

CHAPTER 3

DEFENCE FORCES OF SOUTH EAST ASIA

The defence force structure of any nation ought to be determined by the current strategic environment. For countries within South East Asia, this means that the force structure will be a balance between that which can meet an external threat and a defence force that can also deal with insurgency operations. The emphasis that is given to one or the other varies from country to country: from the Philippines which still operates a mainly counter-insurgency defence force to the Malaysian armed forces which are structured primarily for conventional warfare. Generally though, it is a matter of emphasis as all forces are, by necessity, multi-role because of the wide range of demands made on them.

The principles involved in meeting an external threat and dealing with counter-insurgency activity are markedly different. For insurgency operations, small lightly equipped and mobile units are required. The navy will consist of small patrol craft while the air force will have aircraft that are most effective in the ground attack role and possess a good surveillance capacity.

A conventional force will have in its order of battle, field tanks, heavy artillery, mortars and surface to air missiles. The navy will possess corvettes or frigates and missile equipped patrol craft. The air force will be equipped with air to air fighter aircraft (for South East Asian countries this means F-5E aircraft) and fighter-bombers (A-4 Skyhawks).

Force Structure Requirements

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an outline of the force structure of countries in South East Asia. In assessing the structure of the defence forces, it should be realised that there are many capabilities that are common to either role. Thus, it is a matter of the emphasis which is placed on particular equipments, doctrines and tactics. It should be noted that changes in defence capabilities generally lag behind changes in national policy because of the long lead times that are involved in the acquisition of equipment and the retraining of personnel. The Defence Co-operation Program is required to adapt to these shifting emphases within recipient forces.

Strategic Context

The strategic environment in South East Asia is dominated by Vietnam's intervention in Kampuchea. The Vietnamese military forces have maintained a substantial presence in Kampuchea and the possible Vietnamese withdrawal of its forces and an early cessation of fighting seem unlikely. Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, in coalition with the Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front and the Armee Nationale Sihanoukee, continues to conduct a guerilla campaign against the Vietnamese supported Heng Samrin forces.

The situation in Kampuchea is seen to be strategically critical for Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. The position is particularly sensitive for Thailand as Kampuchean resistance is supported by Chinese military aid which is supplied from Thailand. Assistance is also provided by Singapore and Malaysia. If Vietnam sees it as necessary to completely halt military aid from flowing into Kampuchea, then the minor incursions by the Vietnamese into Thailand, which currently occur, could become

both more frequent and larger in scale. In that event support for Thailand from the United States could be justified through the South East Asian Collective Defence Treaty (commonly referred to as the Manila Pact). While Australia is also a signatory to this Treaty, in its submission to the Committee, the Department of Foreign Affairs argued that while any obligations within the Treaty 'continue formally to apply, the Treaty does not now have credibility as a collective security framework ... For Australia the Treaty has ceased to have any significant impact on defence and foreign policy formulation.'¹

The tension in the region has been heightened further by China's unilateral declaration of support for Thailand and its open support for the Khmer Rouge. The Soviet Union continues to be the major ally of Vietnam. As well as creating divisions within ASEAN, the Sino-Soviet confrontation has meant that the region has once again become polarised.

Malaysia and Singapore do not face the same threat to their security as Thailand, nevertheless, their defence awareness has been heightened as a result of the Kampuchean conflict. Currently relations between Malaysia and Singapore are good and this is reflected in the level of defence co-operation between the two countries; though the two countries only engage in joint exercises with other ASEAN members. There are standing agreements between the two sides on search and rescue operations and joint defence activities through the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). There is a belief in both Governments today that in the event of an external threat, the defence of Malaysia and Singapore is indivisible.²

Insurgency Groups

An important development that has emerged from the third Indochinese war affecting stability in the region has been the courting of ASEAN support for the actions of both the Soviet-backed Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea and the opposing Chinese-supported forces operating in Kampuchea, and increasing border active between Kampuchea and Thailand.

The ASEAN states claim that the reason for the decline in insurgent activity in the region is attributable to their counter-insurgency measures, however a major contributory factor appears to be the efforts by both China and Russia/Vietnam to win support for their activities from the ASEAN states. To win such support, these countries have reduced their support for communist parties operating in ASEAN states. Accordingly, since 1979 modernisation of the ASEAN defence forces has been concentrated on developing the conventional arm of their forces rather than those aspects that enhance their ability to deal specifically with insurgency activities.

This is not to deny that difficulties do not exist within each of the ASEAN states. The communist party remain a substantial force and all ASEAN states, with the exception of Singapore, have ethnic and/or regional minorities, some of which are actively hostile to the central government especially in Indonesia and the Philippines.

Military Capabilities of Countries in South East Asia

1. Brunei: The small Islamic sultanate of Brunei lies on the North coast of Borneo Island. Its only borders are with Malaysia, with which it has always had good relations. The country is rich in oil and natural gas and has foreign reserves of about \$US20 billion (1981). The average per capita income is one of the highest in the world at \$A20 340 in 1982. In comparison, the figure for Japan is \$A8820.

Brunei gained independence on 31 December 1983, and the British, at the request of the Sultan, agreed to leave a British army Gurkha battalion (600 personnel) stationed in Brunei. The Government of Brunei is responsible for the cost of the Gurkhas. The government also continues to provide jungle training facilities at Temburong to the British armed forces (as well as the Singapore armed forces).

The major problems facing Brunei are economic rather than defence questions. Because the economy of Brunei depends on oil and natural gas which are capital intensive, there is little opportunity for expansion of employment. Currently, the government is embarking on a large capital works program including the building of a series of new towns, each housing about 65 000 people.

The main internal threat could arise from the native Malay population or the local Chinese whose rights are very restricted.

Despite being surrounded by friendly nations (Brunei joined ASEAN on 9 January 1984), the government spends 34% of its annual budget or 5.5% of its GNP on defence. As a result, the military forces (3650 personnel) are extremely well equipped with Scorpion tanks, Rapier missiles and patrol boats with Exocet missiles. While the forces have most of the equipment that they need, there is still a gap in training, especially in the maintenance and service of sophisticated weaponry.

The United States will commence a military training program worth \$30 000 in 1985.

2. Indonesia: With an armed force of 281 000 and a defence budget of \$US84.309 billion, the Indonesian armed forces are the largest within ASEAN. On a per capita basis however,

defence expenditure as a proportion of GNP is one of the lowest in the ASEAN group. There is substantial integration of the military forces with civilian infrastructure, from government and parliament downwards. It has been estimated that as much as half of the army's manpower is engaged in what is called dwi-fungsi (dual function) activity. It is not surprising then that the armed forces possess a combination of conventional and counter-insurgency capabilities and in addition considerable manpower and resources devoted to areas which would normally be considered to be civilian matters.

Indonesia requires mobility in its defence structure because of its archipelagic nature. The structure of the army emphasises this mobility, comprising light armoured vehicles and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs). There are few heavy artillery pieces. Much emphasis is placed on airborne and special forces capabilities, which consist of 3 transport squadrons - these support 6 airborne battalions, 3 amphibious battalions and 2 infantry marine regiments.

The airforce is equipped with fighter/ground attack aircraft (Skyhawks), 2 interceptor squadrons (F-5's) and a squadron of OV-10F Bronco's, an aircraft designed specifically for counter-insurgency operations. The airforce also has on order extra helicopters, C-130 transports and 3 Boeing 737 AWACS.

The navy has 2 type 209 submarines and 9 frigates (3 with Exocet missiles) and 29 patrol craft (4 with Exocets) of which 8 are coastal craft. The structure of the navy indicates that greatest emphasis is being placed on securing Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and defending the archipelago from either internal or external threats.

The emphasis of defence spending in the immediate future will be on re-equipping and modernising the army. Because of budgetary difficulties (oil exports have been reduced since the oil glut in 1982), General Benny Murdani, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, is quoted as saying that routine expenditure would be cut by 50%, operating costs by 10%, maintenance by 10% and investment by 30%. Only 20 battalions would be fully equipped for combat readiness as it is believed that Indonesia is in no danger of war.³

Indonesia receives defence assistance from New Zealand and the United States as well as Australia. The United States is providing military aid worth \$47.5m in 1984 and \$42.7m in 1985. United States aid consists of FMS (Foreign Military Sales) assistance and military education and assistance, both in the United States and Indonesia (See Table 1).

New Zealand aid is also directed to training and assisting the Indonesian defence forces in their upgrading of defence force facilities. These have included assisting the development of the Indonesian Defence Dental Institute and the Air Force Medical School. Indonesian officers regularly attend courses in New Zealand.

3. Malaysia: The Malaysian armed forces are the best example of the impact that the changing strategic environment can have on the structure of a defence force. Until 1979, the primary role of the defence forces was to deal with counter-insurgency (COIN). However, with the eruption of the third Indo-Chinese war and the not coincidental reduction in activity by the Communist Party of Malaysia the role of the armed forces has shifted to conventional warfare.

In the years immediately following the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnam, there was a rapid growth in the size and equipment of the armed forces. In 1975, Malaysia spent 4% of its GNP on defence. By 1981 this had increased to 8.3%.

This increase in funding has been used to purchase major pieces of new equipment for the armed forces and to provide for a dramatic increase in manpower. In 1978 there were 64 500 in the armed forces. In 1981 this had increased to 102 000. The army has purchased new rifles, 105 mm Howitzers, fire support vehicles, light tanks and APCs. The APCs and the light tanks can also be used for counter-insurgency operations.

The airforce has recently purchased jet trainers which can be used also in a light strike role and 40 A-40 fighter-bombers to supplement its 12 F-5E's. A new airbase to be built at Gong Kedak, in Northern Malaysia, has been suspended as a cost-saving measure. The air force is also considering the purchase of a E2C Hawkeye airborne warning system (AWAC).⁴

The navy has 2 frigates and 2 corvettes on order from West Germany. There are 16 fast attack craft (8 with Exocet missiles), a large supply vessel and many small patrol craft. They also have on order 4 minehunters.⁵ However, with Malaysia in 1983 facing a foreign debt of \$US7.600 million (an increase of 365% since 1980), defence cutbacks have occurred.⁶

Areas that are believed to be in need of improvement are training standards, combat proficiency and administrative efficiency.⁷

United States military assistance to Malaysia is dominated by the FMS credit program which reflects Malaysia's shift from a counter-insurgency to a conventional warfare orientation. The United States also has a training and study visits program with Malaysia which, in 1983, was significantly increased after a request from the Malaysian Prime Minister. In 1983 53 personnel were training in the United States. By 1985 it is proposed that this number be increased to 101 (see Table 1).

New Zealand assistance to Malaysia involves joint exercises and support in the development of a battle field simulation system. Malaysian defence personnel regularly attend a variety of training courses in New Zealand and New Zealand army officers also provide specialised instruction in Malaysia.

4. Philippines: While the armed forces of the other ASEAN states have redefined the role of their defence forces, the Philippine government continues to place greatest emphasis on enhancing its counter-insurgency capabilities, which it sees as the major problem facing the country. The Philippines relies almost entirely on the US presence to deter potential enemies. There are US military facilities at Subic Bay (U.S. Naval Support Base) and Angeles City (Clark Air Base).

The Philippine army is based on light armour with Scorpion light tanks, APCs and 105mm and 155mm howitzers. There is a special warfare brigade too.

The navy also is relatively lightly armed, consisting of 7 ex-US frigates, and 10 Corvettes, 3 fast patrol boats with Exocet missiles and 16 large patrol craft. The air force, significantly, has 3 COIN squadrons, one helicopter squadron of UH-1Hs with another 35 helicopters on order. There is also a squadron of ground attack aircraft (F-8H) and 5 transport squadrons including a squadron of 12 Nomads.

The United States has had a defence treaty with the Philippines since 1952 and has had military bases in the Philippines since 1947. In 1979, President Carter pledged \$500 million of 'security assistance' for the financial years 1980-1984. This is used to assist 'the Philippines to meet its own defence needs, which include the threat of a slowly growing

insurgency, and to advance toward its goal of military modernization'.⁸ The main forms of the assistance are FMS credits and training and study visits (see Table 1).

New Zealand involvement is limited to taking part in joint exercises involving the Philippine armed forces.

5. Singapore: Since the withdrawal of the British military presence in the late 1960's, the Singapore armed forces have expanded rapidly. While there was no sudden increase in defence expenditure in 1979 which occurred in most other ASEAN states, expenditure still continued to rise.

The army is oriented towards countering external threats, being equipped with AMX-13 tanks, M-113 APCs and Commando APCs. The army is both heavily armoured and highly mobile. The navy and air force are also well equipped. The navy has 9 missile equipped patrol boats with 3 more on order. The air force is the strongest in the region with eight squadrons of Skyhawk A-4's and one squadron of F-5E and F-5F fighters. There are also 4 surface to air missile squadrons.

While the armed forces of Singapore are well equipped with technically sophisticated equipment, the forces are without combat experience of any sort. Thus the major priority of the forces is in improving training. New Zealand provides assistance to Singapore by way of training assistance in both New Zealand and Singapore. New Zealand and Singapore regularly take part in joint exercises.

The United States commenced a modest training program (\$50 000) with Singapore in 1982 (see Table 1). The program is used to train professional officers from all three services.

6. Thailand: The structure of the Thai armed forces has been determined by a number of diverse factors. Under the total force concept, the military forces in Thailand are deeply involved in civil activity, building roads, bridges, irrigation channels, providing medical care etc. Rice and fertilizer banks have even been established by the army.⁹

While the outlawed Communist Party of Thailand has become less active in recent years, Thailand's border with Kampuchea has meant that it has needed to develop its conventional warfare capabilities against a possible Vietnamese invasion. As a result of the war in Kampuchea, there is also the problem with controlling the flow of refugees. The main areas of insurgency activity are at two extremes of Thailand - in the south on the border with Malaysia and in the west on the Kampuchean border.

The structure of the armed forces reflect these different force requirements. The army has significant heavy artillery, mortars and armour with 55 M-48 and 200 M-41 tanks. They also have on order a further 100 M-48 and 16 M-60 tanks.

While the navy has 6 frigates and 6 missile equipped patrol crafts, the emphasis is one of coastal patrol with 23 large patrol craft, 27 patrol craft and 40 river patrol craft. The air force has 3 squadron of F-5E aircraft but their air defence capability is largely untested. The main focus of the Thai air force is with the 10 counter-insurgency squadrons (2 of which are Nomad N-22B). There are a further 18 Nomads on order.

The Thai forces have been able to take advantage of the United States' FMS Credits to develop a sophisticated defence force.

Thailand is assisted in the development of its armed forces by military assistance from the United States (see Table 1), New Zealand and Australia. American concern is two fold: as a front-line state (with Kampuchea) and as the country in South East Asia that has borne the heaviest burden of refugees; Thailand is also seen as a key member of ASEAN which the United States Government believes deserves their full support.

The New Zealand Government provides training for Thai officers (22 in 1983) and study visits by Thai officers.

TABLE I

UNITED STATES MILITARY AID TO ASEAN COUNTRIES
(In millions of dollars)

Country	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984 (Esti- mated)	1985 (Pro- posed)
Indonesia	58.1	34.8	33.1	32.2	42.2	27.3	47.5	42.7
Malaysia	17.1	8.0	7.3	10.3	10.5	4.6	10.9	11.0
Philippines	37.3	31.7	75.5	75.6	51.1	101.4	101.3	182.0
Thailand	38.6	32.1	37.4	54.6	80.7	101.7	106.2	110.4
Singapore	-	-	-	-	0.048	.050	.050	.050

Source: Foreign Assistance and Related Programs: Appropriations Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives 1982-84 Washington, D.C.

ENDNOTES

1. Submission, (Foreign Affairs), p. S64.
2. Far Eastern Economic Review, 16 August 1984.
3. Sydney Morning Herald, 14 October, 1983.
4. Huxley Tim, 'Recent Military Developments in Southeast Asia: Their Implications for Australia's Security', Basic Paper No. 2 1983, Legislative Research Service, Canberra, 1983, pp. 19-21. See also Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 October 1983, pp. 48-50.
5. Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 October 1983, p. 50.
6. Far Eastern Economic Review, 24 October 1983, p. 5.
7. Huxley, op.cit, p. 21.
8. United States Department of State Bulletin, 1983, p. 42.
9. Pacific Defence Reporter, September 1983, p. 27.