straits Times Interactive* (Singapore), available at <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>, 28 April 2002.

as the original Al Qaeda representative in the Far East.⁷³ Around the same time that Khalifa was settling in, radical Islamic Filipinos returned from training camps in Afghanistan to form Abu Sayyaf in 1991. Abu Sayyaf once had close links with Al-Qaeda, notably through Ramzi Yousef, who attempted to destroy the World Trade Centre in New York in February 1993, and later planned to blow up 11 airliners over the Pacific in 1995. In recent years, however, Abu Sayyaf, which according to some estimates, number about 300, has not had very many dealings with Al-Qaeda. It is now suspected that Al-Qaeda has been forging closer links with the 12-000 strong and better-organized Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).⁷⁴

It is in Indonesia, the largest archipelagic country in Southeast Asia, and whose embattled central government is unable to fully control its far-flung outer islands, that Al-Qaeda might be consolidating its most substantive presence.⁷⁵ Of particular interest, on 12 December 2001, Lieutenant General Abdullah Hendropriyono, head of Indonesia's national intelligence service, revealed that Al Qaeda operatives were providing assistance to the Indonesian radical Islamic group Laskar Jihad in its battles with Christians in Poso in central Sulawesi.⁷⁶ Laskar Jihad numbers between 3 000 and 10 000, and is led by Jafar Umar Thalib, who apparently fought beside bin Laden against the Soviets in the 1980s.⁷⁷ Thalib also heads a network of *pesantren* or Quranic schools that impart a radical Islamic worldview with global dimensions.⁷⁸ Since 1999, this group, which seeks to establish Islamic law in Indonesia, has been leading thousands of Muslims in battles with Christians for control of the islands in central and eastern Indonesia. Although Thalib denies any connection with Al Qaeda, American officials believe that Laskar Jihad has set up secret training camps in the jungles of Sulawesi where hundreds of non-Indonesian Muslims, including possibly Al-Qaeda operatives, have trained.⁷⁹ Laskar is based in the central Javanese city of Yogyakarta, and has even set up a media centre in Jakarta, which hosts a Web site and produces radical Islamic publications. As Diarmid O'Sullivan of the

⁷³ Rohan Gunaratna, "Al-Qaeda : The Asian Connection". *The Straits Times Interactive* (Singapore), available at <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/usattack/story/0,1870,94610-1010095200,00.html>, 4 Jan. 2002.

⁷⁴ Anthony Spaeth, "Rumbles in the Jungle", *Time*, 4 March 2002, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁵ "Indonesia Presenting Numerous Obstacles to US Action", *Stratfor.com*, available at www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_print.php?ID=204199, 22 April 2002.

⁷⁶ Barry Desker and Kumar Ramakrishna, "Forging and Indirect Strategy in Southeast Asia", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.25, No. 2 (Spring 2002), p. 164.

⁷⁷ Andrew Marshall, "The Threat of Jaafar", *The New York Times Magazine*, 10 March 2002.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Brussels-based International Crisis Group observes, “Laskar Jihad stands out because of its strong ideological motivation and its military strength.”⁸⁰

Laskar Jihad so far does not appear to have a regional, let alone an international presence.⁸¹ However, Ayip Sysfruddin, Thalib’s deputy, has indicated that Laskar is willing to “fight with our Muslim brothers” if they are being killed “in other parts of the world”.⁸² Nevertheless, there does exist a Southeast Asian radical Islamic network which has a regional and most probably international profile, and whose ideological and organizational epicentre appears to be located in Indonesia. This is the Jemaah Islamiah (JI), which also has cells in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. On 11 January 2002 the Singapore government revealed that it had detained 13 members of JI, which had been planning terror attacks on US naval personnel, American naval vessels transiting Singapore waters, the US, Israeli, British and Australian embassies, the Ministry of Defence as well as American companies in Singapore.⁸³ JI was created in the mid-1990s by two radical Indonesian clerics, Hambali alias Riduan Isamuddin and Abubakar Bashir. They preached the overthrow of secular governments and the setting up of a *Daulah Islamiah*, an Islamic state linking Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Muslim-dominated southern Philippines. Along the way, according to some analysts, JI became part of the broader Al-Qaeda network.⁸⁴ While Hambali is said to be Al-Qaeda’s “point-man in Southeast Asia,”⁸⁵ Bashir, who heads the Indonesian Mujahideen Council, which seeks the adoption of Sharia law in Indonesia, has been described as “the Osama bin Laden of south-east Asia”.⁸⁶ The Malaysian government also claims that Bashir directs another militant Islamic group, the Malaysian Mujahideen Movement (KMM), which has been implicated in bank robberies, murders, and kidnapping.⁸⁷ Between August 2001 and

⁸⁰ Diarmid O’Sullivan, “Indonesia: Radicals Have Homegrown Causes,” *IHT Online*, available at www.iht.com/articles/42897.html, December 26, 2001.

⁸¹ Marshall, “The Threat of Jaffar”.

⁸² Seto Nu-Wen, “Watch Out: Bloodthirsty Indon Wolfpack Prepared to Fight in other Countries”, *The New Paper* (Singapore), 11 May 2002, pp. 28-29.

⁸³ “Yishun target in group’s plans”, *Straits Times* (Singapore), January 12, 2002, p.1.

⁸⁴ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Al-Qaeda’s Southeast Asian Reach”, *MSNBC.com*, available at www.msnbc.com/news/698796.asp, 3 Feb. 2002.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ John Burton, “Police to Quiz Cleric Seen as South-East Asia’s bin Laden”, *FT.com*, 23 Jan. 2002, available at

<http://news.ft.com/ft/gx.cgi/ftc?pagename=View&c=Article&cid=FT3ZFTWKTWC&live=true&tagid=ZZZC19QUA0C&subheading=asia+pacific>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

February 2002, Kuala Lumpur detained 50 KMM militants.⁸⁸ According to leading terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna, Al Qaeda has established “military links” with the KMM, which operates in both Malaysia and Indonesia.⁸⁹

Is Southeast Asia therefore ripe for transformation into the next Al-Qaeda base of operations? It is a truism that Southeast Asian Muslims have traditionally been moderate, willing to practise their Islam as a private obligation, and quite happy to live within a secular political framework. This is because Islam came to Southeast Asia by way of traders who put the needs of commerce ahead of matters of faith. Hence, Islam in Southeast Asia was compelled to accommodate the beliefs and traditions that Hinduism and Buddhism, already present in the region, propounded. The net result was the gradual emergence of a Southeast Asian Islam, which—in the words of Azyumardi Azra, a leading Indonesian Islamic scholar—was “basically, tolerant, peaceful, and ‘smiling’.”⁹⁰ However, there are three reasons why America should not take things for granted. First is the problem of poor governance afflicting critical maritime Southeast Asian states. Indonesia, whose *own* armed forces (TNI) commander warned in mid-February has the potential to become a “hotbed for terrorists”,⁹¹ requires especial attention. It urgently requires assistance in consolidating its democratic experiment while maintaining territorial integrity and administrative coherence. That Jakarta has a problem in actually governing is evinced on the one hand by its slothfulness in detaining suspected terrorist ringleaders. While Abu Bakar Bashir was only questioned and then released, much to the chagrin of neighbours such as Singapore and Malaysia, Jafar Umar Thalib was only detained in early May after inciting violence against Christians in Ambon and making threats against President Megawati and her family.⁹² Reports that elements of the TNI have actually been supporting Laskar Jihad also hint at the very weak administrative capacity of the central government.⁹³ Jakarta also needs help in promoting socio-economic development, especially as it is still feeling the after-effects of the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis. As is

⁸⁸ Simon Elegant, “Untangling the Web”, *Time.com*, 9 Feb. 2002, available at www.time.com/time/world/printout/0.8816.197713.00.html.

⁸⁹ Gunaratna, “Al-Qaeda”.

⁹⁰ Azyumardi Azra, “The Megawati Presidency: Challenge of Political Islam”, paper delivered at the “Joint Public Forum on Indonesia: The First 100 Days of President Megawati”, organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore) and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (Jakarta), 1 Nov. 2001, Singapore.

⁹¹ Tiarna Siboro and Yogita Tahilramani, “Indonesia Could be Used as ‘Hotbed for Terrorists’”, *Jakarta Post*, 15 Feb. 2002, available at www.thejakartapost.com/misc/PrinterFriendly.asp.

⁹² Seto Nu-Wen, “Watch Out”.

⁹³ Desker and Ramakrishna, “Forging an Indirect Strategy”, p. 170.

stands, “rising poverty and lawlessness, fuelled by economic stagnation and political infighting”, have begun to compel increasing numbers of ordinary Indonesians to “view radical Islam as a panacea”.⁹⁴ In this connection, Laskar Jihad, like Hamas and Hezbollah in the Arab world, won new supporters because it tried to alleviate the plight of the rural poor by setting up health clinics and schools.⁹⁵

The second reason for concern about the potential for Southeast Asian Islamic radicalisation is the extant circulation of radical Islamic ideas throughout the region. These strands of thought promote enhanced civilizational identity by suggesting *inter alia*, that “Islam knows no geography”, that the “concept of separate Muslim nation-states was itself alien to Islam”, and that “a problem of a Muslim anywhere is a problem of Muslims everywhere”. Hence it is incumbent upon young, able-bodied Muslims to implement a pan-regional Islamic union governed by the Sharia by force, if need be.⁹⁶ The proximate source for these ideas are the numerous networks of radical Islamic *pesantran* and madrassas scattered throughout the rural hinterlands of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines especially. For instance, Fathur Rahman Al-Ghozi, the Indonesian bomb-maker linked to the MILF and JI and who was captured in the Philippines in January 2002, was educated in a *pesantran* in Ngruki, near Solo in east Java that had been set up by Abu Bakar Bashir.⁹⁷ In addition, at times non-Southeast Asian Al-Qaeda operatives themselves have set up radical Islamic centres in remote localities out of the central government’s effective control, as in the case of Mohammad Sabri Selamah, an Iraqi Palestinian, who prior to his arrest had been a head teacher at a Koranic recitation centre in the small rural community of Simuay Crossing in Mindanao.⁹⁸ It must also be recognized that every year hundreds of Southeast Asians return from religious studies in Pakistani madrassas, some of which are run by Saudi-supported “semi-educated scholars” who propagate the exclusionist Wahhabi ideology that predisposes pupils toward radical worldviews. In fact, the Malaysian government recently learned that perhaps up to 1000 Malaysian Muslims

⁹⁴ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Indonesian-Style Taliban Fights for Islamic Law”, *Washington Post*, 4 May 2002, p. A01.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Ahmar Mustikhan, “The Roots of Islamic Extremism”, *The World and I Online*, July 1999, available at www.worldandi.com/new/subscribers/printversion.asp?num=18395. While Mustikhan was writing about radical Islamic thinking in a Pakistani context, the fact that scores of Southeast Asian Muslims have been schooled in fundamentalist madrassas in Pakistan has ensured that extremist Deobandi and Wahhabi ideas have been imported into Southeast Asia.

⁹⁷ Elegant, “Untangling the Web”.

⁹⁸ Spaeth, “Rumbles in the Jungle”, p. 16.

are enrolled in Pakistani madrassas. As Malaysian political analyst Chandra Muzaffar notes, if a “large pool of Malaysians are being exposed” to extremist teachings, then “there is a good chance that some of them will return home with the same ideas as the Taleban”.⁹⁹ Ulil Abshar Abdallah, an official of the moderate Nadhlatul Ulama, Indonesia’s largest Muslim organization, admitted that radical Islamic propaganda is powerful because rather than “mulling over religious paradoxes and disputes about the lives of long-dead saints,” it excels in “presenting a simple yet comprehensive ideology that can be grasped by common people.”¹⁰⁰

Analytically distinct from but complementing the threat posed by radical interpretations of Islam – and the final reason why the potential for the “Talibanization” of Southeast Asia should not be too casually dismissed - is the widespread anti-Americanism among Muslims in the region. In Southeast Asia as elsewhere in the *ummah*, the perception exists that the *Dar al-Islam* “has fallen behind in economic development, education, science and democratization” because of a worldwide Jewish-American conspiracy to keep Muslims downtrodden.¹⁰¹ This visceral anti-Americanism has generated an intrinsic tendency to doubt Washington’s good intentions and pronouncements, and explains the reflex belief amongst many street level Muslims that the 11 September attacks were actually the work of the Mossad, and that videotapes of bin Laden all but admitting culpability for the strikes were in fact doctored by American intelligence services.¹⁰² One young Indonesian female student at the *Pesantren Darunnajah*, a leading Islamic boarding school in Jakarta, spoke for many Southeast Asian Muslims when she told the *New York Times* journalist Thomas L. Friedman that “most Muslims are afraid of America because they think that America is against Islam”, and that “America is backing the Israelians [sic], and the enmity between Islam and Israel, the Jews [and] Judaism, is obvious”.¹⁰³ Such anti-Americanism is only exacerbated by egregious American public relations blunders. Thus a “photograph of an American cruise missile bound for Baghdad during Operation Desert Fox with the words Happy Ramadan

⁹⁹ Brendan Pereira, “The Pakistani Connection”, *Sunday Times (Singapore)*, 7 April 2002, p. 31

¹⁰⁰ Peter Ford, “Listening For Islam’s Silent Majority”, *The Christian Science Monitor* (Online), available at www.csmonitor.com/2001/1105/p1s2-wogi.html, 5 Nov. 2001.

¹⁰¹ Thomas L. Friedman, “Blunt Question, Blunt Answer”, *The New York Times*, 10 Feb. 2002, Late Edition - Final, Section 4, p. 15.

¹⁰² Bergen, “Picking Up the Pieces”, p. 174.

¹⁰³ Friedman, “Young Muslims Get a Twisted Picture”.

chalked on the side is still widely remembered” in the Muslim world.¹⁰⁴ Given the anti-American sentiment that pervades the Muslim world, it was no real surprise that the American air campaign in Afghanistan that began in October 2001 caused ripples in Muslim Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, for instance, the Islamic fundamentalist political party PAS called on Muslims to wage a jihad against the U.S,¹⁰⁵ while Jakarta was hit by waves of anti-American demonstrations.¹⁰⁶ Israeli incursions into the West Bank in April 2002 also had a similar effect, precisely because of the special religious and hence emotional significance of Palestine to Muslims in general. Thus demonstrations against Israel’s intervention took place in Jakarta, where the offices of the United Nations and the United States were mobbed. The unrest also spread to other cities such as Bandung, Yogyakarta and Makassar.¹⁰⁷ The Nahdlatul Ulama expressed concern at the inflammatory effect of the Israeli incursion on Muslim sentiments.¹⁰⁸ In sum, a lopsided praetorian approach to the war on terror can only breed a creeping anti-American, civilizational enmity amongst Southeast Asian Muslims, persuading them to identify themselves defensively *as above all else*, part of a borderless worldwide Islamic nation under attack. This might predispose them to accept the radical Islamic argument that rather than rely on secular state authorities that are themselves too identified with America to be relied upon to defend Islam, ultimately “salvation lies in an international, unified Islamic fundamentalist movement”.¹⁰⁹ This is not all that far-fetched. Even urban Singaporean Muslims, which have traditionally separated religion from politics, are now evincing “growing awareness of what’s happening in the Middle East”.¹¹⁰ In January 2002 the Muslim-rights group Fateha.com also criticized the Singapore government for being insensitive to local Muslims for aligning far too closely with America in the war on terror.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Philip Taylor, “Spin Laden”, *The World Today*, Dec. 2001, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Richardson, “Mahathir Boosted by Terrorism Stance”, *CNN.com*, available at www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/10/31/malaysia.mahathir/index.html, 31 Oct. 2001.

¹⁰⁶ Atika Shubert, “Indonesia Braces for Friday Protests”, *CNN.com*, available at www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/10/11/ret.indon.protests/index.html, 11 Oct. 2001.

¹⁰⁷ *Indonesia Digest*, no. 14.02, 8 April 2002, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ “Upsurge in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Impacts Southeast Asia”, *Stratfor.com*, available at www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_print.php?ID=203803, 8 April 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Mustikhan, “The Roots of Islamic Extremism”.

¹¹⁰ Trish Saywell, “Common Ground”, *Far Eastern Economic Review* (online), available at www.feer.com/articles/2002/0201_24/p020region.html, 24 Jan. 2002.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The preceding analysis suggests that the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 – “911” - represented a profound psychological shock to America, and given the globalized nature of the new terrorism, American concerns about homeland security are fully justified. The gravity of the threat, together with the neoconservative character of the Bush Administration has resulted in a post-911 foreign policy stance of praetorian unilateralism that emphasizes a military approach to the campaign against Osama bin Laden. This strategy is however worryingly lopsided. While the Americans and their Coalition partners may score operational successes in Afghanistan and other theatres in the war on terror, the failure to effectively and comprehensively address the sources of Muslim anti-Americanism in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and elsewhere will only ensure that Al-Qaeda and its ideological bedfellows remain an existential threat. In particular, if in the coming months America is perceived by the global Islamic *ummah* as more keen on attacking Iraq rather than expending greater effort on seeking a just resolution of the Palestine conflict, it risks sending the singularly unhelpful message that *America is no friend of Islam*. This might compel Muslim governments, already worried about increasingly broad-based public opposition, to leave the Coalition, thereby delegitimizing the latter in the eyes of the worldwide Muslim street. In a wider sense, moreover, the perception - reinforced by both radical Islamic propaganda and ill-conceived American deed - that Islam itself is under attack might radicalise previously moderate Muslims. In the case of Southeast Asia, the radicalisation process would involve Southeast Asian Muslims defensively and self-consciously asserting their sectarian Islamic identities at the expense of overarching national allegiances and in extreme cases this may destabilize multi-religious, multiethnic polities. This development would only precipitate a further loss of investor confidence and economic stagnation, rendering radical Islamic solutions more attractive to ever-increasing numbers of frustrated young Muslims. Al-Qaeda would then have access to potentially large numbers of Asian Muslim recruits for possible deployment in future operations. There is in fact *already* concern that in order to elude racial profiling by US law enforcement agencies, Al-Qaeda may simply resort to using non-Arabs, such as Asians, for future strikes on

American soil and at American targets.¹¹² In the most supreme of ironies, therefore, American praetorian unilateralism – if left unmitigated - might over the longer term sustain the very threat it has sought to eradicate.

¹¹² Eric Pianin and Bob Woodward, “Terror Concerns of US Extend to Asia”, *The Washington Post*, 18 Jan. 2002, p. A18.

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