Section 5. Southeast Asia

1. General Situation

Southeast Asian countries have made efforts for political stability and steady economic growth while deepening interdependent relationships with countries both inside and outside the region. The region is encompassed by the Straits of Malacca, the South China Sea, and the waters around Indonesia and the Philippines, thus occupying a key position for traffic by linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans. However, this region still has destabilizing factors, including the territorial dispute over the Spratly Islands, ethnic minority issues, separatist and independence movements, and Islamic extremist groups. Moreover, there are incidents such as piracy by which the safe passage of ships is obstructed. In response to these situations, the countries in the region are working to build sufficient military forces not only for traditional national defense but also to address the new security issues such as anti-terrorism and piracy. In recent years, against the backdrop of economic development, they have been modernizing their military forces, through the introduction of new warships and other measures to build naval capability and the introduction of new fighters. (See Fig. I-2-5-1)

2. Relations with the United States

Many Southeast Asian countries have been developing cooperative security relationships with the United States. Singapore supports the United States’ presence in the Asia-Pacific. The two countries signed a memorandum of understanding in 1990 permitting the United States to use military facilities in Singapore. This allows U.S. forces to
promptly respond to an emergency in the Middle East and Africa. The United States ranks Singapore as a Major Security Cooperation Partner. In July 2005, the two countries signed the Strategic Framework Agreement between the United States of America and the Republic of Singapore for a Closer Cooperation Partnership in Defense and Security to further strengthen cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism, prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, defense technology, joint military exercises and training, and policy dialogues.

The Philippines and the United States maintain a long-lasting cohesive military cooperation. They resumed the large-scale joint military exercise, Balikatan in 2000 and have since conducted the exercise on an annual basis. At Balikatan 08, held from February to March 2008, the two nations conducted command post exercises and civic assistance activities in Mindanao and other areas. The Philippines and United States have also conducted other joint exercises, including Balance Piston and Talon Vision.

Thailand and the United States started joint military exercise Cobra Gold in 1982, and the exercise has been multinational since 2000. In response to the military coup in Thailand in September 2006, the United States announced the suspension of military aid of about $29 million in total to Thailand. However, the military exercise Cobra Gold 07 in 2007 was held as usual. The suspension of military aid was lifted in light of the December 2007 general election. At the joint exercises in May 2008, besides command post exercises, non-combat missions such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance were held.

In 2003, the United States granted Major Non-NATO Ally status to the Philippines and Thailand, since the United States recognized their proactive participation in the U.S.-led War on Terror.

In February 2005, the United States expressed its intent to resume the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program for Indonesia, which had been suspended since 1992. Subsequently, in November 2005, the United States decided to resume weapon sales to Indonesia. In addition, on his February 2008 visit to Indonesia, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates held dialogue with President Yudhoyono and Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono, where they agreed to strengthen military cooperation and counter piracy and terrorism.

Regarding relations with Viet Nam, in June 2005 then Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai visited the United States. On his visit the two countries concluded an IMET agreement and major developments were seen regarding military cooperation. In June 2006, then U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited Viet Nam where he held dialogue with then Vietnamese Defense Minister Pham Van Tra, and agreement was reached to expand military exchanges between the two countries. Many U.S. defense-related personnel, including the Defense Secretary and Commander of U.S. Pacific Command, visited Viet Nam between 2006 and 2007, and in April 2007, the United States partially lifted its arms embargo on Viet Nam.

In this way, the United States is developing relationships of confidence with the Southeast Asian countries and working to strengthen the readiness of them through numerous joint military exercises such as the multilateral military exercise Cobra Gold and the bilateral sea exercise CARAT, provision of military technology, and military assistance.

3. Relations with China

There are currently territorial disputes between Southeast Asian countries and China over the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands. At the ASEAN-China Summit Meeting held in November 2002, ASEAN member countries and China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, which aims
for a peaceful settlement of the territorial issue. However, no major development has been seen in the drafting of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, which would provide more concrete behavior and possess legal binding force. Moreover, it is said that China conducted military exercises in the Paracel Islands in November 2007 and, in December 2007, the Chinese Government approved the establishment of “Sansha City,” which includes the Spratly Islands. In opposition to these actions, there have been public-level demonstrations in Viet Nam.

In recent years, China has actively pushed the related countries to give priority to the development of resources in the waters surrounding the Spratly Islands, setting aside the territorial issue. For example, in September 2004, China and the Philippines agreed on a joint oil field exploration in the waters of the Spratly Islands, and in March 2005, China, the Philippines, and Viet Nam reached an agreement on the launch of a joint exploration of oil and natural gas in the South China Sea. Furthermore, the establishment of a joint working group on resource development in the South China Sea between ASEAN and China was approved by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in July 2005.

In recent years, China has been making efforts to develop cooperative relations with Southeast Asian countries by such means as visits by government officials via bilateral and multilateral frameworks.

In the defense sector as well, senior military officials have made visits between China and Southeast Asian countries, and a joint patrol was launched in the Gulf of Tonkin with Vietnamese and Chinese Naval vessels in April 2006 as a unit-level exchange and cooperation. In July 2007, the special forces of China and Thailand came together to conduct Strike-2007, a joint counterterrorism military exercise. In addition, in November 2007, China donated patrol ships to Cambodia as a means for assistance. At the China-ASEAN Summit Meeting in November 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao expressed China was prepared to strengthen cooperation with ASEAN countries in the sector of unconventional security, and it was ready to provide funds for such uses as marine surveying training on the Straits of Malacca.

4. Regional Issues and Cooperation
Southeast Asian nations utilize ASEAN as a multilateral security framework for the region. In addition to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), a dialogue forum on the political and security sectors in the Asia-Pacific region launched in 1994, the first ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting was held in May 2006, and the second installment of the said meeting was held in November 2007. Furthermore, at the 13th ASEAN Summit in November 2007, the ASEAN Charter was adopted that contains the basic principles for establishing ASEAN community by 2015.

The direction of an organizational reform was the subject for attention since effective measures have yet to be taken against Myanmar, as ASEAN takes a consensus method and the noninterference principle. However, the ASEAN Charter bases itself on the traditional condition of unanimous approval by all member countries and, in the event unanimous approval is not attained, the way of decision shall be made at the summit meeting. The Charter states that if there is a serious breach of the Charter or non-compliance, the matter will be referred to the ASEAN summit for decision and also includes the establishment of a human rights body, strengthening the functions of ASEAN.

In the Southeast Asian region, multilateral cooperation is being promoted in order to deal with transnational issues such as terrorism and piracy. ASEAN countries have continuously discussed the issue of terrorism at various ASEAN meetings, and at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting in July 2006, the ministers adopted the ARF Statement on Cooperation in Fighting Cyber Attack and Terrorist Misuse of Cyber Space.

In July 2004, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore started the Trilateral Coordinated Patrols for vigilance against pirates in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. In this effort, the naval forces of the three countries patrol their own territories in cooperation with each other. Subsequently, in September 2005, the countries launched their joint coastline airborne patrols codenamed Eyes in the Sky. Since 2004, Malaysia, Singapore, the United
Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand have conducted joint exercises including maritime interdiction training within the framework of the Five Powers Defense Arrangements (FPDA). In addition, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP\textsuperscript{132}), which was proposed and promoted by Japan, entered into force in September 2006 and the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre was established in November 2006 in Singapore based on the agreement\textsuperscript{131}.

Since August 2007, there have been frequent large-scale anti-government demonstrations in various areas of Myanmar predominantly by monks. The Myanmar government deployed its military to repress the demonstrations. These governmental efforts injured and killed a large number of people. Furthermore, the cyclone in May 2008 victimized and caused extensive damage, including house destruction and severing of transportation systems and lifelines. In response to this disaster, many countries offered to dispatch rescue personnel, but the Myanmar government refused them except those from Thailand, India, China, and Bangladesh. Nonetheless, later on, having been approached by ASEAN and the U.N., the Myanmar government agreed to accept rescue personnel of humanitarian support objectives. In addition, soon after the disaster, the Myanmar government administered a national referendum regarding a new constitution whose content includes maintaining military authority, as was initially planned.

Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, and Malaysia dispatched international security forces to East Timor in April 2006 in response to a worsening security situation, and in August 2006, the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) was established\textsuperscript{134}. Beginning in April 2007, there was a presidential election and a parliamentary election, and these elections concluded without any major disturbances as security measures were reinforced by international security forces. However, in February 2008, President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Guzmao were assaulted by an armed group. In response to this, a state of emergency was declared in the country\textsuperscript{135} and the U.N. extended the mandate of UNMIT until February 26, 2009\textsuperscript{136}. It is reported that there has not been any major turmoil following the shooting incident; however, the security situation remains unstable and the country’s process for stability in the future will gather attention.

5. Military Modernization in the Region

In recent years, Southeast Asian countries are modernizing their militaries against a backdrop of economic development and other factors. In regards to air forces, in 2004, Viet Nam imported Russian Su-30 fighters and Indonesia imported Russian Su-27 and Su-30 fighters. Indonesia plans to purchase U.S. F-16 fighters as well. In 2005, Singapore concluded a contract with the United States to purchase U.S. F-15 fighters. In 2007, Singapore concluded a contract to purchase additional F-15s, Malaysia imported Su-30 fighters, and Thailand decided to import Swedish JAS-39 fighters.

In regards to naval forces, Malaysia, which had not previously possessed submarines, concluded a contract in 2002 to purchase Scorpène-class submarines, which were jointly developed by France and Spain. Furthermore, in 2005, Singapore signed contracts to purchase Swedish Vastergotland-class submarines. In 2007, Singapore commissioned a French Formidable-class frigate, and also plans to commission a total of six of these, including those produced domestically, by 2009. In 2007, Indonesia commissioned two Sigma-class Corvettes, and plans to commission a total of four by 2009. Moreover, in September 2007, Indonesia and Russia agreed to strengthen military technology and defense cooperation. The two nations signed a statement of mutual agreement concerning the procurement of Russian weapons on the scale of $1 billion through government loans, and this agreement is reported to include weapons such as two Kilo-class submarines.

Some point out that the military modernization of these countries can be attributed to economic growth following the Asian currency crisis, and continued tensions in this region. Although the military modernization does not yet amount to an arms race, in some cases, it can be observed that some Southeast Asian countries watch their neighbors’ defense programs and react to them\textsuperscript{137}. 

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