

The Existence of Anarchic State of Affairs and the Significance of Military Capability : The Southeast Asian Region Context

Abstract

There have been controversies over the effectiveness and the relevance of regular armed forces against non-conventional warfare. A number of military experts remain dubious about the spectrum of conventional military activities under the rubric of low-intensity conflicts. One of the most important ones is Martin van Creveld. According to van Creveld, a trinitarian model for the analysis of war advocated by a great military genius Carl von Clausewitz, comprising of character of war – the people, the army and the government is no longer valid. None-

theless, this article has offered a different point of view in anticipating the future of regular armed forces – specifically in the Southeast Asian region. Despite the fact that there have been an increasing numbers of unconventional conflicts over the past decades, we must not assume that traditional threats will eventually wither away. The anarchic setting in Southeast Asia still remains unaffected. In consequence, it is essential for each nation to continue its conventional military strength in order to maintain an appropriate level of its bargaining power in the region.

Introduction

Several scholars now have come to recognise the restrictions of Clausewitz's¹ fundamental assumption of the primacy of the state, and the central role-played by the armed forces in unconventional warfare and the fact that technologically sophisticated armies are not always effectively against primitive, unsophisticated irregular forces. In addition, there has been a considerable debate surrounding the utility and application of conventional military response to these unconventional threats. A number of Western military experts remain dubious of the spectrum of conventional military activities under the

rubric of irregular conflicts. A military specialist such as Richard Simpkin has also expressed his concern over the ability of organised forces to overcome unconventional opponents.²

Nonetheless, the latest, and perhaps, the most expressive in a long line of those who doubt the adequacy, even relevance of military armed forces against unconventional warfare is Martin van Creveld, a well-regarded military historian. In 1991, van Creveld published a book *The Transformation of War*, which gives a radical review of this topic. In his volume, van Creveld even predicts that the spread of sporadic small-scale war would cause

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, the son of a retired army officer, was born in Burg, Germany in 1780. He was commissioned in the Prussian army in 1793. He attended military school in Berlin from 1801-1804, and then joined the general staff in 1804, serving under General Scharnhorst. He assisted Scharnhorst in the reorganisation of the Prussian army following the defeat by Napoleon in 1806. In 1812, he served with the Russian army that defeated Napoleon, and in 1815 he was a senior officer in the Waterloo campaign. In 1818 he was appointed director of the War College in Berlin, where he began writing his major work, *On War (Vom Kriege)*. He died while serving the Prussian army during the Polish revolution of 1830-31. According to Michael Howard on his book, titled *Clausewitz*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1983, p. 16), *On War* is based on two key concepts: war is waged by the state; and war is nothing but the continuation of policy by other means. States waged war against one another. Put simply, only states that are allowed to wage war. For that reason, it was the great Napoleonic campaigns, which formed Clausewitz's career and dominated his thoughts - he saw war as a trinitarian model comprising state, people and army. Additionally, Clausewitz strongly believed that the directing policy of government, the professional qualities of the army, and the attitude of the population all take part in an equally significant element.

² Richard Simpkin, *Race of Swift*, Brassey's Defence Publisher, London, 1985, p. 284.

regular armed forces to transform, shrink size, and fade away.³

There have also been many studies of military in a new security environment, focusing on its shifting role from responding to traditional state versus state military challenges to include constabulary missions, which involve countering non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, illegal immigration, piracy and the like. Smith and Berlin, for example, argue that military forces are likely to be drawn into police missions based on hierarchy relevance; for example, issues such as money laundering.⁴

Despite the fact that regular armed forces may find themselves difficult among such non-traditional environment of conflict, I argue that it is quite impossible (even ridiculous) for armed forces to wither away and be replaced by constabulary force. I contend that the emergence

of non-trinitarian warfare has left anarchic setting of international politics *untouched*. As there has been an increasing numbers of an unconventional conflict since the past decades, it does not mean that traditional enemy no longer exists. Put simply, it seems too impossible for states to completely neglect their conventional arms build ups and entirely devote for peace. Such an ideal scenario could happen in Utopia but not reality. According to Kenneth Waltz, the state among states conducts its affairs in the threatening shadow of violence, and because some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so.⁵

Thomas Schelling suggests an interesting view by stating that the occurrence of violence does not always “bespeak a shrewd purpose, the absence of pain and destruction is no sign that violence was idle”.⁶ Violence, as Schelling puts

³ In 1991, the well-regarded military historian Martin van Creveld published a book *The Transformation of War*, which gives a radical survey of this topic. He proposes a non-trinitarian model for the analysis of war and argues that Clausewitz’s model of the trinitarian character of war - the people, the army and the government is no longer valid. Van Creveld sees much lacking in the comfortable assumptions underlying the trinitarian approach to strategy. Accordingly, he proposes a more broad-spectrum approach to understanding the nature of warfare. The approach centres around five key issues, which attempt to describe the critical factors inherent in war. The issues are meant to define the nature of the conflict in terms of the principles involved. The aim is to define war, as did Clausewitz, in non-prescriptive terms.

⁴ P.J. Smith and D. Berlin, *Transnational Security Threats in Asia: Conference Report*, Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies (APCSS), Honolulu, 2000, a Digital Edition via Internet at <http://www.apcss.org> (accessed 20 November 2002).

⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Anarchic Orders and Balance of Power”, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison- Wesley Publishing Company, California, 1979, p. 102.

⁶ Thomas Schelling, “The Diplomacy of Violence”, in Robert J. Art and Kenneth Waltz, *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, 3rd edition, University Press of America, Lanham/New York/London, 1988, p. 9.

it, is most purposive and most successful when it is threatened and not used; successful threats are those that do not have to be carried out.⁷ I believe, (as Schelling does), that a credible military power is relevant to a state's diplomacy effectiveness. As forces do not always be physically used but gives meaning to the posturing of diplomacy, the stronger a state, the less likely it will have to use military power physically. To this end, the efficacy of military power should not be confused with the will to use it.

The Southeast Asian Perspective

It is my argument that while non-trinitarian form of warfare has brought some significant changes to the notion of war, it has not yet transformed the anarchic environment of state action in the Asian/ASEAN region. I argue that because unconventional warfare has left anarchy untouched, military power remains essential to Southeast Asian states' foreign policy. International political systems, as Waltz contends, are thought of "being more or less anarchic".⁸ As well, inter-

national politics is anarchic because there is no central authority above the level of the state clothed with the *power* and *authority* to resolve disputes that inevitably rise among them.⁹ For his part, Barry Buzan notes that states are not restrained by any higher power of authority in their behaviour toward each other, thus, insecurity is a problem for all states, and war is an ever-present possibility.¹⁰

There are three themes indicate the "anarchic state of affairs" in the ASEAN region. First, *there is no credible multilateral mechanism in place to manage peace and security problems in the Asian/ASEAN region*. There is a popular notion among academics, politicians, and security practitioners that the 21st century is the Asia Pacific century. This notion is based on the economic dynamism the Asian region experienced during the 90s and on the various security issues and challenges facing the region at the turn of the century. Optimists may point to positive developments of Asian regionalism such as the international political settlement of the Cambodia conflict, the end of the ideological polarisation and enmity

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁹ See Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, 30 January 1978, 167-215.

¹⁰ Barry Buzan, "People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in the Third World", in Edward E. Azar and Chung-in Momm, eds., *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Hants, 1988, p. 27.

between ASEAN states and the collapse of communist insurgencies in the region.¹¹ Scholars such as Joseph Camilleri argues that ASEAN gradually assumed a pivotal role in regional-institution building, and would over time develop a comprehensive security framework.¹² Wenrong Qian even argues Samuel Huntington's article "The Clash of Civilisation", that APEC development have proved that economic regionalism can succeed even if the grouping is composed of different civilisations.¹³

This article is not intended, however, to conclude that ASEAN and other multilateral organisations connected to ASEAN are not going to provide any positive development toward regional security. This would be too overwhelming and much beyond the interest and scope of this thesis's interest. Instead, my argument is that the inability of those institutions to muster sufficient threat of force and to deter aggression is of paramount importance to my argument, which doubts

the viability of these institutions as guarantors of regional security and stability.

Nicola Baker and Leonard Sebastian's observation on the problem with security in the ASEAN is instructive.¹⁴ Formal security arrangements and structures, as they noted, were not considerable realistic or desirable by ASEAN for three reasons: they lacked the defence capacity for any form of collective security, their relations were complicated by unresolved territorial disputes, and they had quite different external threat perceptions.¹⁵ Moreover, the very few of ASEAN defence capabilities, as Baker and Sebastian added, have reached the point where adequate forces could be committed to, and sustain in, any form of collective action beyond the occasionally military exercises.¹⁶

This view was shared with J.N. Mak and B.A. Hamzah as they noted that with no common political aim or defence objectives, "the old-intra ASEAN rivalries are beginning to resurface".¹⁷ Notwith-

¹¹ See Muthiah Alagappa, "The Dynamics of International Security in Southeast Asia: Change and Continuity", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 45/1, May 1991, pp. 1-37.

¹² Joseph Camilleri, "Regionalism and Globalism in Asia Pacific", in Majid Tehranian, *ASEAN Peace: Security and Governance in the Asia Pacific Region*, I.B. Tauris Publishers, London/New York, 1999, p. 57.

¹³ Wenrong Qian, "APEC – A New Model for Regional Economic Cooperation", in Majid Tehranian, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁴ Nicolai Baker and Leonard Sebastian, "The Problem with Parachuting: Strategic Studies and Security in the Asia Pacific Region", in Desmond Ball, ed., *The Transformation of Security in the Asia Pacific Region*, Frank Cass, London, 1996, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ J.N. Mak and B.A. Hamzah, "The Maritime Dimension of ASEAN", in Ball eds, op. cit., p. 138.

standing the primacy of economic growth and development objectives in each of the ASEAN states, as they further argued, economic cooperation is not expected to be “smooth sailing”.¹⁸ In Mak and Hamzah’s point of view, most of ASEAN states tend to be “economic competitors” rather than “partners” at this stage of development.¹⁹

Although ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is regarded as “the only genuine inclusive regional cooperation”, in the Asian region²⁰, I argue that it is partial accurate. It is because the ARF seeks to address security issues and disputes through consultation and dialogues rather than through collective security arrangements. According to Michael Leifer, the ARF is neither a negotiation process nor a collective security organisation.²¹ Since the ARF objective is to improve the climate in which regional relations take place in an effort to manage bilateral and multilateral problems, as Leifer puts it, the ARF has never been an institution for genuine dispute settlement in the complex Asia Pacific

strategic environment.²² Additionally, as Leifer further argues, the ARF has been concerned primarily with confidence building as a way of promoting a stable regional order rather than engaging directly to dispute settlement; the expression of preventive diplomacy advocated by members showed that ARF would rather engage in the “elaboration of approaches to conflict”, which is opposed to developing mechanisms for conflict resolutions.²³

For their parts, Christopher McNally and Charles Morrison note that the capabilities and the future of Asia Pacific multilateral institutions, specifically the APEC forum and the ARF seemed to be “overestimated”.²⁴ The 1997-98 economic crises and the 1999 East Timor crisis, as they argued, provided the “stark demonstration of the limits of APEC and ARF in each situation”.²⁵ These failures, thus, fit Samuel Huntington argument in his *The Clash of Civilisation* that “economic regionalism may succeed only when it is rooted in a common civilisation”.²⁶

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rommel Banlaoi, “The ASEAN Regional Forum and Security Community Building in the Asia Pacific: Lessons from Europe?” in *the NDCP Occasional Paper*, vol. 2, no. 11, November 1999.

²¹ Michael Leifer, “Truth about the Balance of Power”, *Structure*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 1996, pp. 115-136.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Christopher A. McNally and Charles E. Morrison, *Asia Pacific Security Outlook 2001*, ASEAN Institute for Strategic Studies and International Studies, Tokyo/New York, 2001, p. 12.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Qian, op. cit.

In other words, these multilateral mechanisms are merely organisations which try “to maintain themselves as organisations”, but not “get something done”, as Kenneth Waltz wrote:

Organisations have at least two aims: to get something done and to maintain themselves as organisations. Many of their activities are directed toward the second purpose. The leaders of organisations, and political leaders preeminently, are not masters of the matter their organizations deal with. They have become leaders not by being experts on one thing or another but by excelling organisation arts – in maintaining control of a group’s members, in eliciting predictable and satisfaction efforts from them, in holding a groups together.²⁷

Second is *maritime insecurity in the South China Sea*. For Thailand, maritime and coastal industries are vital to the economic stability for the country because, in addition to being a source for energy, industries and fisheries, the sea is a major line of communications for the shipment

of imports and exports. Thailand has territorial sea on two coasts, namely the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. Consequently, it is important for Thailand to closely patrol and control the seas in order to protect maritime interests, maritime industrial sites and lines of communications.

Although Thailand is not one of the ASEAN claimants in the Spratlys²⁸, it is possible that any conflict, which may arise at any time among the claimants, could threaten Thai shipping lanes. During the last 30 years, six countries have laid claim to all or part of the Spratlys: Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. Their competing claims encompass political, economic, and strategic concerns. Among these claimants, however, China is the key player in the dispute and the most bellicose in its rhetoric and actions. Given the nature and complexity of the various legal claims to the islands, no purely legal process is likely to be sufficient to achieve the settlement, notwithstanding the establishment and acceptance of international legal precedents, such as those contained in the UN Conventional Law and Sea.

²⁷Waltz, op. cit., p. 103.

²⁸For more details on disputes over Spratlys, see, for example, Dan J. Dzurek, *The Spratly Islands Dispute: “Who’s on First?” Maritime Briefing 2*; 1 (Durham: U.K.: International Boundaries Research Unit (IBRU), University of Durham, 1966); Rigoberto Tiglao, “Seaside Boom”, *Far Eastern Economic Review* (July 8, 1999), p. 14, and John C. Baker and David G. Wienck, eds., *Cooperative Monitoring in the South China Sea*, (Westport, Connecticut London: Praeger, 2002), pp. 193-194.

Anthony Bergin, a notorious expert on the Law of the Sea has identified five areas in which government must establish control in a country's maritime regions: the management of maritime resources; the maintenance of territorial integrity; the protection and preservation of marine environment; the prevention of illegal activities; and the safety of life at sea.²⁹ In order to achieve this control, as Bergin notes, the state must be capable of three basic tasks: surveillance; monitoring, and enforcement.³⁰

Maritime surveillance, monitoring and enforcement refer to the systematic observation and monitoring of an area in order to detect and deter violations of specific rules. In order to demonstrate a nation's resolve and capability to exercise control over its sovereign territory, as Bergin argues, there must be a real expectation by perpetrators that the breaking of the rules within the nation's maritime domain will be discovered and punished.³¹

My argument is that to create such an expectation requires a surveillance system

that is perceived as being capable for both detecting and apprehending offenders on a regular basis. If these tasks are not carried out effectively, there will be a serious loss to national economy, with impact felt on trade, fisheries, loss of life and etc. I would conclude that the cost penalty for not having this level of deterrence is difficult to quantify.

The last one concerns *the consistent defence build-up that is taking place among Southeast Asian states*, where interactive factors such as existing territorial disputes and bilateral tensions take part in. Whereas the post-Cold War Southeast Asia are engaged with the number of unresolved intra-state issues, such as bilateral tensions and protracted border conflicts, there has been very clear evidence that all countries in the region have engaged in force modernisation programmes to varying degrees.³² Almost all of the ASEAN states; namely Burma, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are also in the process of introducing their new arms procurements. According to Buzan, Military remains a useful instrument of state policy for most

²⁹ Edgar L. Abogado and Reynaldo Yoma, "Development of a Philippine Maritime Surveillance Capability", *Issues Regional Maritime Strategy: Papers in Australia Maritime Affairs*, no. 5, Department of Defence, Canberra, October 1998, p. 30.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Tim Huxley and Susan Willett, *Arming East Asia*, Adelphi Paper, International Institute of Strategic Studies, London, 1999.

Third World government.³³ In practice, as previously examined, neither ASEAN nor ARF provide much restraint on the intra-regional conflicts, and bilateral tensions.

Clearly, potential for conflict between ASEAN states over territorial disputes, border conflict and alleged support for domestic rebellion are evident within the Southeast Asian region. Albeit it is less likely that these conflicts would lead to an armed conflict, military build-ups are essential as security guarantees to maintain a relationship of equality. Military build-ups, in other words, should be viewed as a support of bargaining power, or guarantor of uncertainty, which may arise from interactive factors within the region. According to Colin Gray, fairly autonomous arms increase, undertaken for a variety of reasons, might be matched by a fairly disinterested party solely as a precautionary move, and thus spark off a cycle of close or intermittent armament interactions.³⁴ Ultimately, while countries in the Southeast Asian region currently enjoy friendly relations with their neighbours, they cannot afford to be complacent: they need to maintain their military preparedness to enhance their bargaining powers.

Conclusion

Three factors presented above indicate that the very existence of Southeast Asian states, in their territorial-political aspects is still often dependent on the military forces as a “muscle that gives meaning to the posturing diplomats”. Although one must accept that this generalisation has exception, such as in the case of the Middle East states and Japan, I contend that military forces will always attractive in those states, as their circumstances permit. Accordingly, I disagree with a number of theorists who argue that the increasing economic interdependence of the region and the world would reduce the role of military power. In a foreseeable future, we can expect a continuing and vital role of defence forces. Put simply, as long as the security environment in the region remains anarchic (it will always be), military power will continue to be employed. Reliable armed forces and advanced weapons, in other words, act as the bargaining power for every nation, including Thailand to deal with others in the international politics.

³³Buzan, op. cit., p. 33.

³⁴Colin Gray, “The Arms Race Phenomenon”, *World Politics*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1972, p. 41.