

Southeast Asian Military Modernization: A New Arms Race?

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Overview

- What is driving and enabling arms modernization in Southeast Asia?
- What kinds of military equipment are regional militaries buying?
- How are new weapons systems affecting the regional military landscape?
 - Does it constitute an “arms race”?

Drivers and Enablers Behind Naval Modernization Activities

- Drivers:
 - Regional tensions
 - Changing military requirements demanding force projection capabilities (coalition operations, good order at sea)
 - Shift in U.S. military activities
 - Growing Chinese military presence in South China Sea
- Enablers
 - Rising defense budgets
 - Supply-side economics: “buyer’s market” for arms

Regional Tensions

- Competing territorial claims (Spratlys, Liancourt Islets, Ambalat sea block)
- Competing EEZ claims: oil and gas, fisheries
 - Several countries in SEA (and China) overlap in their EEZ claims in the South China Sea
- Enduring intra-ASEAN animosities (Singapore v. Malaysia, Myanmar v. Thailand)

New Force Projection Requirements

- Protect SLOCs
 - Malacca/Singapore, Lombok, Makassar, Sunda straits
 - Critical to global trade
 - 25% of the world's trade passes through Southeast Asian waterways
 - 25% of crude oil
 - 50% of supertankers, by tonnage
- Increased requirement for PKOs and stabilization missions
- “Good order at sea” in the regional waters
 - Counter-terrorism
 - Counter-piracy

U.S. Military Activities in the Asia-Pacific

- Shift in focus from NE to SE Asia
- Force transformation
 - Relocation of troops out of South Korea and Japan
 - Corresponding buildup in Guam
- Defense transformation
 - Greater emphasis on mobility, agility, flexibility of U.S. forces in Asia-Pacific
- New alliance arrangements
 - Forward operating bases/staging areas
 - Improved interoperability with regional militaries

Chinese “Creeping Assertiveness” in SEA

- Growing economic interests in SEA: 60% of China’s oil comes through Southeast Asian SLOCs
- China claims “sovereign control” over most of South China Sea
 - A “core interest” on par with Taiwan, Tibet
- Chinese military buildup around SEA:
 - PLA Navy: From brown to green to blue: create a sustainable power projection/expeditionary naval force
 - New naval bases in Hainan and Woody Islands (nuclear submarines, Su-30MKIs)
 - Base access in Myanmar and Pakistan (“string of pearls”)

Enabler #1: Rising Regional Defense Spending

	2000	2008	Increase
Indonesia	\$2.2b	\$3.8b	72%
Malaysia	\$1.7b	\$3.5b	106%
Singapore	\$4.6b	\$5.8b	26%
Thailand	\$2.1b	\$3b	43%

Source: SIPRI

- Overall SEA military spending rose 50% in real terms between 2000 and 2008

Enabler #2: The Global “Buyer’s Market” in Arms

- Most leading arms producers (Western Europe, Russia, Israel) are highly dependent on exports
 - Excess capacity, shrinking markets at home
 - Producers prepared to deal when it comes price, flexible payment options, offsets, tech transfers
- SEA: Small but growing market (~\$2b annually)
 - 2005-09: Malaysian arms imports rose 722%; Singapore, 146%; Indonesia, 84% (SIPRI)
 - Singapore: 7th largest arms importer
 - SEA: a truly “open” arms market

Airpower Buildup in SEA

- Singapore: 24 F-15SG
 - 74 F-16 “block 52/52+”
 - JSF partner (up to 100)
- Malaysia: 18 Su-30MKM (+18?)
- Indonesia: 4 Su-27, 5 Su-30 (+6?)
- Vietnam: 12 Su-27, 12 Su-30MKK
- Thailand: 12 Gripen
- Burma: 20 MiG-29

- Armaments: AMRAAM, AA-12, JDAM (S’pore), JSOW (S’pore), RBS-15 (Thai)

Naval Power Buildup in SEA

- Singapore: 6 *Lafayette*-class FFGs, 4 ex-Swed. SSKs (acquiring 2 more, with AIP), 4 LPDs (350 troops, 18 tanks, 2 helos, 4 LCAC)
 - Building a “networked navy”
- Malaysia: 2 British frigates, 2 *Scorpène* SSKs
 - Once had plans to locally construct up to 27 MEKO100 OPVs, later cut back to 6 (but may be resurrected)
- Indonesia: 4 Dutch *Sigma*-class corvettes (w/Ch. C-802 and Exocet ASCMs), 4 Korean LPDs
 - May also buy submarines: new from Russia (earlier buy effort failed), or used from Germany or South Korea
- Vietnam: 6 Kilo-class SSKs
- Thailand: aircraft carrier (*Chakri Nareubet*), subs?

Land Power Buildup in SEA

- Main Battle Tanks
 - Malaysia: Polish PT-91M MBT (T-72)
 - Singapore: Leopard 2A4
 - Vietnam: T-72 (ex-Poland)
 - Myanmar: T-72
- Artillery Systems
 - Malaysia: Brazilian ASTROS II MRL; South Af. G-5 arty
 - Singapore: HIMARS MRL; Primus, Pegasus arty
 - Thailand: Fr. CAESAR arty
- Attack Helicopters
 - Singapore: AH-64D
 - Malaysia: Mi-8 Hip
 - Indonesia: Mi-8 Hip

C4ISR

- UAVs: Singapore: (Israel), Malaysia (indigenous), Thailand (Israel), Philippines (Israel)
- AEW+C aircraft: Singapore (Israel), Thailand (Sweden)
- C4 systems: IKC2 (Singapore)

Is It an “Arms Race”? Probably Not

- Characteristics of an arms race (Colin Grey, Grant Hammond)
 - Conscious, mutually antagonistic relationship
 - Deliberate structuring of armed forces based on likely adversary’s behavior
 - Military planning directly based on calculations of likely adversary’s capabilities and intentions
 - Explicit quantitative and qualitative competition in arms acquisitions
 - Increased defense spending and a “rapid” rate of acquisitions
- Hard to see an “arms race” *per se* in SEA, in terms of openly adversarial relationships, military planning, # of arms being acquired, the rate of acquisitions, etc.
 - Many SEA countries (Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines) are barely players

The China Factor

- Presence of China complicates regional arms planning, undercuts “regional arms race” argument
 - There is certainly a “counter-China” element to the SEA arms acquisitions, esp. naval, and esp. on the part of Vietnam
 - But China is hardly arming itself respective to countering an SEA arms buildup (no action-reaction cycle)

Nonstrategic Rationales for SEA Arms Acquisitions

- Prestige and pride
- “Keeping up with the Joneses”
- Corruption (bribery)
- Supply-side economics
 - Is “easy” access to advanced weapons driving demand?
- Domestic/Interservice politics (“everyone gets a new car!”)
 - Thai aircraft carrier

Asia-Pacific Military Buildup: More Than “Just” Modernization

- New capabilities when it comes to:
 - Force projection: range, speed, maneuver, and sustainability
 - Lethality and precision
 - Stand-off strike capacity
 - Stealth
 - Command and control, battlespace knowledge
- Kernel of the RMA/defense transformation
 - Singapore: IKC2 networked forces

SEA and the “Arms Dynamic”

- Buzan and Herring: Arms dynamic/arms competition
 - Still an action-reaction process, but...
 - ...mostly technology driven (recapitalization)...
 - ...and basically “status quo” oriented (intended to maintain a regional military balance, rather than gain hegemony or superiority over competitors)

SEA Military Modernization: A Potentially Destabilizing Buildup?

- “Modernization-plus”: lead to the introduction of new capabilities (e.g., for force projection, stealth, firepower, ISR) into regional military security calculus
- Increased arms competitions: can contribute to a regional “security dilemma”
 - Reinforce mutual suspicions and insecurities: spiral effect undermines the very security that arming is seeking to enhance
 - Make conflict, should it occur, more lethal
- On the other hand, improved capabilities for contributing to and interoperating with US forces in coalition operations; counter-China capabilities