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How 'Big Brother' USA became the 'Great Satan':
Changing Perceptions of the United States of America Among the
Muslim Communities of Southeast Asia

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I. Against the *infidel* state of America: How anti-Americanism in Southeast Asia transformed itself into a *Jihad* against the enemies of Islam.

'The Americans hate the *Taliban* because the latter is firmly committed to upholding Islamic values. Osama bin Laden is just an excuse for the US, which has time and again shown its hostility towards Islam, to wage war against (our) religion.'¹

**Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat,
Spiritual Leader of the Pan-Malaysian
Islamic Party (PAS), October 2001**

On 28 April 2004, the predominantly-Muslim provinces of Patani, Jala, Satun and Narathiwat in Southern Thailand were rocked by a series of simultaneous attacks carried out on a number of police check-posts, police stations and an army garrison.

Witnesses to the attacks claimed that it was unprecedented in terms of its ferocity and brazenness as well as the tactics that were used: The assailants did not employ the familiar hit-and-run tactics favoured by local criminal gangs or guerrillas, but instead attacked the security forces head-on, fighting pitched battles while holding on to their positions, seemingly heedless of the casualties they were sustaining. Witnesses also claimed that many of the attackers were chanting religious slogans and their bodies were covered by banners and symbols denoting their commitment to their religion. It is also interesting to note that many of the attackers chose to use traditional weapons such as swords and machetes – in a region long-since known as a major transit point for illegal firearms and where the most sophisticated weapons can be bought easily on the black market.

By the end of the day, all of the attacks were beaten back and more than a hundred young Muslim attackers were killed. The Thai security forces, in the course of their mopping-up operations, collected the bodies of the slain attackers for further inspection. On several of the alleged militants were found copies of a text written in *Jawi* (Malay written in Arabic script), entitled '*Jihad di Patani*' (*Jihad in Patani*).

The contents and significance of this mysterious text shall be discussed further in the following section. But we would like to note here that one important theme which appears in the text time and again was the need for Muslims the world over to unite and struggle against the perceived enemies of Islam. In the context of the struggle of Patani, this enemy was presented as the government of Thailand, based in Bangkok. But more significantly was the text's allusion to the 'real power' behind the government of Thailand, namely the United States of America. The struggle against America was now being presented as a religious struggle against the enemies of Islam. Anti-Americanism, which is neither new nor unique to Southeast Asia, had been reinvented as a *Jihad*.

How, and why, has it come to this? This is the question that we set out to answer – albeit tentatively – in the course of this paper.

¹ Mohd Irfan Isa, *Osama an excuse to wage war against Islam: Nik Aziz* (Malaysiakini.com, 10 October 2001)

In this introductory section we shall give a cursory outline of America's historical entanglement in Southeast Asian affairs. In the second section we shall examine the emergence and development of the newer discourse of anti-Americanism among the predominantly Muslim communities of Southeast Asia, attempting a close reading and discourse analysis of this new rhetoric and its political-ideological implications. In the third section we shall try to identify the major failures and shortcomings of American foreign policy vis-à-vis the ASEAN region, which accounts for the renewed spirit of Anti-Americanism there, as well as its tenor and temper. In the concluding section we shall offer some tentative observations on the state of American-ASEAN relations today, and where the situation might lead us to in the near future.

- ***The Yankee gunboat sails into view: America's arrival to Southeast Asia in the post-war years.***

“...and so we inaugurate our rule of peace with a heart-breaking little war.”²

**Sir Hugh Clifford,
British Colonial Resident to the
State of Pahang, 1929.**

The heavy imprint of American culture, as well as its political, economic and military-strategic influence, can be seen everywhere in Southeast Asia³ today: from the legion of American fast-food restaurants that litter the streets of ASEAN's cities to the heavily-fortified American embassies that blight the already-ugly urban landscape of the region's capitals.

Since the 1960s, American influence has been growing steadily in the region – primarily due to America's active role in the anti-Communist struggle in Southeast Asia – on practically all levels. America was seen by many postcolonial ASEAN elites as an exemplary model of modernity and rapid development, and also a land of equal opportunities and free trade. America in turn pumped millions of dollars into the region in terms of direct foreign investment (FDI), development projects, educational exchange programmes, military and strategic assistance, joint intelligence and military operations as well as – at times – covert support for political groupings, agents and actors.

America's arrival in Southeast Asia was not without considerable local support and approval: With the withdrawal of the former West European colonial powers (Britain, France, Spain and the Netherlands) from the region it was the United States that stood to gain the most from the power vacuum that was created in the wake of the fall of Empire. The unstated understanding between the United States and Great Britain, which intimated the need for the US to step into the former British colonies and protectorates east of Suez, was clear widely known by then. So was America's unwillingness to allow the former European powers to pursue their foreign policy objectives with any degree of muscular vigour, as Washington's blatant rebuke of London and Paris over the Suez affair clearly demonstrated.

² Hugh Clifford, *Bush-Whacking and Other Asiatic Tales and Memories*, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1929. (pg. 8)

³ For the needs of this paper, our definition of 'Southeast Asia' shall include all the countries that were the founding members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), that is Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines. It also includes the countries of mainland Southeast Asia, which are Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Burma/Myanmar, as well as the tiny Malay Sultanate of Brunei.

In Asia, America presented itself – at least initially – as a liberating power that had not only defeated the forces of Imperial Japan but also as a new partner in intra-Asian affairs. Stepping into the void that was left by the former colonial powers came the USA, which established a firm foothold in countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines as well as Malaysia and Indonesia. In these countries the United States worked to gain influence and clout through its non-governmental agencies and foundations: The Asia Foundation, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and numerous other agencies actively sponsored, supported and promoted issues and interests that were close to the heart of American politicians, technocrats, lobbyists and the American business community.

From technical matters such as economic liberalisation and structural adjustment to thorny and controversial issues such as birth control and family planning (particularly in countries like Indonesia and the Philippines), the hand of the USA was clearly evident. America's universities became the models that Southeast Asian universities were based on; America's industries became models that were emulated and replicated locally, and American political culture was seen as the representative standard of how Constitutional Democracies should be run and managed. American technocrats, consultant and specialists worked hand-in-glove with their Southeast Asian counterparts, helping to re-model the economies and societies of the region according to the American prototype.

Despite the bold approach taken by the American government and its related non-governmental agencies, American influence and interference in the domestic affairs of Southeast Asia was not entirely unwelcomed. This can only be understood in the context of the wider background of the Cold War that was raging in earnest then, and the pivotal role played by the US as the sole guarantor of the safety and territorial integrity of many of the ASEAN states. The singular factor that recommended the United States in the eyes of Southeast Asia's leaders then was the fact that it was the only other superpower that could stand against the might of Communist Russia and China – both of which were treated with scorn and suspicion, and widely believed to have long-term strategic and political designs on the region.

Thus during the Cold War, the US was not only seen as a reliable ally and partner, but its active support was being courted by the leaders of Southeast Asia as well. In the case of countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, successive local leaders and governments adjusted their foreign policy orientation so as to ensure that their countries remained 'neutral on the side of the West'.

In the Malaysian case this was most clearly demonstrated by the foreign policy orientation of the country's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj⁴ – who was not only a self-confessed Anglophile, but also staunchly anti-Communist to boot. Tunku Abdul Rahman saw to it that with the passing of the British colonial era Malaya (later Malaysia, post-1963) was able to seek out a new strategic and military partner who could guarantee the safety and territorial

⁴ Tunku Abdul Rahman was one of the many sons of the philoprogenitive Sultan Abdul Hamid of Kedah (who fathered 45 children and had 92 grand- and great-grand-children). He was given a traditional royal upbringing and was later sent to Cambridge to further his studies. For a more detailed discussion of the Tunku's personal history, feudal outlook and practices, see Chandra, *Protector?*, pp. 89–90; Harry Miller, *Prince and Premier: A Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj*, London: Harrap, 1959; and Abdullah Ahmad, *Tunku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1963–1970*, Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1985.

integrity of the fledgling nation.⁵ (It should be remembered that when the Federation of Malaya first came into being in 1957, it was widely suspected – by the Indonesians and Filipinos in particular – of being a ‘Trojan horse’ of the former colonial powers. Soon after Malaya was formed an active campaign to discredit the Malayan project was initiated by the Indonesians. This campaign intensified when Malaya was expanded to the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, leading to the short and ill-fated *konfrontasi* (confrontation) between Malaysia and Indonesia.⁶)

To this end, the Tunku made numerous overtures to other Western nations, including America, Britain and Australia. Tunku Abdul Rahman’s pleas did not go unanswered: The Americans were keen to support the new project of an independent Malaya so as to ensure that the Malay Peninsula would not fall under the heels of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), that was then fighting a vicious and bloody guerrilla war in the Malayan countryside. Washington was also keen to support the new Malayan state as a counter-balance to neighbouring Indonesia, that was then under the leadership of the nationalist firebrand leader Soekarno – who was in turn perceived as being under the thumb of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

The American government was therefore more than willing to aid and assist the gradual (and peaceful) transfer of power from British colonial rule to Malayan self-rule; and to ensure that the new Malayan government under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman and his UMNO party

⁵ For a critical review of Tunku Abdul Rahman’s foreign policy orientation, which many of his critics claimed was too partial to the West, see: Abdullah Ahmad, *Tunku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia’s Foreign Policy 1963–1970*, Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1985.

⁶ The *Konfrontasi* between Malaysia and Indonesia, that was initiated by the latter, lasted from 1963 to 1965. During the conflict the Philippines supported Indonesia in its efforts to discredit the newly established Malaysian Federation. When the north Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak joined the federation, the Indonesian communists (led by Dupa Nusantara Aidit of the PKI) immediately criticised the move as part of a Western plot to create a pro-Western puppet state in the heart of Southeast Asia. The Indonesian communists were also being supported by radical Malaysian leftists who had escaped into exile in Indonesia, such as Ibrahim Yaakob. The PKI communists pressured Soekarno to declare war on Malaysia in 1963. Soekarno, who was under pressure to keep his own coalition of nationalist, religious (Islamist) and communist forces intact under the NASAKOM pact, was forced to give in. The failed Azhaari revolt in Brunei in 1962 (which the PKI claimed was planned by Malaysia) was used as the pretext for declaration of hostilities. In the Philippines, the Macapagal government was also under pressure from the opposition parties who claimed that Sabah was technically part of the Philippines as it was once under the dominion of the Sultanate of Sulu. This gave the Philippines justification to support Indonesia’s open declaration of hostilities against Malaysia. During the confrontation, only Indonesia launched open attacks against Malaysia. Attacks on Sarawak had begun in 1962, and attacks on the Malay Peninsula began in 1963 with bombings in Melaka and Singapore. However, the Indonesian army, though stronger and larger, was poorly led and suffered from inadequate intelligence sources. The Indonesians made the mistake of including Chinese communist guides in their landing forces in Johor and along the west coast of the peninsula. The Indonesian troops gained little sympathy from the local Malays, who had come to hate the Chinese communists for the atrocities they committed in Malaysia during the Emergency of 1948–60. The Indonesian forces who landed were quickly rounded up, captured or killed by Malaysian defence forces and local volunteers. The Indonesian airforce also performed badly during the conflict. Casualties were borne mainly by the Indonesian side, and both economic and human costs of the conflict were enormous. By 1965 inflation in Indonesia had risen to more than 600% and the economy was spiralling out of control. Soekarno’s decision to go to war against Malaysia led to massive capital flight from Indonesia, which wrecked the economy even further. In Java alone more than one million people were starving. Malaysia, on the other hand, received sympathy and support from the West and the conflict only brought the country even closer to the Western bloc. The confrontation also failed to create a popular movement in Malaysia against the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, something which Soekarno desperately wanted. In the end, the conflict was terminated by 1965 when the failed GESTAPU revolt by the communists led to persecution of the PKI and communist sympathisers in the country and the rise of General Soeharto.

was not threatened by leftist elements in the country. As soon as the Second World War was over, American intelligence and military operatives (of the American Office of Strategic Services, OSS) were already based and working in Malaya, laying down the foundations of a long-term anti-Communist counter-intelligence campaign and helping the British and Malayan government set up the new Malayan intelligence and counter-insurgency service.⁷

Throughout the Cold War, it was America that was widely seen as the main supporter of the 'neutral' governments of Southeast Asia. The American government openly endorsed and supported the governments of Malaysia (under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957-69), Tun Razak (1970-1976) and Hussein Onn (1976-1980)), the Philippines, Thailand, South Vietnam as well as Laos and Cambodia. The US would also support the government of Indonesia after the fall of Soekarno and the rise of the right-wing military-backed General-turned-President Soeharto (1966-1998).

The situation in Southeast Asia was no different than that of the rest of the world then. America's war against Communism meant that Washington was able and willing to lend its weight (and when needed, its muscle) to any government that stood by its side against the so-called 'red menace' of the 'evil Soviet Empire'. Further afield in countries like Pakistan, the United States would also support other leaders – such as Generals Ayub Khan⁸ (1958-69), Yahya Khan⁹ (1969-

⁷ Following the end of the Second World War, the returning British colonial authorities were keen to re-establish control and influence over their colony by whatever means necessary, and their priority was to disarm the militia units of the communist forces (which they themselves had helped to train and arm). Like the French in Indochina (who desperately tried to promote the enfeebled Emperor Bao Dai whose Nguyen dynasty they had previously disempowered), the British identified a number of Malay rulers and leaders they could rely upon to prop up the tattered remains of their colonial establishment. In September 1945, the British Military Administration (BMA) was set up in Malaya; it effectively ruled the country until the end of March 1946. Tagging along with the British was a detachment of security and intelligence personnel from the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which surveyed the political terrain in the region. The American agents were based at the OCBC bank offices in Kuala Lumpur, close to the Chinatown district where they could observe the activities of the Chinese communist and leftist movements. Among the American OSS agents were Brig. General R. C. Pape, Lieutenant J. W. Smith and Captain Post. The OSS agents attempted to lure members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). None of the MCP's efforts was successful, and in the end it was the OSS (with the help of the Malayan intelligence expert C. C. Too) who won over the communist leaders (like Chan Tai Chee) to their side. Though few in number, the American presence in Malaysia was long-lasting. As shown in the Philippines, the Americans were keen to impress upon the people of Southeast Asia that they were the new power to be reckoned with. The British and Americans were keen to ensure that order was restored in Malaya as soon as possible, but their main concern was the potential threat of the communists rather than the Islamists.

⁸ General Ayub Khan came to power in Pakistan following the 'soft *coup*' of 1958. (Even after he took over the control of the State, General Ayub Khan insisted that the President Iskandar Mirza should take responsibility for the abrogation of the 1956 constitution and the introduction of martial law. Ayub knew that the Pakistani constitution did not contain any provision for the declaration of its own abrogation and that there were no provisions for the appointment for a Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA). Technically what General Ayub did was tantamount to treason against the state of Pakistan.) Ayub Khan has gone down in history as the dictator who promoted what is generally perceived as 'modernist Islam'. Ayub Khan was the first to try and modernise the Pakistani economy through rapid industrialisation and modernisation. Throughout the 1960s he opened the way for technology transfer and foreign investment from the West, and was the one responsible for putting Pakistan on the path towards nuclear arms/energy. Ayub Khan was also concerned about the emergence of Islamist movements and parties in the newly independent country. Under Ayub Khan's leadership pious foundations, mosques, *madrassa*, tombs and mausoleums were brought under the control of the State. Ayub Khan's era was peculiar in the sense that while the dictator in power was advocating a rather liberal credo (as far as Islam was concerned, at least), some of the representatives of the so-called scripturalist school of thought (including Maudoodi, the

71) and Zia 'ul Haq¹⁰ (1977-88) – who danced according to the beat of the American drum. This pattern was replicated all over the world, from Latin and Central America to Africa and the Arab states.

founder of the *Jama'at-e Islami*) attempted to appear as the champions of suppressed democracy. Ayub envisaged his own brand of modernist Islam that combined traditional (re. South Asian as opposed to Arabic) Islamic piety with modernisation, technological innovation, scientific enquiry and a rationalist outlook on life. Ayub Khan's experiment with modernist Islam brought the military regime into direct conflict with the more conservative sections of the *Ulama* and Islamist opposition. Ayub Khan and his American-trained technocrats were accused of diluting Islam and reducing it to a modernist way of life or work ethic that was merely cosmetic and not grounded in Islamist principles and values. For his part, Ayub Khan silenced his critics by putting many of them in jail, but by doing so he merely added to their Islamist credentials and their image as martyrs for the Islamist cause. The regime of Ayub Khan was finally forced to relinquish power after the debacle of the 1965 war with India where Pakistan was badly defeated. Power was then handed over to the Shia Pushtun General Yahya Khan who led the country until the ill-fated third Indo-Pakistan of 1971.

⁹ General Yahya Khan was a Persian-speaking Pushtun from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. He was of Shia background, extremely outgoing and extroverted, and popular with both the troops and the officers of the army. After taking over from General Ayub Khan, Yahya's initial moves were all popular and well-received. He abolished Ayub Khan's controversial One-Unit project (which tried to unite all the provinces of West Pakistan under one centralised system), sacked a number of corrupt senior civil servants and prepared the way for the only free and fair elections that Pakistan has ever had. In the sphere of Islamisation and political Islam, Yahya Khan continued where Ayub Khan left off. Like Ayub, Yahya was likewise worried about the rise of the Islamist parties in the country and their growing political influence. Like Ayub, Yahya also saw the Islamist tendency as being dominated by illiterate and ill-educated rural Mullahs, many of whom he regarded as backward peasants and charlatans. His policies towards Islam sought to depoliticise the religion and to limit its influence on society and the political process in particular. Yahya Khan tried to curb the levels of sectarian violence between Muslims and non-Muslims as well as violence between different Muslim sects. He extended the domain of state control to include pious institutions and Islamic institutions of learning as well. His approach was a combination of outright oppression coupled with patronage and indirect control. But the emphasis of Yahya's administration remained the same as Ayub Khan's: he sought to gain control of Islamist institutions and to disarm them while preparing the way for the modernisation of the Pakistani economy and society. Yahya Khan's fall came when Pakistan was split into two (Pakistan and Bangladesh) and India's moves to support East Pakistan (Bangladesh) during the third Indo-Pak war of 1971. The failure of the Pakistani army was compounded by allegations that the senior officers (Yahya Khan included) were incompetent and morally corrupt (Yahya was said to be drunk on the eve of the war). The outcry that followed led to Yahya's fall from power, but also the growing popularity of the Islamists who began to call for the Islamisation of the State and the army in particular.

¹⁰ General Zia 'ul Haq came to power following the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, with the backing of the Pakistani middle-classes, Islamist movements and senior leaders of the Pakistani bureaucracy and state security forces. The middle classes in particular supported Zia's reversal of Bhutto's economic reforms and were happy that he had managed to improve Pakistan's foreign links to the other countries like the United States and India. Zia's closest allies during the time included Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who was Zia's main advisor on economic and financial affairs and who was known for his conservative economic policies and General Khalid Mahmud Arif, who was made Chief of Staff and served as the main link between the Pakistani army and Civil society. From 1977, the militaro-islamic dictatorship of Zia 'ul Haq had reinforced the Islamic policies of the previous government by inscribing its reform program into a legislative and juridical framework and by focusing on women and religious minorities. However, far from competing with the holistic example of neighbouring Iran, the Islamic model that was promoted by Zia was never free of certain political considerations (and precautions). The 1979 *Hudood* ordinances defined fornication as a 'crime against God' (and by extension, the State) and, among other things, blurred the distinction between rape and adultery. During the 1980s, Zia worked tactically with the Islamists (and vice-versa) to legitimise his grab for power and to justify the policies that he introduced. Pakistan opted for all-out Islamisation, particularly in the wake of the Iranian revolution of 1979. Zia Islamised the state

The political costs of this policy of uncritical support, however, were set to grow over the years. In the third section of this paper we shall look in more detail at the contradictions and blind spots in America's policy towards its tactical and strategic allies in the East. However at this stage it would suffice for us to note that much of the support given and shown by Washington to its Asian allies during the Cold War was guided more than *realpolitik* concerns rather than a genuine and sustained commitment towards the promotion of human rights and democratic values. The brutal conduct of the anti-Communist campaign in Central, South and Southeast Asia, which we shall examine in greater detail later, was to incur a devastating cost in terms of the loss of respect for the United States; the eradication of other progressive democratic forces (so often then labelled as Communist or leftist); the erosion of civil society structures and the democratic culture of these societies; and the rise of right-wing local powers that were more often than not engaged in little more than the systematic exploitation and rapine of their own economies, often under the very noses of their American benefactors and protectors.

Needless to say, these factors contributed to the slow yet inexorable shift of the public's perception of the United States and its role in Asia. What was meant to begin as an 'equal partnership' between nation-states eventually manifested itself as a highly unequal patron-client relationship underpinned by very real differentials of power, wealth and influence between the East and West.

By the 1970s, the entire region of Southeast Asia had grown into a fertile ground for dissenting groups, agents and actors who were primarily opposed to their own governments, and by extension the American government as well that was seen as the main pillar of support behind these local regimes. Between 1972-1976, Southeast Asia erupted as a result of these pent-up frustrations being let loose and articulated by a new generation of younger student activists. In October 1973 Thailand's campuses burst at the seams and student protesters took to the streets

bureaucracy, encouraged the creation of more and more institutions of Islamic learning, and indirectly supported (or at least tolerated) the growth of numerous forms of Islamic militancy in the country. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 also made Pakistan the closest ally of the US in the cold war in the region, and more military aid was pumped into the country which was channelled by the military establishment as well as the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence agency) as part of the effort to support the *Mujahideen* in Afghanistan. During this time, the Islamist parties were encouraged to open more and more religious educational centres (*madrasahs*) which also doubled as recruitment centres for *Muhahideed* from Pakistan and other parts of the Muslim world. Most of them travelled to Peshawar, then to recruitment and training camps in the tribal areas along the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) before entering Afghanistan. Nonetheless, even Zia's experiment with Pakistani politics began to falter in the end. By 1986, it was clear that Zia's regime was losing its support among the people. Even the Islamists of *Jama'at-e Islami* and other parties had broken away from the regime, because Zia had not opened the way for democratic elections (where the Islamists had hoped to come to power constitutionally). Zia finally lifted martial law on 1 January 1986. By then the country already had a new Prime Minister, Junejo. But in time Zia and Junejo began to clash with each other and Junejo was using his power as Prime Minister to veto many of Zia's orders. On 29 May 1988 Zia dismissed the government, sacked Junejo (a prerogative he maintained as President) and dissolved the national and provincial assemblies. He formed a new caretaker government without a Prime Minister and re-launched his earlier Islamisation programme. Zia's sudden death in a plane crash in 1988 left the country in a state of acute crisis and lack of direction. The Zia years witnessed the systematic impoverishment and destruction of civil society and civic institutions like public education. Most of the state schools in the country were under-funded and under-staffed. The main universities (The Islamic university of Islamabad, the Punjab university of Lahore and the national University at Karachi) were taken over by the militant youth wing of the *Jama'at-e Islami*, the *Jami'at-e Tulaba-e Islam*. On the campuses, Islamist militants were shooting university lecturers and students who were said to be 'enemies of Islam and opponents of Islamisation'.

demanding political reform and the end to Western (i.e. American) interference in Thailand's domestic affairs – leading to the country's brief 'democratic interlude' that lasted three years, before it was brought to an untimely end by a right-wing counter-*putsch* led by the Thai army.¹¹

In Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia the year 1974 marked a turning point in local politics as student movements in all the countries rose in protest against their own governments (and their Western backers) and expressed their support for rural peasants and urban industrial workers who were seen as the primary victims of the rapid economic development that was modelled on the American example.

The event that sparked off the round of protests in all these countries was the proposed visit of Japan's Prime Minister Tanaka to Southeast Asia. By then Japan was seen as yet another 'pseudo-Western country' bent on exerting its will and economic clout on a defenceless Southeast Asia. Japanese investment into the Southeast Asian region was seen as part of a concerted campaign by the developed countries to 're-colonise' Asia via more sophisticated means, and the condemnation of both Japan and the United States was uttered with the same breath.

Compounding matters by then was the widespread knowledge of America's own support for repressive regimes elsewhere, and the growing concern about America's support for Israel. In Malaysia the student unions organised a number of demonstrations aimed at highlighting injustices on the local and international level. In 1973–74, their protests included one staged in front of the American Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on 16 October 1973 against US support for the Zionist regime of Israel and another at Subang Airport against the visit of Japanese premier

¹¹ The brief democratic interlude in Thailand that was brought about by the student-led mass uprisings in October 1973 was brought to an end three years later thanks to a counter-reform *putsch* led by extreme right-wing elements supported by the army in October 1976. The pro-democracy reform movement was initially supported by some sections of the Thai elite, including the royal family. But due to the culture of paranoia and the stigmatisation of the Left thanks to the hostile climate of the Cold War, the leftist democrats were soon accused of harbouring pro-Communist sympathies and were portrayed as a threat to the ruling elite as well as foreign capital (notably American and Japanese) interests. As Thailand was a frontline state in the anti-Communist war waged by the USA in Vietnam, the US and other Western powers were prepared to allow a counter-reformist *coup* by the extreme right-wing elements of Thai society that included the royal family, the army and even the Buddhist clergy. Nevertheless the democratic experiment of 1973-76 (which witnessed the coming to power of the first truly democratic government in the post-war era) left its mark by emphasising democratic and reformist values in Thai society. Later in October 1977 'moderate' elements of the Thai army staged an internal *coup* that brought them to power and added to the further moderation of Thai politics (that was still heavily dominated by the army, which in turn was still backed by the West.) The absence of a functioning democratic opposition, however, contributed to the growth of a landed elite – constantly working hand-in-glove with the army and police – that used the limited civil democratic space to strengthen their own patron-client networks and were at the same time heavily involved in the underground black market economy. The culture of electocracy grew as Thai politicians regarded the state as their personal fiefdoms to be plundered at will and the electorate as constituencies to be bought. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the growth of clientelist politics where ideological differences became secondary and political factionalism the norm; leading to a succession of unstable coalition governments where the Prime Minister's main function was to appease the demands of various political warlords who commanded local support but who paid little attention to longer, macro-level economic considerations. The state became a tool for factional political manoeuvring and the line between politics and business blurred as a result. As a result Thailand had more elections than any other country in the ASEAN region, and the elections were usually heralded by politically-motivated violence. The breakdown of the state was only temporarily halted by a military-engineered *coup* led by the 'National Peace-Keeping Council' in February 1992.

Tanaka to Malaysia.¹² Similar demonstrations in Jakarta and Bangkok at the same time demonstrated a similar degree of anti-Americanism at work, an indicator of just how much popular perception of the US had changed by the mid-1970s.

By then the political terrain of the predominantly-Muslim countries of Southeast Asia had altered radically. In Malaysia and Indonesia there emerged new, more revolutionary, student-led Islamist organisations like the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*, ABIM)¹³, that consciously rejected the developmental model of the West; valorised the Islamist

¹² In Malaysia the activities of the student unions reached a peak in December 1974 when university students came out in support of Malay rubber smallholders in Baling, Kedah who demonstrated against the government which, they claimed, had abandoned them after a bad year when the price of rubber had plummeted. Inflation had made matters worse, and the rural community in the north was badly hit by the rising cost of living. The situation was made even more confusing with the entry of the Communists of the MCP into the fray and the constant broadcasts of the communists' 'Voice of the Malaysian Revolution' (VOMR) station which was feeding the students with more information about the situation in the north. The rubber smallholders organised a 'hunger march' — 30,000 rural peasants came out in protest against the state government. The farmers' demonstrations in Baling soon caught the attention of the Islamist student leaders of the local universities. On 3 December 1974, thousands of students protested in the streets of Kuala Lumpur in a show of solidarity with the farmers. They finally congregated on the grounds of the Selangor Club in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. While the government tried to play down the role of the radical Islamist student activists in the demonstrations, it was clear that the event was organised by Islamist student leaders who led MBM and Islamist youth movements like ABIM. In response to the demonstrations, the security forces launched *Operasi Mayang* and arrested nearly 1,200 student protesters and detained many student leaders, including Anwar Ibrahim, Adi Satria, Hamzah Kassim, Salamat Ahmad Kamal and Ibrahim Ali under the ISA. Other student leaders such as Hishamuddin Rais and Yunus Ali managed to escape and leave the country with the help of foreign embassy officials. (The student leaders were offered refuge by representatives of several Arab embassies in Kuala Lumpur. Attempts were made to smuggle them out of the country through Kelantan and Thailand. In the end, Hishamuddin Rais and Yunus Ali managed to escape. Yunus Ali left to join the PLO in Palestine). Kamarazaman Yacob was caught after failing in his escape attempt. A number of prominent academics were also detained under the ISA for showing their support for the students, including Prof. Syed Husin Ali, Prof. Tengku Shamsul, Dr. K.S. Nijar, Dr. Lim Mah Hui and Sabiha Abdul Samad.

¹³ The *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM- Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) was formed by a number of Malay-Muslim university student activists from the National Association of Muslim Students led by Razali Nawawi, Anwar Ibrahim and Siddiq Fadhil on 6 August 1971. ABIM was launched at the 10th General Assembly of the Muslims Students Association of Malaysia (PKPIM) which was held at the *Dewan al-Malek Faisal*, in Petaling Jaya on 3rd to 6th August 1971. (The movement was formally registered on 17 August 1972.) ABIM's first president was Razali Nawawi, who was elected at the movement's first general meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Its Secretary-General then was Anwar Ibrahim. At the beginning the small organisation had only forty members. But as it developed the movement became centred around the charismatic and dominant personality of Anwar Ibrahim who took over as the movement's second president in 1974. As the president of ABIM and the MBM (*Majlis Belia Malaysia*-Malaysian Youth Council) Anwar Ibrahim soon made his impact felt in Malay-Muslim circles by championing a number of controversial causes. Soon the movement was championing a number of other causes which ranged from the status of the Malay language to the role of the United States in Southeast Asia. In their intellectual formation, Anwar Ibrahim and the leaders of ABIM were very much influenced by the ideas of the Malaysian Islamist scholar, Prof. Seyyed Naguib al-Attas. Anwar's thinking was also shaped by the teachings of the founder of the *Jama'ati Islami* Ab'ul Al'a Maudoodi of Pakistan, the founder-leader of the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimun* Hassan al-Banna of Egypt, Malek Ben Nabi of Algeria and the Islamist intellectual Ismail Raj Faruqi of the United States. (Ismail Raj Faruqi would later play an important role in the development of Anwar's political career as he was among the few who prompted Anwar to join UMNO in 1982). In this respect, the leadership of ABIM was intellectually more open and dynamic than the leaders of the other Malaysian Islamist parties and organisations at the time. The movement's leaders were made up of Malay-Muslim students from the liberal arts faculties of the local universities such as

policies of countries like Iran and Pakistan, and hoped to struggle towards an 'Islamisation from below' in their own countries.

During the 1970s ABIM condemned the American government for its role in the conflicts in the ASEAN region, particularly over America's involvement in the internal politics of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines and Indonesia. The movement also took proactive steps in many cases. ABIM later became the biggest supporter of the Islamic Revolution in Iran that took place

Universiti Malaya (UM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Both ABIM and PAS had already begun to promote activities such as *usrah*, *dakwah* programmes and anti-vice campaigns, but ABIM was far better organised and professional in all of these areas compared to PAS then. On the campuses of Malaysia ABIM's impact was clear for all to see: the members of the organisation were among the few who did not smoke and who dressed according to Islamic standards of decency and modesty. ABIM's aim was to spearhead the struggle for Islamic reform and revival in the country, and to work towards 'Islamisation from within'. The movement sponsored a number of religious *pondoks* and *madrasahs* all over the country, such as the Madrasah Sri ABIM at Kuala Ketil, Kedah and the Ma'ahad Tarbiyyah Ismamiyah at Pokok Sena. It also established its own private school called *Yayasan Anda* (which was partly financed by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), a regional council representing the more established Protestant Churches in the Asian region). Like the other Malaysian Islamist movement at the time *Darul Arqam*, ABIM sought to create an Islamic society instead of trying to build an Islamic state. ABIM's leaders condemned Secularism *per se* and other western ideologies that they regarded as antithetical to Islam, and called for the control and purification of Muslim culture in the interest of creating a healthy Islamic society. The movement constantly monitored developments in countries like Afghanistan, Palestine and the Philippines, and it eventually established links with other Islamist movements in the neighbouring countries of the region such as the *Muhamadijah* in Indonesia. In time, it also expanded its network to include movements like the *Jamaat'i Islami* of the Indian subcontinent and the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin* of the Gulf region. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ABIM organised a number of mass meetings and demonstrations against the Soviets. As the leader of ABIM Anwar Ibrahim traveled to Pakistan to deliver RM 50,000 worth of aid to the *Mujahideen* and collected additional information in order to put more pressure on the Malaysian government to act against the Soviets. At the peak of the Afghan conflict, ABIM demanded that the Malaysian government should send troops to Afghanistan to help the *Mujahideen* in their struggle against the Soviets and their allies. Later in 1980 ABIM also organised a series of demonstrations and rallies against 'fanatical Hindu aggression' in India in the wake of the rise of the BJP and RSS parties. Despite claims to the contrary, ABIM was a thoroughly political movement from the start. ABIM was closely identified with the other Islamist parties and movements in the country, and with the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) in particular. During the 1970s, it worked closely with PAS and the other Islamist movements in Malaysia and was widely regarded as part of the opposition front. This close working relationship with PAS broke down temporarily when PAS joined the ruling National Front coalition between 1974-1978. At that time, ABIM remained outside the sphere of national mainstream politics and instead focused much of its energies on developing and strengthening its bonds with international Islamic movements in the Arab world, mainly based in Egypt, Libya, Palestine and Lebanon. The 1974 crackdown on the university student movements which led to the arrest of Anwar Ibrahim and the leaders of ABIM led to the temporary paralysis of the movement. But after his release from detention in 1976 Anwar mobilised ABIM once again and it resumed its role as the main critic of the government. When PAS left the BN coalition in 1978, ABIM chose to work closely with it once again. During the elections of 1979, ABIM helped PAS organise its election campaign and was actively involved in canvassing support for PAS prior to the elections. ABIM leaders like Anwar Ibrahim had grown close to the senior leadership of PAS, and it was widely rumoured that Anwar would be invited to take over the leadership of PAS after its fourth president (Asri Muda) stepped down. But in 1982, Anwar shocked the nation when he declared that he would enter the ruling UMNO party instead. For the members of ABIM, PAS and the other Islamist movements in the country Anwar's decision was scandalous: ABIM was then widely regarded as one of the most vocal critics of the government and Anwar Ibrahim himself had openly attacked the government's 'Look East' policy on the grounds that countries like Japan and South Korea were 'Westernised' secular capitalist states that should not serve as models for a Muslim country like Malaysia.

in 1979. The leadership of the ABIM movement (then under Anwar Ibrahim) then praised the Iranian revolutionaries for their commitment to Islam. In 1979, Anwar Ibrahim and the leaders of ABIM visited Iran and met personally with the Ayatollah Khomeini. Upon his return from Iran, Anwar called for a 'Iranian Liberation and Solidarity Day' to be held on 16 March 1979.

The emergence of movements like ABIM in Malaysia was symptomatic of the changes taking place in Southeast Asia's Muslim society as a whole. Thanks to the Islamisation race between UMNO and PAS that had begun in the late 1960s, Islamic influences had penetrated even deeper into the political, economic and cultural environment of the Malays in the country. The inflation of Islamic discourse in Malay-Muslim society meant that Malay politics had begun to shift to a more Islamist discursive register. The 1970s was a time that witnessed not only the development of new Islamic movements in the country but also the first signs of popular Islamic resurgence that came in the form of Islamic dress, social norms, modes of communication and Islamic literature.¹⁴ (Ironically, it was the contestation between Islamists of PAS and the nationalists of UMNO that helped to create these new Islamist movements.)

Similar shifts were taking place in other ASEAN countries like Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand.

In Indonesia the rise of political Islam was measured by the growing degree of Islamist student activism on campus, most of which was organised under the auspices of the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (HMI-Association of Muslim Students of Indonesia): A new generation of Islamist student-activists such as Nurcholish Madjid¹⁵ and Imaduddin Abdulrahim was also

¹⁴ Ungku Maimunah Mohd Tahir has examined the development of Malay 'Islamic' popular literature that began to appear in the country in the 1970s. She argues that the 1970s witnessed the birth of a new genre of Malay literature known as '*sastera Islam*' (Islamic literature) which dealt with issues relation to religion and popular culture. She argues that 'in giving literary expression to this new philosophy, the writers were apt to highlight the questions of morality and salvation, seeing individual crisis of morality as the root cause of social ills and its redress as the panacea for social chaos'. (pg. 79). Among the foremost proponents of this new form of *sastera Islam* was the Malay writer Shahnnon Ahmad. In their writings the authors present the problems facing contemporary Malay society in clear-cut dialectical terms: The evils of modern life are contrasted to the purity of Islam and true Muslims. Among the most common themes that were found in their writings were the theme of conversion (usually of Christians to Islam), redemption and salvation (for deviant Muslims) and the rejection of Western values as secular, materialist and immoral. (See: Ungku Maimunah Mohd Tahir, *Morality and Salvation in Malaysia's Islamic Literature of the 70s and 80s*. In *Akademika 47*. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Bangi. July 1994.).

¹⁵ Nurcholish Madjid was born and raised in Jombang, East Java, which was long associated with the tradition of Javanese 'folk' Islam and traditionalism. His early education was in Indonesia and he eventually became a student in the local university system. Between 1966 to 1971 he was elected as the leader of the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (HMI-Association of Muslim Students of Indonesia) twice. He later did his doctorate in Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago on the subject of pluralism in the ideas of the Muslim scholar Ibn Taymiyya. In Indonesia, Madjid was known as one of the most vocal leaders of the Muslim student movement and an advocate of democracy and democratisation in the country. He argued that the Muslim political parties and movements had failed to win the hearts and minds of the Indonesian people because they had not adapted to the needs of pluralistic democratic politics. In 1971 he accused the Islamic parties of Indonesia of sacralising what was profane in life by calling for an Islamic state. (Hefner, 2000. pg. 116) His attacks on the Islamic parties and movements made him a popular figure among Muslim democrats and reformers, particularly among the student body, but earned him the hatred of many conservatives and traditionalists. Hefner (2000) has also noted that Madjid was criticised by Islamists from Malaysia who claimed that his approach to Islam effectively reduced it to a 'personalised ethical system' more akin to the fate that had befallen Christianity in the West. (Hefner, 2000. pg. 118) By the mid-1980s Nurcholish Madjid had become a popular and well-respected (though still controversial) figure

coming to the fore. The Indonesian students were rallying to the banner of the ‘Salman movement’¹⁶ sweeping across the campuses of Indonesia, though the orientation and practices of the Salman movement were far more open and eclectic than ABIM’s.

Meanwhile in Thailand and the Philippines the more secular and nationalist-oriented resistance movements were being eclipsed by a new generation of more Islamically-oriented activists and Muslim resistance leaders, keen to shift the focus of their political struggle from demands for autonomy towards Islamisation instead. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, new Islamist resistance movements were beginning to appear on the political landscape of the ASEAN region: In Southern Thailand the *Barisan Bersatu Mujahideen Patani* (United *Muhajideen* Front of Patani)¹⁷ came on the scene, pushing aside other earlier groups like the *Barisan Nasional Patani*

among the Indonesian Muslim middle-classes. In an effort to win over the Muslim middleclasses to the Islamist camp, he established the Paramadina association in 1986. The Yayasan Paramadina (which means ‘to go to Madina’) project was an attempt to Islamise the Indonesian Middle classes and win them back to the faith. The association boasted of having eight cabinet ministers on its advisory board, which gave an indication of how influential it (and Madjid) was. In 1990 Nurcholish Madjid was invited to take part in the formation of the Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia (ICMI) that was under the co-chairmanship of B. J. Habibie and Dr. Emil Salim. ICMI was meant to serve as a platform for progressive Islamist intellectuals, and Nurcholish Madjid (along with Amein Rais and others) attempted to turn it into a modernist Muslim-democratic force within the country. But ICMI suffered from the mistrust of the army and the Sino-Indonesian business community. Furthermore democrats like Madjid and Rais were given few opportunities to succeed within the organisation. In the end ICMI served as little more than a rubber stamp for Soeharto and B. J. Habibie who would succeed him.

¹⁶ The resurgence of Islam on the campuses in Malaysia occurred at the same time as Islamic resurgence in Indonesia. Unlike the Islamists of Malaysia, however, the Muslim student activists of Indonesia were more modernist in their outlook. Hefner (2000) notes that ‘they adopted relaxed forms of dress and interaction while encouraging strict adherence to Muslim morality and devotion’ (pg. 123). The movement in Indonesia was given the nickname ‘Salman’ because the model Islamic society that the Islamists proposed was developed among students who congregated at the Salman Mosque at the Bandung Institute of Technology. One of the leaders of the Salman movement was Imaddudin Abdulrahim. Another important student leader at the time was Nurcholish Madjid, who was the head of the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (HMI- Muslim Student Association of Indonesia). While their Malaysian counterparts in ABIM and the IRC were obsessed with the policing of dress, manners and behaviour of their fellow students, the Indonesian Islamists of the Salman movement were inviting pop bands and cultural groups to their own mass meetings in an effort to show that Islam (or at least their reading of it) was open and tolerant of diversity and difference. The Salman movement soon spread its network all over the country and by the early 1980s it had established branches and wings in practically every major university and college in Indonesia. Its leaders would later become the leaders of the Muslim pro-democracy movement in the 1980s and 1990s, and would play a critical role in bringing about the fall of Soeharto’s regime in 1998. (See: Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. 2000.)

¹⁷ The *Barisan Bersatu Mujahideen Patani* (United *Muhajideen* Front of Patani) was formed in 1985 by Wahyuddin Muhammad, former vice-chairman of the BNPP along with other leaders of the same organisation. Most of the leaders of the BBMP were Patani students who had studied in Malaysia and Indonesia. In 1986, the BBMP leaders invited the other leaders of the BNPP, BRN and PULO to meet together and discuss ways to unite their efforts against the Thai government. They called for a secret meeting in Kuala Lumpur, but none of the other groups agreed to the proposal. As the name of the movement suggests, the BBMP’s orientation is more radical and Islamist than that of the BRN (est. 1963) or PULO (est. 1968). It has called on Patani Muslims to take up arms in a *jihad* against the Thai government which it regards as a *kafir* power bent on undermining the rule of Islam and the Muslim identity of the people of Patani. Unlike the BRN and PULO, the BBMP is less inclined to work or cooperate with more secular organisations and liberation movements. Unlike the BNPP, BRN and PULO, though, the BBMP’s network was far less developed.

(BNPP) and Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO). In the Philippines the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)¹⁸ came to stand where the nationalists of the Moro National Liberation Front once stood.

By the early 1980s, Southeast Asia was home to a number of new (and mostly foreign) Islamist groupings and movements which had settled in the region and were actively recruiting among the students of the local universities. Apart from home-grown Islamist movements such as ABIM in Malaysia and the *Negara Islam Indonesia*¹⁹ (NII) movement in Indonesia, there were also new actors and agents on the scene, such as the Indonesian branches of the *Ikhwan 'ul Muslimin*²⁰ and

¹⁸ The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was formed in 1984 after a split among the leadership of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) that was led by Nur Misuari. The MILF's leader was Salamat Hashim, an al-Azhar educated Moro student who had joined the MNLF with Nur Misuari and other radical Moro students in 1969. In Cairo Salamat Hashim was one of the leaders of the Moro student movement in al-Azhar university. Like many of the students in al-Azhar, Salamat Hashim studied *fiqh*, Arabic and Islamic history. In 1970 he returned to the Philippines with the intension of promoting *daw'ah* among the Moros. When he broke off from the MNLF and formed the MILF, Salamat Hashim rejected the leadership of Nur Misuari on the grounds that the latter was too secular and leftist, and that the MNLF was too open to other groups like the Christians of Moroland. The MILF was meant to be an organisation made up and led by Muslim Moros and its aim was to fight for an independent Moro Islamic state governed according to the principles of the *Shariah*. The MILF rejected compromise with secular groups and regarded Moro ethno-nationalism *per se* as un-Islamic. As Che Wan (1990) notes, the MILF's ideology is fundamentally based on a political reading of Islam and the core of its political programme is the Islamisation of Moroland and Moro culture. Unlike the MNLF, the MILF received much of its funding and support from more conservative Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The MILF also regarded its struggle as a *jihad* rather than a war of national liberation, and it drew most of its leadership from the non-traditional Moro elite and religious leaders. The leaders of the MILF tried to expand the network of the organisation by penetrating the local Islamic schools and *madrasahs* in the region. In 1985 the MILF established its main headquarters in Camp Abu Bakar, Cotabato. The MILF's main area of activity was in the Cotabato region where it had seven other major camps and training centres as well as 'model communities'.

¹⁹ The *Negara Islam Indonesia* movement was founded by Lukman Hakim in 1978 in Cirebon, West Java. But the NII was actually a decentralised and dispersed movement with cells and branches operating in secret on many of the university campuses all over Java and the rest of Indonesia. These cells emerged partly as a result of the Soeharto government's crackdown on student political activities in the 1970s and the imposition of the *Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus* (Normalisation of Campus Life) regulations passed at the end of the 1970s. As a result, the more radical Islamist students went underground and formed clandestine groups of their own. The founders of the NII were inspired by the *Darul Islam* revolt of 1949 that was led by Islamist radicals like S. M. Kartosuwijro. With the help of Islamist radicals and elements within the Indonesian government and security forces, these radical Islamist groups were allowed to operate underground on campus. They formed secret study groups (*tarbiyyah islamiyyah*) where they studied and disseminated the teachings and ideas of Islamist ideologues like Abul Al'aa Maudoodi, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. Following the example set by the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimun* of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, the students formed their own secret committees and cells that penetrated other student movements. In 1978 they came out into the open with the formation of the *Usroh* group in Bandung. The leaders of the NII then formed their own groups all over the country: Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir established the *Jama'ah Islamiyyah* in Surakarta, Muchliansyah formed the *Generasi 554* group in Jakarta while Lukman Hakim set up the NII in Cirebon.

²⁰ The Indonesian *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* began to appear on the campuses of Indonesia in the mid-1980s. Among its more prominent leaders and spokesmen were Abu Rido (@ Abdi Sumaiti) and Rahmat Abdullah. The Indonesian *Ikhwan* derived most of its ideas, tactics and practices from the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimun* movement of Egypt that was set up in the early 20th century by the Islamist activist Hassan al-Banna and led by Islamist intellectuals like Sayyid Qutb. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, the Egyptian *Ikhwan* had come under the influence of Sayyid Qutb, who had introduced a more radical agenda to the movement. The Indonesian *Ikhwan* members were mostly young student returnees from Egypt and other Arab countries, and their approach to Islamist politics reflected the more radical approach of the Arab

the *Hizb'ut Tahrir*²¹. The stage was now set for a major discursive shift that would radically re-configure the relation between the United States (and the West in general) and the Muslim communities of Southeast Asia.

II. From 'Partner in Arms' to 'Infidel Enemy': The Redefinition of America in the eyes of Southeast Asia's Muslims following the discursive shift to Islamism.

At a moment when the post-colonial nation-state has lost innumerable sovereign powers to neo-liberal global restructuring, Islamism has seized the popular imagination by capturing the mantle of anti-imperialist, populist nationalism in most Muslim majority states.²²

Paul M. Lubeck and Bryana Britts
Muslim Civil Society and Urban Public Spaces

As we have shown in the previous section, the unprecedented social, economic, political and structural changes that took place in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s – which was aided in

movements at the time. The members of the Indonesian *Ikhwan* worked under difficult circumstances and organised themselves into small study cells and underground units. The cells organised *usrah* and *halaqah* study sessions, where they discussed the ideas of other Islamist thinkers like Maudoodi, Qutb and Sayyid Hawwa. The movement remained underground for much of the 1980s and only came to the surface in the late 1990s. After the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, the Indonesian *Ikhwan* formed its own political party, the *Partai Keadilan* (Justice Party). It also formed its own student movement, the Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia (KAMMI- Indonesian Muslim Students United Action Front). Its female members were grouped together under a separate wing called the *Salimah* movement. [See: R. P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. 1969. and *Ikhwan al-Muslimin: Inspirasi Gerakan Tarbiyyah*. In *Suara Hidayatullah*, Jakarta. August 2001.]

²¹ The *Hizb al-Tahrir* of Indonesia was derived from the *Hizb'ut Tahrir* movement that was formed in Palestine in 1953 by Taqiy al-Din al-Nabhani. The Palestinian *Hizb'ut* was a radical militant movement that used *takfir* as a method of discrediting and eliminating its enemies. Its aim was to work towards the toppling of Muslim governments the world over, in order to create a global Islamic Caliphate, the *Khilafah Islamiyyah*. It developed to become the most radical Islamist movement in the Arab world and soon opened up other branches and networks in other parts of the world including North America, Europe, South Asia and Southeast Asia through its students networks. The ideas of the *Hizb'ut* were brought to Indonesia by Abdulrahman al-Baghdadi, who was one of its activists from Australia. Once in Indonesia, Abdulrahman based himself at the Al-Ghazali *pesantren* in Bogor, West Java. He began to give lectures at the al-Ghifari mosque of the Bogor Institute for Agriculture. Through his classes, Abdulrahman was able to attract student followers from the *Lebaga Dakwah Kampus* of the university. In the 1990s, the *Hizb al-Tahrir* spread its networks across the university campuses of Indonesia as its members formed closed secret cells and began penetrating the student movements of other universities. The movement was soon spread out to other universities like Padjadjaran, Gadjah Mada, Airlangga, Brawijaya and Hasanuddin. In 2000 the movement renamed itself as the *Sabab Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* and organised a major conference on the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in Indonesia. It was then led by the ex-student activist and graduate of Bogor Institute of Agriculture Muhammad al-Khattat. [See: S. Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for an Islamic Caliphate*. Grey Seal, London. 1996. and Rusydi Zakaria, *Studi Awal Tentang Kelompok-Kelompok Keagamaan di Kampus Universitas Padjadjaran*, in *Penamas*, no. 20. vol. VII. Jakarta. 1995.]

²² Paul M. Lubeck and Bryana Britts, 'Muslim Civil Society and Urban Public Spaces: Globalisation, Discursive Shifts and Social Movements', in J. Eade and C. Mele (eds.), *Urban Studies: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*, London: Blackwell, 2001, p. 45.

part by American investment as well as direct intervention in terms of training and educational programmes, development aid and educational transfer – had also led to the massive dislocating effects of rupture, antagonism and cultural shock. Mass rural migration to the cities and urban centres as a result of the degradation of the traditional agricultural sector and the lure of employment in the newly created industries meant that there was now a growing pool of urban workers who were living in an environment that was for more cosmopolitan and connected to the outside world.

Advances in communications technology and mass media also meant that these urban constituencies were more exposed to global political developments elsewhere, and were increasingly cognisant of the role that was being played by the United States on the global stage. The newly urbanised Muslims of Southeast Asia were also increasingly aware of developments in other Muslim countries, as well as the plight of Muslims further abroad whom they regarded as the victims of the wanton tyranny and abuse of the more powerful developed states – chief of which was none other than the USA.

The first step to understanding how the discursive shift to Islamism and its political expression took place has to begin by taking into account how the local political dynamics of a predominantly-Muslim society ends up limiting the range of options for that society to act upon: In the case of the countries of Southeast Asia, this occurred as a result of the anti-Communist struggle that was backed by the US, which in turn eliminated a number of other progressive, democratic alternatives along the way. The second factor that contributed to the emergence of Islamism as a counter-hegemonic force in these societies is the process of globalisation, which was also aided and abetted by the meddling hands of the US and other developed nations that hastened the rush towards a global market and the dismantling of the older institutions of the state in the developing South.

It has often been said that the current rise of political Islam was helped along by the forces of globalisation that have dominated the world over the past few decades. This is certainly true, but the truth is also far more complex than many of us would admit. Islamist movements have succeeded so well because they have harnessed the powers and capabilities of globalisation and closely tied themselves to its flow. Witness, for example, how the Islamists of Southeast Asia adapted themselves to the latest developments in computer and communications technology: The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS was the first party in Malaysia to develop its own party website, on-line web TV (to make up for its lack of access to mainstream national media), internet chat-rooms and on-line dialogue sessions, etc.

Globalisation has also helped the rise of such movements by undermining the capabilities and power of states to govern themselves and to manage the internal structural tensions and rifts within their own societies. The discursive shift closer towards the Islamist register was one of the axiomatic effects of globalisation as it made the world a smaller place and ruptured the boundaries of political geography, discursive economies and thought systems the world over. As Muslim societies experienced the (often dislocating) effects of exposure to the West, they were also exposed to the new currents of Islamist thinking gaining ground elsewhere. Issues such as the troubles in Palestine, Kashmir, the developments in Egypt, Sudan and Pakistan – which were previously a world away – were brought home to Muslims in Southeast Asia courtesy of the TV and radio.

In the battle for hegemony and influence, both Islamist movements and Western political and economic interests were caught in a desperate battle for the hearts and minds of their new constituencies. What tipped the balance in favour of the Islamists was the failure of secular

Muslim élites to deliver upon their promises and to demonstrate the worthiness of their secular developmental programmes.

However, it was globalisation that contributed the most to the failure of the secular developmental model in so many Muslim societies. Coming on the bandwagon of liberal-capitalist market reforms and structural adjustment policies, globalisation's impact was uneven and often traumatic. A swathe of Muslim countries — many with weak and dependent post-colonial economies already lagging behind in the development race — were forced to adjust to the economic realities of the day. This meant adopting developmental policies and strategies that contributed to the widening of the income gap; mass rural migration to already overcrowded cities; opening of the local market to predatory external interests, and removing the last vestiges of protectionism that offered some comfort for the marginalised and economically downtrodden.

The discursive shift to the Islamist register took place in the 1970s, when it became clear that the post-colonial project in so many Muslim countries had reached a crisis point. Developments in Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Algeria, Libya and other countries showed that the post-colonial élite in these Muslim states were unable to carry out their revolutionary projects to the end. Corruption and compromise became the order of the day, as many post-colonial leaders succumbed to the temptation of living in now-vacant colonial palaces and the generous pay cheque offered by foreign (often Western) donor agencies. Nepotism became commonplace, and abuse of power was in time routinised. Crippled and burdened by both domestic and externally imposed ills, many post-colonial states began to flounder. The net result of globalisation was social instability, atomisation and the breaking down of the social contract between state and citizens, growing dependency on foreign capital and increased vulnerability and exposure to an international economy where might was right and only the strongest could survive. Little wonder that the rates of unemployment, overcrowding and uneven development grew sky-high almost overnight in many Muslim societies.

As the crisis of postcolonial governmentality deepened, the sphere of contingency and undecidability expanded to engulf practically all avenues of government and law. There seemed no hope of finding a cure within the system, so those who were disillusioned merely looked beyond the frontier of the state. Here they found what they were looking for: an alternative value and belief system located radically outside the economy of governmental discourse. It was a system that had been marginalised and abandoned long ago, but its years in exile meant that it was uncontaminated by the evils that plagued the land. Though seen as out-of-date and irrelevant by many, its untimeliness and alterity made it seem so attractive. That alternative value and belief system was called *Islamism*.

A new global Islamist cityscape was being built in the urban spaces of Muslim states. The combined effects of mass rural migration, entry of illegal foreign workers, increased competition between locally educated (and *madrasah*-educated) Muslims and foreign educated élites and non-Muslims contributed to the growing tensions between different professional and occupational groups. Better educated, occupationally mobile and exposed to local and external currents of thought and ideas, these urbanised Muslims later made up the vanguard of the new Islamist wave.

Islamism, therefore, began as an urban phenomenon and developed within the cosmopolitan environment of the modern Muslim city. The battle for the future of Islam was fought between secular élites and the newly emerging defenders of political Islam who combined the discursive tools of Islamist ideology with the instruments of modern communication, mass mobilisation, networking and political organisation. It is not a coincidence that the current wave of global Islamism has been most visible in Muslim states with the highest urbanisation rate. It should be

noted that the first major Islamist revolution in the world took place in Iran, one of the most urbanised Muslim countries in the world (50% in 1980).

Islamist movements were quick to jump into the void created by the implosion and collapse of the post-colonial state. Funded in many cases by Saudi and other Arab donors and patrons, these movements quickly took up the social responsibilities that were once the prerogative of the state. In the process, they set up alternative education networks, communication and logistical infrastructure, local organic linkages as well as propagated their own brand of often conservative and oppositional Islamic politics. In time, Islamism emerged as the most vocal and visible force for counter-hegemonic and anti-systemic change in the world. In the words of Lubeck and Britts (2001):

Islamism operates at a multiplicity of levels: it simultaneously envisions itself as a force for the revival of global Islamic unity, a movement to reform the territorially defined national state and a creator of a moral economy in urban neighbourhoods. At a moment when the post-colonial nation state has lost innumerable sovereign powers to neo-liberal global restructuring, Islamism has seized the popular imagination by capturing the mantle of anti-imperialist, populist nationalism in most Muslim majority states. Therefore, due to the decline of other alternative visions, Islamism has emerged as the most powerful anti-systemic social force opposing Western-led globalisation especially since the collapse of the Soviet model. Viewed from the micro-level perspective of urban neighbourhoods, Islamism creates a diverse network of civil society groups delivering goods and services, each sharing an appealing cultural narrative claiming ‘authenticity.’²³

Seen in this light, Islamism became, in a sense, the Muslim world’s response to corporate-sponsored globalisation emanating from the US and Western Europe. As Bobby Sayyid has argued: *‘The rise of Islamism was only possible when the availability of Islam could be articulated into a counter-hegemonic discourse.’*²⁴

The weakening of the state – which was more often than not precipitated by corporate and governmental America’s meddling hand – led to the dislocation of society, the collapse of government structures and the opening up of new spaces of class antagonism and confrontation. In this shifting world where, to quote Marx, *‘all that is solid melts into air’*, new opportunities arose for the reconstruction of new understandings and world-views.

Islamism’s great success and achievement lay in its ability to put together elements and pieces of this shifting, unstable world into a coherent ideology that had its own final moral vocabulary, teleology and epistemology. If, in the past, ‘Modernity’ and ‘Progress’ were linked to other ideas such as ‘Westernisation’, ‘economic liberalisation’, ‘material development’ and the emulation of the Western (American) model; the Islamists were now constructing a new chain of equivalences that linked Islam with all that was good and positive such as ‘morality’, ‘ethics’, ‘accountability’, ‘rule of law’, ‘divine salvation’ and of course the promise of heavenly reward. In the context of societies experiencing rapid and unpredictable change, such a coherent discourse seemed reasonable and attractive to many ordinary Muslims.

If Islamism had its positive chain of equivalences, it also had another negative chain of equivalences as its dialectical counterpart. This negative chain of equivalences merely posited the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Rise of Islamism*, Zed Books, London. p. 73.

West as the cause of all that was wrong in the Muslim world, and linked the West (re: America and Americanism) with a host of negative traits such as ‘decadence’, ‘materialism’, ‘militarism’, ‘social decay’, ‘breakdown of law and order’ and, in the final analysis, *Evil* itself. From then on, it would not take much effort to conflate the West and the United States with the Devil.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Islamist groups in Southeast Asia – like their counterparts in Iran, Pakistan and the Arab world – began to articulate this new Islamist discourse with vigour. At its crudest it manifested itself in the anti-Western rhetoric of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who summarily condemned the US as the ‘Great Satan’. The simplistic oppositional dialectics of Khomeini were taken up in earnest by the Islamists of Southeast Asia, particularly by the leaders of the Malaysian Islamist party PAS²⁵. At its most sophisticated it revealed itself in the reversed-Orientalism of Islamist intellectuals like Malaysia’s Syed Naquib al-Attas²⁶, whose landmark text *‘Islam and Secularism’* (that was, incidentally, published by the ABIM movement the same year as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978)) juxtaposed Islam and Islamism against the menacing qualities of all things Western.

- **Anti-Americanism in ASEAN today: From Class Struggle to Holy War**

It is at this juncture that we return to the mysterious text entitled *‘Jihad di Patani’* (*Jihad in Patani*) that we referred to at the beginning of this paper.

The significance of the text in question is how it manages to localise what is a global struggle of Muslims the world over, while at the same time globalising what is in fact the local struggle of the Muslims of Patani. The text breaks away from the traditional political rhetoric of earlier Patani liberation groups like BRN and PULO in the way that it refers to events thousands of miles away, such as the on-going troubles in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, Afghanistan and America’s latest bloody quagmire in Iraq. What links together these disparate localities and disturbances is the apparent role played by the West in general and the United States in particular – either by aiding and abetting the so-called ‘enemies of Islam’ or by virtue of its negative responsibility as a result of casual indifference and/or neglect. The aim, as it quickly becomes evident, is to blame the US for all that is wrong with and in the Muslim world.

The somewhat overheated tenor of the tract is typical of the sort of Islamist discourse that has been in circulation in the Southeast Asian region in the wake of 11 September 2001. Though practically all of the major Islamist movements in the ASEAN region were quick to condemn the terrorist attacks on the United States and to distance themselves from the tentacles of the *al-*

²⁵ For an analysis of the discursive shift in the rhetoric of PAS’s leaders during this period, see: Farish Ahmad-Noor, *Blood, Sweat and Jihad: The Radicalisation of the Discourse of the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) from the 1980s to the Present*. In the Journal of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEA), Singapore, Vol. 25. no. 2, August 2003.

²⁶ Syed Naquib al-Attas was, and is, perhaps one of the most influential Islamist thinkers in Malaysia today. His influence extended well beyond the confines of academia and he has played an important role in the cultivation of the Islamic élite in the country. He comes from one of the best-known aristocratic families in the south and is of mixed Malay-Arabic stock. His early academic research was in the fields of Malay Sufism and literature. His fame was assured with the publication of his two-volume dissertation *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (1965, published 1970). This Sufi influence is clearly apparent in his educational philosophy. He also prides himself as a designer, calligrapher and artist. In 1993, he was awarded the Al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Philosophy by the Malaysian government. (The award was presented by his own student-turned-politician Anwar Ibrahim, then a Cabinet minister.) In 1994, he was awarded membership of the Royal Jordanian Academy and in 1995, an honorary doctorate by the University of Khartoum.

Qaeda movement; sentiments were to quickly change as soon as the Bush administration embarked on its ill-planned and ill-executed 'war on terror'. The invasion of Afghanistan in early 2002 was the factor that tipped the balance and brought the Islamists of Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines out on the streets once more.

On the same day that the American forces began their invasion of Afghanistan (8 October 2001) the leaders of PAS came out with their strongest statement against the Americans yet. For the *Murshid'ul Am* (Spiritual Leader) of PAS Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the attack on Afghanistan was clearly an attack on Islam and Muslims in general. Speaking out in defence of the *Taliban* government, he claimed that:

'The US hates the *Taliban* because the latter is firmly committed to upholding Islamic values. Osama bin Laden is just an excuse for the US, which has time and again shown its hostility towards Islam, to wage war against the religion.'²⁷

The Malaysian Islamist party's President Ustaz Fadzil Noor also stated that the attacks were not only against Afghanistan's *Taliban* regime but that they constituted a direct assault on Muslims the world over.²⁸ Speaking to local and foreign journalists in a press conference of his own, Fadzil Noor said that "America has attacked a small and defenceless country like Afghanistan without showing the world strong reason or proof, (and) they are war criminals".²⁹ He then added: "If the Americans are really waging a war against terrorism, why don't they attack Israel, who are terrorists against the Palestinians?"³⁰ The President of the Islamist party ended the interview with a clarion call to arms when he stated that: "all Muslims must oppose these criminals - this time, there is no denying a call for *Jihad*".³¹

Things finally came to a climax on 10 October when PAS declared a '*Jihad*' against the United-States and its coalition partners and gave the go-ahead for its members to openly join and support the *Taliban*. The party's Secretary-General Nashruddin Mat Isa stated that: "If there are any PAS members who would like to go for *jihad*, we cannot stop them because *jihad* is a religious duty. They don't need to seek party approval if they wish to take up the fight in Afghanistan."³² Soon

²⁷ Mohd Irfan Isa, *Osama an excuse to wage war against Islam: Nik Aziz* (Malaysiakini.com, 10 October 2001)

²⁸ PAS based its critique of the American-led international effort on several premises: The first was the claim that there was no direct proof and evidence that Osama ben Laden and/or the *Taliban* were directly involved in the attacks on New York and the Pentagon. Secondly the leaders of PAS argued that the terrorist attacks themselves were fundamentally a reaction against US foreign policy and the fact that America's conduct in the Arab world was seen to have a pro-Zionist, pro-Israel slant to it. (For the Malaysian Islamists it was the United States, and not Osama or the *Taliban* that was the real terrorist state in the world.) Thirdly, PAS also claimed that the entire operation was linked to a broader American-Zionist agenda to demonise Islam and to weaken any Muslim state that was prepared to challenge the hegemonic might of the United States anywhere in the world. The logic of PAS's critique was couched in terms of an oppositional dialectics that pit the West against the Muslim world. Having drawn a chain of equivalences between the United States, Western Europe, Israel and the so-called 'Zionist conspiracy' to overthrow and dominate the Muslim world, PAS also drew a second chain of equivalences which linked together Islam, the *Taliban*, Osama ben Laden and themselves as the defenders of Islam and the Muslim *Ummah*. What eventually emerged was a zero-sum logic of confrontation which- like George Bush's now-infamous 'you are with us or against us' statement- left no middle ground for waverers and neutral parties.

²⁹ Malaysiakini.com, *US embassy under guard, PAS labels Americans 'war criminals'*. (8 October 2001).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See: Nur Abdul Rahman, *Serangan Amerika langkah permusuhan ke atas umat Islam (Harakah, 11 October 2001)* and *PAS declares 'jihad' over attacks in Afghanistan* (Malaysiakini.com 10 October 2001).

after PAS leaders like Fadzil Noor, Mohamad Sabu and Mahfuz Omar were calling for a total boycott of all American goods and services, and even for the Malaysian government to send troops to Afghanistan to help resist the American-led attacks.³³

In neighbouring Indonesia, groups like the *Front Pembela Islam* and *Lashkar Jihad* were immediately mobilised and took to the streets as soon as America announced its unilateral move to confront its foes abroad. But by then (2002) Indonesia was also caught in dire straits of its own. The country's President Megawati Sukarnoputri flew to Washington to discuss the implications of Indonesia's involvement in the international campaign against Osama ben Laden and the *Taliban*- though it was soon clear that the sensitive matter of Indonesia's spiralling debt problem was also put on the agenda. *Realpolitik* considerations aside, the Islamist parties and movements in Indonesia were less pragmatic in their approach to the problem. The Indonesian President was warned by the country's Islamist groups (and members of her own government like Vice President Hamzah Haz) that any attempt to appease the Americans would lead to a backlash at home with heavy political costs involved.

The Philippines was likewise forced to deal with a backlash from Islamist groups and movements in the troubled Island province of Mindanao in the south. Soon after the American response was made known to the international community, the *Abu Sayyaf* group renewed its attacks on Filipino government installations and outposts all over the province, and a new wave of hostage-taking was soon on the way.

The Bush administration's unilateral 'war on terror' has therefore had many long-term and far-flung consequences for Muslim and non-Muslim relations. For the countries in Asia with sizeable Muslim minorities, it opened up old wounds after decades of internal civil conflict, and served as a justification for clamping down on local Muslim resistance movements.

President Bush's support of strong ASEAN leaders who are willing to join him in his global 'crusade' against terrorism has reawakened widely-held fears of 'Big Brother' America intervening in the affairs of Southeast Asia all over again: Washington's active endorsement of the anti-terror campaign in ASEAN; its recognition of Thailand as a major 'non-NATO ally'; its open endorsement of ex-military strongmen like Thailand's Thaksin Shinawatra³⁴ and Indonesia's

Nashruddin was also quick to add that PAS's definition of *jihad* covered a "wide spectrum including calling for peace, calling for justice and not just taking up arms". He also noted that "we (PAS) are not saying that we are going to create a troop to do that. PAS is also not going to sponsor anyone".

³³ Tong Yee Siong, *Mahfuz wants Gov't to provide military aid to Taliban* (Malaysiakini.com, 11 October 2001). In a press statement delivered at a press conference, the leader of the Youth Wing of PAS, Mahfuz Omar declared that the Malaysian government should mobilise the member states of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) to fight against the US, "in any manner required". Mahfuz also stated that the "OIC should declare the US as a terrorist state and the number one enemy of Islam". He then called on the Malaysian government to temporarily sever all diplomatic and economic ties with the US - Malaysia's largest foreign investor and export market.

³⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel (rtd.) Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra's rise to power was, in many ways, an indirect result of the collapse of the democratic project in Thailand and the return of authoritarian, counter-reform tendencies in the country. Thailand's economic boom came to an end in 1997, with the devaluing of the Thai Baht that precipitated the catastrophic East Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. As a result of this crisis, the pro-democracy and pro-reform movement was delivered a fatal blow as the urban business elite switched their support to strong political leaders who proposed a stronger, centralist, even authoritarian state model for the country. It was at this time that Thaksin Shinawatra came to prominence. The man was himself an ex-security forces commander, who held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of the Thai Police. With a similar

(American-trained) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono³⁵, have all contributed to the popular perception that America has simply reverted back to its old tactics of gunboat diplomacy and mercenary support of dictators working to serve the needs of Uncle Sam.

educational background to that of the senior leaders of the Thai army, police and security services, he commanded considerable respect and support from the armed forces and security services. He then branched out into the world of business and rose to become a tycoon in the telecommunications field. With strong business and army links as well as an independent financial base, he formed and led the *Thai Rak Thai* (Thais Love Thais) party and swept to power with the support of the urban middle class and business community (as well as the backing of foreign capital). Thaksin's rise to power coincided with the promulgation of the 1997 Thai Constitution, which was reformist in appearance but which in reality was directed at the expansion and consolidation of the power and authority of the Executive (Prime Minister) over the Legislature and other wings of the government. Part of Thaksin's project was his 'new social contract' with the Thai public, which promised the restoration of law and order at any cost. Under his leadership the Thai public was constantly fed with a stream of state propaganda about internal threats within Thailand, ranging from drugs gangs to Islamist militants in the South of the country. In the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States of America on 11 September 2001 and the alleged terrorist attacks in Indonesia in 2002, Thaksin has used the rhetoric and discourse of the 'war on terror' to further extend his power and the scope of activities of the Thai security forces. In particular the government of Prime Minister Thaksin was keen to demonstrate to the Thai public and the international community that the troubles in the Muslim provinces in the South of the country was part of a global trend of 'Islamic terrorism' that required a strong, even violent, response from the state. Contrary to the image of Thaksin as a civilian politician that is disseminated by his supporters, the man himself has maintained close links to the Thai armed forces and security agencies, and has further politicised the latter through his direct intervention in the re-shuffling of Thai senior army commanders. Thaksin has even appointed one of his relatives as a commander of the Thai army. General Pisarn has a close relationship to Prime Minister Thaksin (via his cousin Chaksin) and the Thai royal family (he is said to be on personal friendly terms with the Queen). [For further analysis on the development of the democratic reform movement in Thailand and its subsequent regression thanks to the rise of counter-reform tendencies, see: Kasian Tejapira, *Reform and Counter-Reform: Democratization and its Discontents in post-May 1992 Thai politics*. Paper presented at the workshop *Towards Good Society? Civil Society Actors, the State and the Business Class in Southeast Asia – facilitators or impediments to a strong, Democratic and Fair Society?* Organised by the Heinrich Boell Foundation, Berlin, 27-28 October 2004.]

³⁵ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) was born in 1949 in Pacitan, East Java to a family that already enjoyed close links to the Indonesian armed forces. In 1970 he enrolled in the Academy of the Armed Forces of the Indonesian Republic (Akabri) and three years later (in 1973) graduated with the highest honours among all the students in the country. Having distinguished himself as the most promising military cadet of his year, Bambang was selected for further education and training by ABRI both within the country and abroad, particularly in the United States of America. During the New Order regime (1967-1998) of President Soeharto, Indonesia was under constant surveillance and supervision of the United States. America, along with Israel and a number of European allies, invested heavily into the Indonesian state and economy and both America and Israel were instrumental in the training and development of key Indonesian security units such as the Indonesian Intelligence Service (BIN) and the country's elite commando unit, Kopassus. Young officers who demonstrated promise and abilities were regularly promoted and sent abroad for further training in the USA, and Bambang was one of them. In 1976 he took part in the US Airborne and Rangers course at Fort Benning, Georgia, while attending an American Language course at Lackland, Texas, at the same time; in 1982-83 he took part in the Infantry Officers Advanced course at Fort Benning (where he graduated with honours); in 1983 he took part in the Jungle Warfare Training course in Panama; and in 1984 participated in the Antitank Weapons course that was conducted in Belgium and Germany. In the course of his academic work and training he also took part in 'on the job' training with the 82nd US Airborne Division at Fort Bragg (in 1983). Bambang's working relationship with the USA continued well into the 1990s, and in 1990-91 he was at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He was later made the Commander of the Indonesian Infantry Training Academy between 1983 to 1985, and served with a number of important units in various military operations both in Indonesia and abroad. Within the country he was known as one of the senior

Washington's relative indifference to the methods and tactics used in the so-called 'war on terror' in the ASEAN region has also been a cause of concern for Islamists, NGOs, human rights groups and civil society organisations all over the region. The recent troubles in Southern Thailand – which has received relatively less media coverage by the Western media as compared to the problems in Darfur (Sudan), Palestine, Afghanistan or Iraq – merely confirms the suspicion held by many Southeast Asian Muslims that Western double-standards are again at work and that the lives of Muslims are worth much less than that of non-Muslims. The fact that Washington has remained relatively quiet over the killing of civilian protestors by Thai security forces (such as the killing of more than eighty protesters at the town of Tak Bai in late 2004) and has said little

commanders who were put in charge of military and security operations in East Timor. His first tour of command there was between 1979 to 1980, and his second between 1986 to 1988. Despite the global outcry over the violent military invasion and subsequent annexation of East Timor in 1974, it remains a fact that many of the Indonesian officers who were stationed there were trained by the USA and other Western states, and Bambang was one of them. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 led to mass demonstrations by students and civil society groups, who called for the resignation of Soeharto and the trial of key ABRI leaders. In the midst of this upheaval, Bambang was one of the few senior officers who could still maintain a dialogue with civil society organisations and the student demonstrators. While other senior army leaders like Major-General Wiranto were being accused of crimes against humanity in places like East Timor, Bambang was promoted and made the head of the ABRI representation at the People's Assembly (ABRI-MPR) in 1998. Following the resignation of Soeharto in May 1998 and the collapse of the New Order regime, Bambang was promoted to the post of Chief of Territorial Command (1998-99). Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's political career began as soon as he retired from the army in January 2000. While still holding the rank of Lieutenant General he served as the Minister for Energy in the cabinet of President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Following the withdrawal of General Wiranto from politics (due to charges of criminal abuse of human rights in the East Timor campaign), Bambang was then put in charge of national security by Gus Dur as well. Bambang was one of the few faces of the New Order era who managed to survive the transition from military to civilian rule. As the man in charge of security and the maintenance of law and order, Bambang was asked by President Wahid to set up the National Crisis Centre in 2001, a loosely-structured information-gathering and policy-setting group that reported directly to the President. Thus despite his status as retired general, Bambang was allowed to maintain close working links with the Indonesian army, police, intelligence and security services. In 2001 Bambang fell out with President Wahid. In the elections that came soon after, Bambang formed an alliance with Megawati Sukarnoputri. Following the victory of Megawati, Hamzah Haz was made Vice-President and Bambang was brought into her cabinet. He was put in charge of the troubles in Aceh, North Sumatra. As Minister of Security it was Bambang who announced the state of emergency in Aceh on 19 May 2003, while at the same time trying to solve the disputes in Ambon and Poso. Bambang was able to weather the storms of criticism due to his own strong support from the army and the passive support of the Indonesian public, who wished to see the troubles in Aceh resolved once and for all. Finally in September 2004 Bambang – along with his running mate Muhammad Jusuf Kalla – stood against the pairing of Megawati Sukarnoputri and Kyai Hasyim Muzadi. Owing to his reputation as a leader who stood firm on the question of law and order, and his track record as an army officer and key player in the Indonesian security/intelligence network, Bambang managed to persuade most of the voters that he was the man who could deliver on his promise to restore calm and stability to the country. After seven years the Indonesian economy had yet to recover from the financial crisis of 1997-98 and the spate of bombings in Bali and Jakarta had sullied Indonesia's image abroad – particularly among foreign investors and tourists. Promising that he would rid the country of religious extremism, terror networks and communal violence, Bambang and Jusuf Kalla managed to secure 61% of the votes at the elections of September 2004. In October 2004 he was declared the winner and next President of Indonesia.

about Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's own policy decisions³⁶ has further sedimented the view that America is covertly engaged in a campaign against Islam and Muslims the world over.

So if the image and standing of the United States in the eyes of Southeast Asians today has sunk to an all-time low, all that is left for us to do is to reflect on some of the historical factors that have contributed to this decline and fall. It is to that topic that we shall now turn our attention to.

III. America's failure in the battle for hearts and minds in ASEAN: Some tentative observations.

The declining status and image of the United States in ASEAN, which is most clearly evident in the shift of popular perceptions of the US among the Muslims of Southeast Asia, is the result of a number of factors. We have already alluded to the emergence of new local Islamist groupings and their transnational linkages to other Islamist movements worldwide; as well as the hegemonic influence of a new, transnational and translocal Islamist discourse which sees the United States as the major obstacle, if not adversary, to Muslim global concerns.

Here we would like to highlight some of the more evident failures of American foreign policy vis-à-vis the ASEAN region as a whole, and towards the predominantly Muslim communities of the region in particular. Among the more glaring shortcomings and ultimately counter-productive policies and undertakings of the American government in the ASEAN region over the past four decades are:

- **The failure of the United States to promote the understanding and praxis of constitutional democracy consistently, and the failure of the United States to distance itself from undemocratic and repressive regimes:**

³⁶ Thaksin Shinawatra's high-handed approach was bolstered with the appointment of General Panlop Pinmanee, a former mercenary officer in Laos who was also the head of an Anti-Communist Death Squad in the service of the Thai army to the post of Deputy Director of Internal Security Operations Command (originally an anti-Communist unit called the Communist Suppression Operations Command). Like his Indonesian counterpart General (rtd.) A. M. Hendropriyono (who was appointed for President Megawati Sukarnoputri as head of Indonesia's Anti-Terror Unit in Jakarta), General Panlop Pinmanee was known for his brutal tactics and record of human rights abuses, which he demonstrated once again during his campaign against alleged drugs gangs in Thailand that led to the extra-judicial killings of around 2,000 people. General Pinmanee and the Internal Security Commands Operation unit, along with Thailand's National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and the Thai 4th Army under the command of Lieutenant-General Pisarn Wattanawongkeeree were put in charge of the Southern Muslim provinces of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat and Satun. General Pisarn was new to the post as this happened to be his first field command out of Bangkok. However General Pinmanee's more direct and confrontational approach was demonstrated on 28 April 2004 when Thai troops bombarded and then stormed the ancient Krue Se mosque in Patani, killing all of the alleged Muslim insurgents who had taken refuge there. (Local witnesses claimed that the troops also desecrated the mosque in the course of the fighting.) Thaksin's approach to the problem of social unrest in the Southern Muslim provinces in Thailand has been a combination of the 'carrot-and-stick' approach. While allowing senior Thai military commanders to use their own initiatives and methods, the government has also promised a 300-million Baht investment project (to be parcelled out over a period of 10 years) into the region. One of the initiatives on offer is the 28-million Baht project to restore the Krue Se mosque near Patani. Local Muslim leaders however have argued that the real problems of local army and police corruption as well as abuse of power and infringement of fundamental human rights have not been addressed by any of these promises.

Following the Helsinki accord of 1975 the United States – then under President Jimmy Carter – began to regard the promotion of democracy and human rights as one of its key foreign policy issues in its dealings with the Soviet Bloc and the countries of the developing world. While the active promotion of human rights and democratic change did indeed feature very visibly in America’s conduct in the East European theatre, elsewhere it was conspicuously absent. Nowhere was this more clearly the case than in Southeast Asia, then dubbed the ‘second front’ in the war against Communism.

As we have shown in the previous sections, the United States had stepped into the power vacuum that was created as a result of the withdrawal of Empire. Presenting itself as a Western power of a different sort, the Americans not only expressed initial support for the anti-colonial movements of the Southeast Asian region, but also played up the fact that America was itself a former colony in the past. Lending its weight to local efforts towards independence, development and postcolonial reconstruction efforts, the American government attempted to play the role of honest broker and equal partner in the postcolonial and post-war development of Southeast Asia.

In the course of doing so, American propagandists initially paid considerable attention to creating and maintaining the image of the United States as the ‘land of the free’ and a model of economic development, modernisation and prosperity. Efforts to woo local elites, intelligentsia and influential agents and actors were gradually intensified, with numerous aid packages, educational transfer and sponsorship programmes and joint-development ventures. In many ways, America was then a model and a beacon for many developing countries, and as we have also shown in the previous sections, was regarded as an ideal and haven for many ordinary Southeast Asian politicians, technocrats, workers and potential migrants.

A closer reading of America’s actual conduct in the daily political affairs in Southeast Asia, however, would show just how superficial this initial attempt at cultural and political dialogue really was. A cursory examination of America’s involvement in the internal political affairs of the countries of Southeast Asia reveal a consistent and steadfast pursuit of America’s own political, economic and military objectives from the beginning.

In the decades that followed, America’s own political-military-economic ambitions would be rendered more transparent thanks to Washington’s conduct in countries like Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia. And with the gradual exposure of Washington’s true interests would also come the gradual shift in popular perceptions of the US and its aims.

In Vietnam the American government proved to be the most stalwart and influential supporter of the embattled regime of Ngo Dinh Diem³⁷. This proved to be an unpopular move and was

³⁷ In the wake of the French withdrawal from Vietnam, the pro-Western Emperor Bao Dai attempted to recover his losses and rally public support behind him. In 1954 he appointed the unpopular Vietnamese Christian aristocrat Ngo Dinh Diem as his Prime Minister. Ngo Dinh Diem was, however, totally out of touch with the Vietnamese people like Bao Dai. He ruled like a feudal warlord and was dependent on his own network of Catholic advisers, Chinese business cronies and family members. Diem also preferred to speak in French, had spent years abroad and was known to be supported by the Americans who saw him as their last chance to block a Communist take-over of the country. What made matters worse for Diem was the fact that his government had grown even more dependent on American military and economic aid by then. (The Americans had begun to send thousands of troops to Vietnam to act as ‘combat advisers’ to the South Vietnamese army). In 1956 Vietnam was scheduled to hold its first free elections following the conditions laid out by the Geneva Accords. But the Western powers were certain that should a free election take place, the party of the pro-Western Emperor Bao Dai was certain to lose and Communists under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh was sure to win. Diem therefore decided to cancel the elections altogether and

perceived by many local Vietnamese as a return to the days of colonial rule (for their emperor Bao Dai was likewise supported to the bitter end by the departing French colonial authorities.) Despite America's support that continued throughout the Kennedy era, the feeble and unpopular government of Ngo Dinh Diem never managed to gain public recognition and the man himself was eventually assassinated by right-wing factions of the South Vietnamese military elite.³⁸

America's messy involvement in Vietnam soon came to an end following the Tet offensive of 1968, which demonstrated the strength of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the failure of the Americans to win local support from the South Vietnamese themselves. After the signing of the treaty between North and South Vietnam on 27 January 1973, it was clear that the Americans would no longer be able to hold on to the south of the country and the war was effectively over.³⁹

Of all of America's military ventures in ASEAN, Vietnam stands out as the most glaring example of the failure of US intelligence to understand the nature and character of ASEAN politics and the people of the region. Partly as a result of the debacle in Vietnam, the other countries of the region came together to form the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, to ensure that the region would remain neutral and outside the clasp reach of both the US and the USSR.

The Vietnam conflict also became the rallying point for anti-American pro-democracy activists in the neighbouring countries of ASEAN, as it was used as a major political issue by student

impose direct rule. This immediately led to an escalation of violence and a new campaign by the Viet Minh. Between 1956 to 1960 the Viet Minh forces managed to kill more than 2,500 government officials and they had launched hundreds of hit-and-run attacks on government and military installations all over the country. They were also supported by the local student, workers, peasants and Buddhist associations that were sick with the excesses of the Bao Dai-Ngo Dinh Diem regime. The state of crisis served as a pretext for American intervention into Vietnamese political affairs.

³⁸ After coming to power in November 1960, President John F. Kennedy increased the level of US commitment in the Vietnam War. He increased the level of American 'combat advisers' in Vietnam from 600 to 16,000 within three years. Kennedy also authorised American troops to participate in combat operations, sanctioned the use of US army helicopters, napalm and defoliant chemicals like Agent Orange in an effort to flush the Viet Minh out of their jungle hideouts. McMahon (1999) notes that 'after he grew disillusioned with Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, (Kennedy) even encouraged the South Vietnamese military to assume power by extra-legal means' (pg. 107). The first *coup* attempt was foiled, but a second attempt on 1 November 1963 led to the killing of Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. Following the death of Diem, Vietnam was thrown into turmoil. Within a space of one year, nine different governments tried to take control of South Vietnam, all of them proving incapable in one way or another. Kennedy's own inept meddling in Vietnam was brought to an end by his own untimely death on 22 November 1963. But the Johnson administration that followed merely intensified the level of American involvement in Vietnam even further. President Lyndon Johnson used the 1965 Tonkin incident (where US ships were bombed by North Vietnamese forces) as a pretext to escalate America's war against the Communists in the north. He later increased the number of American troops in Vietnam to half a million, while authorising a sustained bombing campaign of North Vietnam. America's growing involvement in the Vietnam War earned it the scorn and condemnation of anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements worldwide. This trend would prevail right up to the Nixon administration, and Nixon himself would later say that he would 'bomb the bastards like they had never been bombed before' (ibid. pg. 167).

³⁹ In 1975 the Vietnam war finally came to its messy end. On 21 April General Nguyen Van Thieu resigned, blaming the Americans for their lack of support for his tottering regime. By the end of the war, more than two million Vietnamese had been killed, along with an estimated 58,000 American troops. But despite the fears of successive American administrations, the rest of Southeast Asia did not fall into the hands of the Communist bloc and most of the countries of ASEAN would remain firmly allied to America and Western interests. McMahon (1999) concludes that 'in the most fundamental sense, America's failures stemmed from its gross violations of nearly all the classic rules of warfare' (ibid. pp. 130-131).

movements, Islamist groups and pro-democracy NGOs in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Compared to Vietnam, America was more successful in its attempt to construct a string of puppet regimes under its thumb in other ASEAN countries like the Philippines and Indonesia.

In the Philippines the legacy of American involvement has likewise been one of subterfuge, double-standards and outright manipulation, made all the more apparent due to the problematic status of the Philippines as a colony of the USA. America's creation of the independent Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1935 was but a token and cosmetic gesture of appeasement, for the American government harboured no real intention to vacate this strategic colony.⁴⁰

As in the case of Vietnam, Indonesia and the other countries of Southeast Asia, Washington was keen to ensure that the Philippines would not fall under the sway of Communist hegemony in the post-war years.⁴¹ To this end Washington supported right-wing political groupings and leaders

⁴⁰ By the late 19th century America was looking for a means to expand its economic, political and military clout and presence in the Asian region. This opportunity was given to the United States as a result of the Spanish-American war that led to growing American influence in Central America as well as Southeast Asia. America's involvement in the Philippines began soon after the Spanish colonial powers there were defeated and forced to leave their colony in 1898. By 1899 American leaders like President William McKinley were openly declaring that the United States had the right and obligation to intervene in Filipino affairs, and McKinley even went as far as justifying America's imperial adventure by citing divine providence. The American government under McKinley openly spoke of the virtues of imperialism when addressing the Philippine question. The Philippines was bought from Spain at the cost of US\$ 20 million, and a force of 50,000 American troops were despatched to the country to 'restore law and order', particularly in the Southern island provinces of Mindanao and Sulu which had remained relatively autonomous for decades, even under Spanish rule. The Americans attempted the strategy of indirect rule when dealing with the Moros of Sulu and Mindanao in southern Philippines, and this was embodied in the Bates agreement signed between the Americans and the Sultan of Sulu in 1899. The Bates agreement was, however, unilaterally abrogated by the Americans in 1905 when they began to intervene directly in matters of government in the Moro sultanates. The Americans later revised their own policy towards the Southern Moros and attempted to woo some of the Moro leaders to their cause. The political reforms they introduced were intended to help assimilate the Moro communities and to give the traditional Moro leaders a place and status in the colonial administrative system they intended to set up. But attempts to introduce Western education and to disarm the Moros merely provoked them further, leading to even more conflicts. The Americans' treatment of the Moros hardly improved and when the Philippine Republic finally proclaimed its independence on 4th July 1946 the new post-colonial government invariably inherited the 'Moro problem' that the Americans (and Spanish before them) had helped to create. In 1935 the Americans created the self-governing Commonwealth of the Philippines, but it remained under indirect control of the USA and a colony of America. America propped up a number of pro-American cronies and puppet leaders as representatives to the Philippine government, and promised independence in 1945, but this was interrupted by the Japanese invasion during world war two. On 4 July 1946 the Philippines was finally granted its independence, on the same date as the US independence day. This in itself showed how the Philippines remained under American influence even after it gained its nominal independence. American political, military and business interests remained in the Philippines, and Filipino independence remained cosmetic and fictional. The US remained the *de facto* power behind the Philippine government and returned to its policy of selecting and promoting crony Filipino leaders who would serve US interests in the country and the region.

⁴¹ The first obstacle the Americans encountered was the Philippine Communist Party (PCP), which had been formed in the 1940s and had fought against the Japanese alongside the *Hukbalahap* (People's Army Against Japan) that was formed in 1942. American opposition to the PCP and Huk forces was based on ideological grounds: Both the PCP and Huks were left-leaning nationalists who included in their political agenda a land reform programme that the Americans wanted to scuttle. In the post-war period, US forces helped to re-install traditional Filipino leaders and the feudal elite, who were used in the campaign to undermine the Huk forces (Blum, 1995. pg. 40). By the end of 1945, the Americans were training a local

who it knew was sympathetic and partisan to Washington's own agenda and interests; and all the while invested large amounts of military and economic aid into the Philippines that were more often than not arranged through bilateral agreements that were in the former's favour.⁴²

Through agencies such as the Joint US Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) and the American-created Philippine Civil Affairs Office (CAO), the American government managed to reorganise the Philippine armed forces and intelligence services, and put their man Ramon Magsaysay⁴³ (then widely regarded as 'America's boy' in the Philippines) in key positions of power. One such instance being the 1953 elections that led to Ramon Magsaysay being made President, which were orchestrated by CIA and CAO and widely regarded as rigged.

The Americans were also widely seen as the true power behind other subsequent Philippine Presidents, from Diosdado Macapagal⁴⁴ (father to the present Philippines President Gloria Arroyo

force of 50,000 Filipino troops that were later used to contain the Huk uprising. When the Huk leaders attempted to reintegrate themselves into mainstream Filipino society, their moves were blocked by the Americans and pro-American Filipino leaders. Luis Taruc, the leader of the Huks, was prevented from taking his seat in the Philippines Congress even though he had won the elections fairly. The Americans were instead backing right-wing pro-American Filipino leaders to ensure that the new government in Manila would always follow the American line.

⁴² Between 1945 to 1947 the Philippine-US Trade Act and Philippine-US Military Agreement were passed. The latter provided the Americans with 23 military bases in country, and the lease was meant to last for 99 years. The pact also ensured that the Philippines could not turn to any other country for military aid and training, and the Philippine government was not allowed to buy even a single bullet from any other country without permission from Washington (Blum 1995, pg. 41). In 1950, the US provided the Philippines with \$US 500 million worth of military assistance. The Joint US Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) helped to reorganise the Philippine intelligence services, and put their man Ramon Magsaysay as its new head. Magsaysay would later be elevated to the position of President of the Philippines, with the help of the US and its covert intelligence units in the Philippines.

⁴³ In the 1950s, Ramon Magsaysay was made the head of the Philippines Intelligence Services by the Americans who regarded him as a loyal and trustworthy ally whom they could depend on. The man behind the rise of Ramon Magsaysay was Lt. Col. Edward G. Landsdale, who was the head of the CIA in the Philippines and advisor to the Joint US Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG). Landsdale formed the Philippines Civil Affairs Office (CAO) that engaged in psychological warfare against the Philippine Communist Party (PCP) and other nationalist groups. Through the CAO the CIA intervened directly in Filipino affairs, shaping public opinion and developing the image and popularity of Magsaysay. In 1953, Magsaysay won the Presidential elections with the help of the CAO and CIA, and Landsdale would later claim that it was he who 'invented Magsaysay' (Blum, 1995, pg. 44). Under constant watch and supervision, Magsaysay proved to be a loyal servant to American interests: his speeches were written and vetted by Landsdale and the CAO. On one occasion it was reported that Landsdale had even beaten Magsaysay and knocked the new President of the Philippines unconscious for not doing as he was told (ibid. pg. 43). During Magsaysay's term of office the US managed to deepen and strengthen its grip on the Philippine economy and political system even further. American companies behaved as if the Philippines was a US colony, and exploited the Filipinos as a captive market and source of cheap labour and resources. Magsaysay would later die in a plane crash in 1957, after which he was replaced by another pro-American leader, Diosdado Macapagal.

⁴⁴ Diosdado Macapagal began his career as a nationalist Filipino politician who struggled for the national liberation of his country. During the 1940s and 1950s he campaigned for Philippine independence and attempted to mobilise popular support against the Americans who had returned to the Philippines after the Second World War. During the presidency of Ramon Magsaysay, Macapagal was one of the most vocal critics of the Magsaysay government, accusing the President of being a hostage to American business and military interests. By then the American presence in the Philippines was overpowering (the CIA had helped to run and organise Magsaysay's successful 1953 election campaign) and Filipino politics was virtually run by the American-created Civil Affairs Office (CAO) headed by the CIA operative Lt. Col. Edward G.

Macapagal) to Ferdinand Marcos.⁴⁵ Throughout this period (up to the fall of Marcos in 1986), America's promotion of democracy and human rights in the ASEAN region fell short of its

Landsdale. After the death of Magsaysay in a plane crash in 1957, the Americans began courting the support of Macapagal, who was then working with the Americans by providing them with information about the Communists and other dissident groups in the country. The Americans in turn responded by taking Macapagal under their wing and offering him political and financial support. Through the CAO, the CIA was able to support and sustain Macapagal's election campaign in 1961. After winning the Presidential elections in 1961 with US support, Macapagal proved to be another loyal crony to American interests in the Philippines. The Macapagal administration was heavily influenced by Western and especially American interests. Macapagal signed more agreements that gave American companies the right to exploit Philippine resources and dominate the Philippine economy.

⁴⁵ Ferdinand Marcos was born on 11 September 1917, the son of a family of middle-class teachers, his days in higher education were spent studying law at the University of the Philippines. But the Marcos family was already part of the feudal Filipino elite system and his father was also a political leader with links to criminal networks. During the Second World War he served as an officer in the Philippine army. In 1947 Marcos entered the world of politics and became an assistant to the Philippines President Ramon Magsaysay. In 1949 he stood for election and became the youngest elected representative in the country. Using his networks and links to feudal, right wing and criminal organisations, Marcos earned himself a fortune and quickly becomes a political warlord by the 1950s. In 1953 he successfully ran for re-election again. After his political success he married Imelda Romualdez Marcos, a beauty queen in 1954. From then his political career soared and he again managed to win at the elections of 1957, 1959 and 1961. In 1963 he was elected President of the Senate and was made the head of the Philippine Liberal Party (PLP). But Marcos was never motivated by ideological or party commitments and in 1964 he switched sides and joined the right-wing Nationalista Party (PNP), where he soon becomes their Presidential candidate. After the fall of Diosdado Macapagal in 1965, Marcos was elected President of the Philippines. In 1969 Marcos won a second four-year term as President, but by then the opposition to his government and its American supporters had grown. Angered by the policies of Marcos and further US influence and control of the country, the militant arm of the Communist party, the New Peoples Army (NPA) launched an all-out revolt in the countryside, which in turn prompted Marcos to declare martial law in the country in 1971. With the declaration of martial law, Marcos suspended the Constitution and assumed absolute legislative and executive power in the country. His wife Imelda Marcos was made Governor of Manila and Minister for Human Settlements and Ecology- all with the backing of the US and its covert agencies. Marcos also created an extensive network of cronies and dependents, selecting close friends and family members to head key political institutions in the country. It was during the time of Marcos (1965-1986) that American-Philippine interests coincided most closely, and when US economic, military and strategic links were strengthened. Ferdinand Marcos's period of rule witnessed the biggest volume of American aid and investment into the country ever: Between 1962 to 1983 the American government gave more than \$US 3 Billion to the Philippine government in terms of investment aid and military support. The Philippines, which was also a major ally to the West in the Cold War, also received \$US 4 Billion in aid from international bodies like the World Bank. Apart from that the Philippine economy was also opened up and liberalised for foreign capital penetration thanks to the structural adjustment policies imposed by international financial advisory bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During the Vietnam War, the Philippines, under Marcos came even closer within the orbit of US strategic and military interests. Marcos did not allow Philippine troops to join in the Vietnam war, but did allow Philippine Engineer units to go to Vietnam and help the American war effort there. He also allowed the US to use the Subic Bay naval facility and Clarke air base as bases for US naval and aerial units. It was during this time that US-Philippine military co-operation was at its highest and it was also then that the Philippines became the prostitution centre of ASEAN, thanks to US troops who were allowed to go on 'rest and recreation' leave while based there. As the economy faltered from one crisis to another, the Marcos regime vented its wrath on its two main enemies: the Communist opposition and the Moro Muslims in the Southern regions of Mindanao and Sulu. On 25 February 1986, the Marcos regime finally toppled and the Marcos family were forced to seek refuge in the United States. Corazon Aquino then became the next President of the Philippines, with the country's foreign debt estimated at around US\$ 28 Billion. On 28 September 1989 Marcos died of a heart attack in Hawaii. Imelda Marcos was later brought to trial in New York but

declared ambitions, as *realpolitik* concerns and the military goal of defeating Communism – at any price – guided Washington’s relations with Manila.

With extensive US overt and covert support, the Marcos government helped to corporatise the Philippine army, allowing army officers to run businesses and siphon profits into their personal accounts. The American government continued to bankroll the Marcos regime and Philippine army because of their commitment to contain the Communists, and during the period of 1975 to 1980 abuses of human rights in the Philippines reached a peak. During this time, the Philippines came closer under American control and the Philippine economy came under the indirect supervision of international agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF imposed structural adjustment policies (SAPs) that effectively opened up the Philippine economy to extensive foreign capital penetration, but at the expense of the local industry and business community. A similar scenario was developing at the same time in the neighbouring country of Indonesia.

America’s relationship with Indonesia has been problematic from the beginning. When Indonesia unilaterally declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1945, it was the United States that attempted – on more than one occasion – to block subsequent attempts by the Dutch to regain control of their former prized colony. But at the same time successive American administrations from Eisenhower’s viewed Indonesia as a major strategic prize and were unwilling to concede the possibility of Indonesia slipping further to the left. One of the first countries to openly resist the assertion of American power was Indonesia, then under the leadership of the staunchly nationalistic leader Soekarno, who in turn was strongly backed by the anti-American Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

The Indonesian government under Soekarno was unwilling to accept any form of aid or military assistance from the United States for the simple reason that such a move would jeopardise Indonesia’s neutral stance. In October 1950, Sukarno announced that Indonesia would no longer accept any form of aid from the US on the grounds that such assistance often meant have to accept political conditionalities imposed by the powerful donor country as well.⁴⁶ In April 1955 Indonesia hosted the Bandung Conference that brought together the leaders of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa. Both the United States and Soviet Russia were

acquitted of all charges. By then the Philippines had the highest level of foreign debt of any ASEAN country.

⁴⁶ A few months earlier (in May 1950) the Burmese government had also announced that it would no longer accept any American military assistance. This setback did not dampen the ambitions of the Americans though: American efforts to woo Indonesia and bring it into the fold of the Western bloc intensified between 1951 to 1952, as the Korean War began to intensify. But these moves backfired for the simple reason that the Communist opposition in Indonesia had grown progressively stronger and were unwilling to allow Indonesia to fall under America’s shadow. When Prime Minister Sukiman signed a mutual security agreement with the United States, he was widely criticised by the PKI and other anti-American groups within his country. Sukiman himself was forced to step down in the end. On 1 August 1953, Ali Sastroamidjojo was sworn in as Indonesia’s fifth Prime Minister under the tutelage of President Soekarno. The Americans were perturbed by Soekarno’s choice for the post of Prime Minister, as Sastroamidjojo was known to have strong Communist links and sympathies. The Sastroamidjojo cabinet reflected the leftist leanings of its leader: Eight of the cabinet ministers were themselves members of the PKI or had strong Communist sympathies. The cabinet approved a number of radical policies related to nationalisation and land reform that were being pushed by the PKI at the time, and the rise of Ali Sastroamidjojo was seen as an indicator that Indonesia might soon fall into the Communist camp. The behind-the-scenes battle to win the hearts of the Indonesian leadership continued right up to the Bandung Conference that Soekarno organized in 1955.

apprehensive about the move; while China was more inclined to support the idea since it could identify itself with the newly emerging forces in Asia.⁴⁷ Eager to gain the confidence of Soekarno, the Americans intensified their attempts to woo the Indonesian leadership – culminating in an American government-sponsored tour of the United States (which included a trip to Disneyland, hosted by Walt Disney) for Soekarno and further promises of US aid and support.⁴⁸

When tours of Disneyland failed to produce the desired results, the American government proved that it was also prepared to adopt less peaceful means. In September 1958 the Eisenhower government authorised its agencies to lend covert support to anti-government groups and militias on the islands of Sumatra and Sulawesi that had turned against the central government of Soekarno and the Republic of Indonesia. Numerous attempts were made to send supplies and other covert tactics were employed, but the anti-government rebels were ultimately defeated by the Indonesian army led by General Abdul Haris Nasution. This tit-for-tat game of Cold War insurgency and counter-insurgency only came to an end in 1965, following the ill-fated *putsch* against the government initiated by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung and members of the PKI.

In the anti-Communist crackdown that followed, it was the United States that was wholly behind the right-wing elements of the Indonesian army and security forces. Working with other right-wing militias (including the more radical and violent Youth Wings of Islamist parties and groups like the *Nahdatul Ulama*), the republican forces of the Indonesian army virtually exterminated the entire PKI membership and its support networks.

From 1965 to 1998, it was the United States (with the backing of Australia and Britain) that was the biggest supporter of the New Order regime of General-turned-President Soeharto. With the rise of Soeharto and the military elite, Indonesia embarked on a bloody and ferocious purge against the leftists and Communists that destroyed the PKI; forcibly annexed Irian Jaya (in 1968-69) and East Timor (in 1974) and moved closer to the West in its political orientation. Indonesia's violent annexation of East Timor, which was widely condemned by the United Nations Assembly and which has never been recognised internationally, was nonetheless tacitly accepted by the US administration – again, for *realpolitik* reasons. It was widely suspected then, both by the US and other ASEAN governments, that an independent East Timor would veer to the left and thus lead to the creation of a 'Cuba in the heart of ASEAN'. (During the same week when the invasion began, Jakarta was host of key American leaders, including Henry Kissinger. Local journalists noted that the timing of the invasion of Timor was delayed so that the American delegation could have enough time to fly away and leave Indonesian airspace before the attack began.)

⁴⁷ The Russians were keen to ensure that they would not be sidelined from the discussions of the conference. On the eve of the conference the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Kusnetsov declared that 'the Soviet Union understands fully the struggle of the nations of Africa and Asia against any form of colonial domination and economic dependence' (McMahon, 1999. pg. 73).

⁴⁸ Finally it was President Eisenhower himself who invited Soekarno to America in May 1956. The visit was hailed as a success by Eisenhower, who was particularly impressed by Soekarno's willingness to be taken on a tour of Disneyland by none other than Walt Disney himself. McMahon (1999) notes that 'So impressed were US officials with the results of the Sukarno trip that in the summer of 1956 the Eisenhower administration quietly approved \$US 25 million in developmental assistance for Indonesia's struggling economy' (pg. 85). This optimism was off the mark though. Soon after he returned to Indonesia, Sukarno reached a tentative agreement with Soviet Russia that would allow the transfer of \$100 million worth of aid for a number of unspecified developmental projects. To make things worse, the elections that were held in Indonesia had allowed the leftist Ali Sastroamidjojo to come back to power with the backing of the PKI that was stronger than ever.

With the Communist opposition all but liquidated and local civil society groups domesticated via the government's depoliticisation programme, the pro-American elite of Indonesia worked to improve economic, strategic and military links with the US, and the Americans (and British) in turn propped up the corrupt and brutal Soeharto regime with gifts of arms, investment and military training. From the mid-1960s to the late 1990s, Indonesia's President Soeharto rose to become the longest-serving leader of ASEAN and was soon regarded as one of the most brutal dictators in the world. Soeharto's government was also dominated by pro-Western generals and military officers like General Benny Moerdani⁴⁹ and General A. M. Hendropriyono⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ General Benjamin (Benny) Moerdani was born in Cepu, Central Java, in 1932. In his youth Benny Moerdani was an admirer of Soekarno and the nationalists of Indonesia. He took part in the Indonesian independence struggle and in 1945 he joined the *Pusat Pendidikan Perwira Angkatan Darat* (Army Officers Training Centre, P3AD) of the newly independent Indonesia. After graduating from P3AD he joined Kopassus (*Komando Pasukan Khusus*- Special Forces Command) and began his career in military intelligence. During the first decades of Indonesian independence, Benny Moerdani was involved in most of the major security issues of Indonesia. He handled intelligence issues during the *Konfrontasi* between Malaysia and Indonesia; the PRRI (*Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia*) revolt; the Pamesta (*Perjuangan Rakyat Semesta*) revolt in Sumatra and the take-over of Irian Jaya from the Dutch colonial forces in 1964. He was later sent abroad to serve as Indonesia's diplomat in South Korea, but was called back to Indonesia by Suharto in 1974 to settle the internal disputes between the heads of the different intelligence agencies in Indonesia. From 1974 to 1983 he held all the top positions in military intelligence in Indonesia. By the end of his military career Benny Moerdani had served as the commander of ABRI (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*- Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia), Kopkamtib (*Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban*- Command for the Restoration of Law and Order) and the deputy chief of Bakin (*Badan Koordinasi Intelijens*- Intelligence Coordination Board). After his official retirement in 1993, Benny Moerdani began to work with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that had been set up by Father Beek, General Ali Murtopo and General Soedjono Hoemardani. Through the CSIS, Benny Moerdani worked to further undermine the activities of the Islamists in Indonesia, and he worked closely with other Western intelligence agencies operating in the region.

⁵⁰ During the Soeharto era General A. M. Hendropriyono was one of the key generals who ran the Indonesian army's intelligence and counter-insurgency apparatus, and under his guidance the Indonesian special forces and covert ops units were responsible for some of the worst human rights violations in Indonesia's history. It was he who was put in charge of the operations in the Lampung district in South Sumatra, where the Indonesian army was given the task of 'containing' the 'threat' of Islamist activists and an alternative Sufi-inspired mass movement there. After a series of covert actions and psy-ops warfare (where the public was told that the Islamists were a 'terrorist threat') the army was ordered to move in for the kill. The end result was the massacre of hundreds of innocent civilians, and this earned Hendropriyono the nickname of 'the Butcher of Lampung'. But like all Indonesian generals, Hendropriyono has managed to survive thanks to his political skills and ability to win friends and allies. When President Soeharto met his end in 1998, Hendropriyono took a step back and began to support the President's contenders. Seasoned Indonesia-watchers regard him as the man who was behind the meteoric rise of Megawati Sukarnoputri, and it was he who brokered the deal between Megawati's PDI party, the predominantly Chinese-Christian urban business elite and the army prior to her coming to power. When the beleaguered Megawati was in desperate search for partners to keep her feeble government together, and she turned to her one-time benefactor and supporter, Hendropriyono. Under President Megawati Hendropriyono was promoted to the head of Indonesia's new counter-insurgency intelligence service based in Jakarta. From the beginning, Hendropriyono was the most vocal advocate of more aggressive measures to be taken against the so-called 'Islamist threat' in Indonesia. Long before anyone else, it was he who claimed that *al-Qaeda* was now spreading to Indonesia and that the Indonesian army and intelligence services should be given more sweeping powers to deal with the threat. Hendropriyono continued to serve under President Megawati until she lost the elections of 2004. Shortly after Indonesia came under the leadership of ex-General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Hendropriyono announced his decision to retire from his post and public life. Till the end of his career he was never prosecuted for the alleged crimes against humanity he was said to be responsible for in Lampung.

At the hands of men like General Benny Moerdani, General Wiranto and General Hendropriyono, the abuse of human rights and the outright persecution of Indonesia's Islamist groups began in earnest. General Hendropriyono was put in charge of security operations in Lampung, which led to the killing of hundreds of civilians whom the army claimed were members of an underground Islamist militant network. General Moerdani in turn advised the Suharto regime on how to deal with the two main 'security threats' to Indonesia: the Communists and the Islamists. Prominent Muslim leaders like Mohammad Natsir (d. 1993), Anwar Haryono (d. 1999) and Syafruddin Prawinegara were persecuted along with their followers under Benny Moerdani's command.

The repression against Islamists reached its peak in 1984 with the Tanjung Priok incident where Indonesian soldiers massacred more than 400 Muslims outside a mosque in the Tanjung Priok district of Jakarta. The army began to impose direct control on Muslim activities, to the point where *Imams* of the mosques had to submit copies of their *khutbahs* to officers before they could deliver them during the Friday *Jamaah* prayers. During this time the imprisonment, torture and killing of *Ulama* and Islamist activists also reached its peak.

While the local Indonesian Islamists were being routinely harassed, abused and attacked, the technocratic elite of the Soeharto regime were being courted by the US and trained at its most prestigious institutions of higher education. Among them was B. J. Habibie, who studied engineering and aeronautics in the US and Germany. Along with the so-called 'Berkeley mafia' (so-called because of their education at the Californian university), Habibie and the New Order technocrats attempted to reconstruct the economy of Indonesia following the model of development given to them by the Americans, IMF and World Bank.

While Indonesia's economy did not suffer the same fate as that of the Philippines' (it was, in fact, one of the so-called 'Tiger economies' of Asia up to the financial crisis of 1997), the rapid and unprecedented development in Indonesia did help to further entrench the political and military elite surrounding Soeharto, solidified the neo-feudal patron-client linkages in Indonesian society, contributed to the urban dislocation and environmental destruction of the country and introduced cleavages of class and wealth differentials on a hitherto unheard-of scale.

In all these cases, as well as in the other countries of the ASEAN region, the United States has shown that its own promotion of democracy and human rights fell short of its laudatory claims. The US paid lip service to these ideals, but failed to put them into practice when Marcos declared martial law in the Philippines (thereby ending civilian democratic rule until he was deposed in 1986) and when Soeharto announced his programme to dismantle the existing party-political system and introduce the 'coalition' party programme in 1973-74 (which effectively robbed many of the parties in the country of their distinctive identities).

America also proved to be the strongest and most visible backer to these regimes, sticking it out with the South Vietnamese, Philippine and Indonesian governments till the bitter end. Needless to say, among the consequences of this policy of supporting un-democratic (and even anti-democratic) regimes in Southeast Asia is the negative association of the United States with the regimes of the past and the discrediting of America's image and the values it professes.

Among the Muslims and Islamist activists of the region, America's standing and image was doubly damaged: firstly due to its support of anti-Islamist and anti-Muslim regimes in the case of Philippines and Indonesia; and secondly for the perceived double-standards in its dealings with Israel and the Arab world (which we have discussed earlier). What few American politicians, scholars and intelligence personnel understood and realised was that it would be the Islamist

activists themselves who would undergo a radical transformation and rise to become among the most vocal defenders of civil society and democracy in the region one day. By then, however, America's double-standards and record of collaboration with the earlier regimes had tainted its image beyond repair, and thus Washington was no longer able to have an open line to the Islamists themselves.

- **The failure to identify, assist and promote genuinely progressive Islamist actors, agents, movements and trends:**

Linked to America's support – both open and clandestine – of repressive regimes in the ASEAN region is its singular failure to identify, assist and promote genuinely progressive Islamist actors, agents, movements and trends. This is particularly true in the case of Indonesia, which, as the world's biggest Muslim country, could and should have been allowed to play the pivotal role of model Muslim state for other developing Muslim countries in the South, as well as Malaysia where political Islam is now a major factor on the Malaysian political landscape.

America's intervention in Indonesian affairs, as we have alluded to above, was primarily directed towards channelling military support and technical aid/training to the Indonesian regime and its military supporters in the Armed Forces of Indonesia (ABRI/TNI). While this support was being given the United States government also tried its best to shield the Indonesian elite from the probing eyes of the International media if and when the latter were directly implicated in massive and outright cases of human rights abuses such as the annexation of East Timor, the troubles in Aceh, West Irian and South Sumatra.

In the wake of the anti-Communist putsch of 1965-66, the United States actively supported the regime of President Soeharto and his GOLKAR party, while remaining largely indifferent to the developments within and among the numerous Islamist groupings and parties of the country. During this time, various Indonesian Islamist groups worked openly with the Soeharto regime in their collective effort to eradicate the presence of the Communists of the PKI and their sympathisers in the country. The militant youth wing of the *Nahdatul Ulama* (NU), for instance, were directly implicated in the mass killings and violent anti-Communist pogroms that took place across Java in the late 1960s, under the watchful eye of both the Indonesian and American governments. At this stage, *realpolitik* concerns predominated America's relations with Jakarta and it was evident that Washington was not inclined to issue any protests or words of caution even when it was clear that Islamist groups were on the rampage across the country.

From 1965 to 1998, the United States paid little attention to the evolution of political Islam in both Malaysia and Indonesia, preferring to work almost exclusively with the governments of both countries. As a result of this policy of non-interference, the government of Indonesia was allowed a free hand when dealing with the political challenge of political Islam. Leaders of the Indonesian army were and are known to have had dealings with radical militant Islamist groups such as the *Komando Jihad*⁵¹, who were clandestinely set up by senior leaders of the Indonesian army to be

⁵¹ The shadowy *Komando Jihad* militia emerged in Indonesia in 1977 and was under the leadership of the young Indonesian cleric Imran bin Zein. An underground paramilitary movement, it was based mainly in Jakarta and Bandung, West Java, and its members were mainly young disaffected Muslims from the cities. Between 1977 to 1978 they were responsible for some minor attacks in some of the cities of Java, but their influence and their ability to project their power was limited by their own lack of resources. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, however, the leaders of the *Komando Jihad* claimed that they would embark on a revolutionary struggle against the Indonesian state. In March 1981 members of the *Komando Jihad* staged

deployed as an irregular militia force against perceived enemies of the state, be they alleged Communists or secessionist movements in the outer islands.

This trend of active support and collaboration with radical militant Islamist groups continued right up to the 1990s, with elements of the Indonesian army working together with the leaders of groups like the *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah*⁵², that later spawned radical militia such as the *Laskar*

an attack on a police base outside Bandung and managed to steal a number of small arms. Analysts at the time suggested that the attack on the police base may have been an inside job, with rogue elements of the Indonesian army secretly working to ensure that the arms heist was successful. By then it was widely speculated that the *Komando Jihad* had actually been set up under the watchful eye of Indonesian army intelligence and General Ali Murtopo – a close associate of President Soeharto and the general who had been put in charge of the Indonesian oil company Pertamina – who wanted to use the *Komando Jihad* to eliminate opponents of the government and residual elements of the banned Communist party of Indonesia. Later on 28 March 1981 members of the *Komando Jihad* staged the hijacking of a Garuda airlines DC-9, which they directed to Malaysia and finally Bangkok. The hijacking was ultimately foiled by the Kopassandha (later KOPASSUS) unit of elite para-commandos. By then the Indonesian army commanders were distancing themselves from the *Komando Jihad*, and the group had grown beyond their control. Later in the 1980s the Indonesian army and intelligence would provoke the radical Islamists to gauge their strength, but this in turn radicalised them even further.

⁵² In 1994 the various Indonesian Islamist groups came together to form the *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah* (Community of the Revival of the Sunna) that later became the wellspring from which other militant organisations like the *Laskar Jihad* emerged. Led by the popular and influential *Ulama* and ex-*mujahideen* Jaafar Umar Thalib and based at the *pesantren* at Kaliurang, Jogjakarta, the *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah* began as yet another *dakwah* movement that was concerned with the Islamisation of Indonesian society (rather than the State). But Jaafar Umar Thalib and the other leaders of the movement were very much under the influence of *Wahhabi* ideas and were orthodox puritans and scripturalists at heart. In its early stages, the members of the organisation were concentrated on the task of reforming the behaviour and beliefs of Indonesian Muslims, weaning them away from what they regarded as the 'impure' and unorthodox practices of many Muslims in Java in particular. The *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah* concentrated most of its attention on university students in the local campuses. The campuses that were targeted included Universitas Diponegoro (UNDIP), Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Universitas Airlangga (UNAIR), Universitas Nasional Veteran (UPN), Universitas Indonesia (UI) and the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) – all of which were widely regarded as bastions of secular thinking. The *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah* was particularly interested in the Muslim students who were members of the numerous *halaqahs* and *usrahs* (study circles) where Islamist theories and ideas were being discussed. It is interesting to note that many of the Islamist students were themselves the products of the *Latihan Mujahid Dakwah* (Missionary Activists Training) programme that was first launched by Imaduddin Abdurrahim, the former Indonesian Secretary to the International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations (IIFSO), which was partially set up with help and funding from the Saudi *Rabitat* organisation. Many of the student *usrah* cells were created by the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam- Majelis Penyelamat Organisasi* (HMI-MPO), which was a splinter group that broke from the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (Islamic University Students Organisation) which was led by 'liberals' like Nurcholish Madjid. Unlike the HMI, the HMI-MPO group were less inclined to pay lip service to the *Pancasila* ideology of the state and were more open in their opposition to the Soeharto regime. They also opposed other Islamist intellectuals and activists like Nurcholish Madjid whom they regarded as being too 'soft' and accommodating to the Soeharto government and the non-Muslim minorities. Jaafar Umar and the other leaders of the *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah* began trying to recruit these students and convert them to their cause and many of those who joined the movement belonged to the 'hard sciences', such as medicine, engineering and natural sciences. As the movement developed its leaders grew increasingly obsessed with the status of the Muslim community in the country and they began to adopt a more confrontational rhetoric against those whom they regarded as the enemies of Islam and the Muslim *Ummah*: the secular nationalists of the Soeharto regime, Indonesian Christians and the ones whom they regarded as agents of Zionist interests in Indonesia. The student activists of the *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah* began to conduct *razzias* (raids) on business premises and social centres which they regarded as dens of vice and iniquity. Bars, social clubs, casinos, video centres and cinemas became their favourite

Jihad, Fron Pembela Islam and the *Laskar Mujahidin Indonesia*. Groups like the *Laskar Jihad* were used as part of an irregular force to destabilise the political situation in troubled provinces like the Moluccas. Throughout this period the American government and its advisors did little to caution the Indonesian political and military elite about the folly of their adventures.

In other cases senior Indonesian military leaders and members of the Indonesian intelligence community were likewise given a free hand to conduct their anti-terrorist activities and campaigns, often at a high human cost. The case of (retired) General A. M. Hendropriyono is a case in point: Dubbed the 'butcher of Lampung' and accused of numerous abuses of human rights that occurred during his anti-Islamist campaign in the Lampung province of South Sumatra, Hendropriyono was nevertheless supported by both the Soeharto regime and the Americans, and later promoted to the post of the Director of Indonesia's Anti-Terror Operations Centre based in Jakarta. Throughout his career as head of Indonesia's security and anti-terror operations the officer was constantly in contact and co-operating with his American counterparts.

It was only in the wake of 11 September 2001 that the American government began to demonstrate a keen interest in the development of political Islam in Indonesia. Cognisant of the important role the country might be able to play globally should Indonesia be able to present itself as a showcase of moderate Islamism at work, the United States has now performed a radical u-turn in its policy towards Indonesian Islamist movements.

Since 2001, the United States government – via its expansive network of NGOs, donor foundations and aid agencies – has been at the forefront of trying to reinvent a new, more moderate and progressive image and praxis of Islam in Indonesia. The Asia Foundation, the Ford Foundation and other similar bodies have begun to pour funds into the country, in an effort to create new local institutions, NGOs, research institutes and academic institutions to study, promote and defend what it describes as 'moderate Islam' at all costs. One such initiative has been the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) that was set up two years ago and located in one of the most exclusive residential quarters of Jakarta. Set up with the backing and funding of the Asia Foundation, ICIP has managed to gain considerable local media publicity and invite a number of prominent local and foreign Islamist intellectuals, activist and scholars. But despite its laudatory aims to promote a culture of pluralism and democracy among Muslims, and its impressive panel of local and foreign advisors, ICIP remains tainted by its association with the Asia Foundation, a body that is known for its intimate association with the Soeharto regime during the post-1965 era in Indonesia.

Here again the *realpolitik* concerns of the USA are evident, and has been made plain for all to see thanks to the less-than-sophisticated approach of American think tanks and corporations such as the RAND Corporation, whose report on '*Civil Democratic Islam*' clearly stated that the aim of such efforts was to ensure that the US could help to create and promote a brand of Islamist activism that was not hostile to long-term American military, economic and political ambitions.

In short, it was Washington's indifference to the growing currents of Islamist activism in Indonesia and Malaysia over the past three decades that has left it out of touch with the new actors and agents on the local scene. Post-2001, post-Afghanistan and post-Iraq, America's image is at an all-time-low in both countries and no amount of financial support given to any local bodies and agents can overcome this credibility deficit quickly enough. If anything, it could be

targets and many of these raids were marked by violence and destruction of property. In time, these attacks would develop to become more co-ordinated and organised, led as they were by paramilitary *Jihadi* organisations like the *Laskar Jihad*, *Laskar Pembela Islam* and the *Laskar Mujahidin Indonesia*.

argued that thanks to the popular negative perception of the USA in Indonesia and Malaysia today, American donor money is more likely to be regarded as the ‘Midas’ touch’ that contaminates and sullies any local efforts to create a local brand of progressive moderate Islam. Rather than effectively promoting a ‘moderate Islam’ that cherishes, defends and promotes democracy, pluralism, multiculturalism and dialogue, American donor support is more likely to be seen by many local Islamists as a covert means to ‘corrupt’ Islam and to domesticate it instead.

IV. Conclusion: How America won the battle, but lost the war for hearts and minds in Southeast Asia.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the image, standing and perception of the United States of America in the eyes of Southeast Asia’s Muslims is at an all-time low. America’s return to the region is, as we have shown earlier, not without precedent: Its constant involvement and intervention in the internal domestic politics of countries like Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand – and to a lesser extent, Malaysia and Singapore – burdens it with a long train of historical baggage that it has yet to discard. Added to that is the knowledge of America’s record of interventions and unilateral actions in countries from Latin America to Africa to the Arab world – guaranteed as a result of improvements in information technology as well as the development of a media-conscious ASEAN community that is now better connected to the rest of the world.

Rightly or wrongly, America is seen as the true inheritor of the legacy of Neo-Colonialism in ASEAN today; and though much of the anti-American rhetoric and bluster that has issued from the Islamist movements of the region have been peppered by outlandish conspiracy theories and unfounded allegations, the negative image of the US has been consolidated, sedimented and to a large extent hegemonised.

At the same time, however, this jaundiced image of the US is a complex one that does not and should not be read as a blanket condemnation of the US *in toto*. The Southeast Asian audience is a sophisticated and educated one, which recognises the internal contradictions and heterogeneous nature of American society. Thanks in part to the large numbers of Southeast Asian students who have travelled to the US for further education, the realities of contemporary American society are known and acknowledged in the ASEAN region. Malaysian and Indonesian students who have travelled to, and lived in, the US have brought home vivid accounts of the what they saw and experienced there: The problems of racism and racial tension, the growing differentials of wealth and power, the so-called ‘problem of social and moral decline’, urban squalor, crime and corruption – these are the issues that are constantly conjured up in the populist discourse of the Islamists who see America as a failed state and the embodiment of all that is wrong with the decadent, materialistic and morally base Western world. (It is important to note that here the Islamists’ critique of American society often stands parallel to that of secular-leftist opposition groups in the region, who regard America as the embodiment of all that is wrong with the model of liberal-capitalist development.)

Compounding the problem further is the failure of American foreign policy in the Bush era to secure allies and win new friends. America’s initial military successes in Afghanistan and Iraq have already begun to unravel, revealing the patent absence of a long-term strategy for regime change that could have been credible and morally defensible. The Islamists of Indonesia and Malaysia point to the revival of the drug trade in Afghanistan, as well as the return to warlordism and gangsterism, as proof of America’s failure to improve conditions of life there. They also emphasise the weak and dependent character of the government of Hamid Karzai, who they argue

has simply been installed as an American puppet and deduce from this the lack of commitment as far as the genuine promotion of transparency, democracy and human rights are concerned. Further afield, Iraq's inexorable slide towards civil war and sectarian conflict has shown that Washington's entry into Iraq was not supplemented by the equally important exit strategy that would have saved the US from the charge of being merely a neo-colonial power.

The Islamists' negative perception of the US, however, has to be understood in the context of the wider background of a resurgent Asia that feels itself burdened by a lumbering, overbearing partner who has simply thrown his weight around the region. If the Islamists of Indonesia and Malaysia (as well as Thailand and Philippines) feel a growing hostility towards the US government, the same sentiments are shared by members of their societies as a whole. America's failure in Afghanistan and Iraq may have a special emotional significance for the Islamists who are moved by sentiments of Islamic solidarity with fellow Muslims abroad, but the negative perception of US policies is shared by other sections of the Asian populace who are likewise tired with the shenanigans of the Bush administration and its failure to keep its own house in order. Nowhere is this more evident than among the business community of East and Southeast Asia, who feel that America's tottering economy has jeopardised the health of the global economy as a whole.

If Southeast Asia's Islamists are angered by America's militarist adventures abroad, the economists and business community in Asia are angered by its fiscal neglect and follies as well. If the Islamists are outraged by America's mismanagement of affairs in Afghanistan and Iraq; the economists and business community of Asia are dismayed by the Bush administration's singular failure to impose even a modicum of discipline and normality in the American-Asian trade balance.⁵³ Southeast Asian NGOs are, in turn, angered by the US's intransigence on matters such

⁵³ At the time of the writing of this paper, America's economic relations with East and Southeast Asia is also at an all-time low: The spiralling debt of the US (now in excess of 400 billion US Dollars), which has received much less attention by the world media, is hitting the economies of Asia very hard. The reason for the unequal trading relationship between the US and its Asian partners is the comparatively lower costs of labour and production in East and Southeast Asia, which in turn has resulted in a disproportionate ratio of exchange between the two sides. At present (late 2004) manufacturers in East and Southeast Asia have been selling much more to the US compared to the level of American imports back into Asia. As a result of this unequal trade, the economies of East and Southeast Asia have accumulated a disproportionately large amount of US dollar earnings, which have had to be converted into US government securities, bonds and stocks. Today Japan's Ministry of Finance holds the biggest portfolio of US government securities in the world, estimated at around 720 billion US Dollars. China, South Korea, Taiwan and other Asia countries have also been forced to do the same. As a result of this policy to buy up US security stocks, interest rates in the US have been artificially kept low, allowing American businesses to borrow cheaply, discouraging savings and allowing ordinary Americans to continue buying from Asian manufacturers. The low interest rates in the US have also allowed the Bush administration to finance the Federal government's ever-expanding budget deficit. The governments and finance ministries of Japan and China have complained about the lax management of the US economy – pointing out that Asian countries currently hold about 40 per cent of America's public debt – but to no avail. The problem that faces the governments of Asia is that they have been caught in this unequal trading arrangement for too long, and have accumulated such large stocks of US securities and bonds that they are unable and unwilling to dump them (by converting to the Euro currency for instance) for fear of depreciating the value of their remaining stocks. Should a country like Japan convert 10 percent of its US securities to another currency, there is no guarantee that the value of the US would now slide uncontrollably due to the variable nature of the financial market, thereby wiping out the value of the remaining US securities they have in stock. The Asian economies are therefore caught in a double-bind: Unable to convert their surplus US securities and unable to alter the uneven trading relations with an uncompetitive US economy. (*Dollar's Fall is an Asian Dilemma*, International Herald Tribune, 6 December 2004.)

as the Kyoto Treaty on the emission of polluting gases, as well as the fact that the US remains as the nation that consumes and pollutes more than any other country on the planet. The convergence of these viewpoints is the factor that has helped to hegemonise anti-Americanism in South, Southeast and East Asia today.

America's failure on both fronts – economic and political-strategic – is the real reason why the image of the US is so bad in the Southeast Asian region at the present moment. Thanks in part to its role in exacerbating the economic inequalities and deficiencies in the developing world, successive American governments have helped to create the socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances that favour the rise of radical groupings in search for a change and a new socio-political order. America's cavalier and mercenary approach in dealing with the so-called 'Communist threat' in Southeast Asia in the 1960s-80s did achieve the military goals it set out to deal with, but in the course of doing so also eliminated scores of other progressive, secular political trends that might have served as the foundations of a democratic civil society in the future. In the void that was created with the extermination of the leftist opposition came the Islamist conservatives, whom the US was initially oblivious to, and only recently wary of.

Today the American government is busy trying to make amends and more importantly to make new friends in the Muslim world and Asia. Washington's support of leaders like Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan and Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, however, has done little to improve the image and standing of these leaders in their home countries. (As the three assassination attempts on General Musharraf readily testifies.) The situation in Southeast Asia is hardly any more different, and Washington's endorsement of the governments of Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand (to the extent of recognising the last as a major 'non-NATO ally' in the so-called 'war on terror') has done little to win over the ordinary people of the countries concerned.

Washington's failure to appreciate the fact that there are really two 'ASEANs' – divided between the islands of wealth, power and cosmopolitan culture of the cities and the under-developed seas of poverty and relative backwardness in the countryside – means that America's contact has been solely with the urbanised metropolitan elite of the countries in the region. In the countryside it is a different story altogether.

On that note, we end this paper with an anecdote which, we believe, illustrates the complex dilemma that the American government now faces when dealing with the Muslims of Southeast Asia. During the course of our fieldwork in the Southern Thai Muslim province of Patani this year⁵⁴, we encountered a young Thai Muslim man who was selling T-shirts of Osama ben Laden at the market in the small border town of Golok. Intrigued by the incongruous sight of Osama in the humid tropics, I decided to interview the young man who was selling the T-shirts. This is what happened next:

'How's business?' I asked him. 'Oh, it's doing well' came the reply.

'Who buys these T-shirts?' was my next question. He replied 'Everyone. Lots of kids like them. We also sell them to dealers who come from Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines. They buy them by the hundreds and then sell them back home.'

I then asked him: 'So do *you* support Osama too? I mean, would *you* be happy if people like these came here, and turned Thailand into a country like Afghanistan

⁵⁴ Fieldwork carried out between June and July 2004.

under the *Taliban*?' He gave me a broad grin and said: 'Oh no, no, no! I have a girlfriend man! I enjoy the motorbike races on the weekends and going out to have drinks with my friends, racing on the highways, playing computer games, and all that.'

'So why *do* you sell these T-shirts then?' I asked. He replied: 'It's simple – We're fed up with what our government in Bangkok is doing to us. I mean, look at how poor we are. Life for us here has been hard for years, and we've had to cope with the criminal gangs, smugglers, drug-pushers and the army and cops as well. But Bangkok is more interested in supporting the Americans and the Americans hate Osama. So we wear the Osama T-shirt to say: We don't care about your policy with the United States. We have our own identity and we want you to respect it.'

I then noticed that among the Osama ben Laden T-shirts was one with Che Guevara instead. I glanced at the boy's shiny motorbike parked nearby: It was bright green and there was a sticker that said '*No Fear*'.⁵⁵

End.

Farish A. Noor,
Zentrum Moderner Orient,
Berlin
December 2004

⁵⁵ See: Farish A. Noor, '*Thailand's Smile Fades*', Letters from Our Correspondent series (radio program), BBC World Service, 9 December 2004.

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