ONE
Introduction

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This book focuses on civil-military relations in South and Southeast Asia. In these sub-regions, the institutionalization of civilian-control over the armed forces has in many countries remained a crucial issue. This owes to the fact that weak civilian control has generally coincided with democratic frailty. The result has been a preponderance of power by the military over civilian governments, a condition which has eroded political rights and civil liberties. While civilian governments in some countries in South (i.e., India, Sri Lanka) and Southeast Asia (for example Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei) have, in some respects, managed to keep their militaries at bay, others appear to be falling prey to the armed forces’ hegemony in the political realm.¹

The past three decades have seen a global trend of democratic transition going hand in hand with the decline of military regimes and open military intervention. In 1979, fourteen military regimes held power in sub-Saharan Africa, nine in Latin America, five in the Arab states and North Africa, three in Southeast Asia, two in South Asia, and one in East Asia. Since then, democracy replaced all of the military or „quasi-civilian” regimes² in Latin America. In the Middle and Near East, military rule has almost universally transformed into civilian strongman rule. In Asia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand and Pakistan have moved from military domination to democracy or mixed patterns of civilian-military

² Quasi-civilian regimes are military regimes with a civilian window-dressing (civil president, constitution, semi-competitive elections) but which are military in substance in the sense that the military holds political hegemony. Typically, a former general serves as head of state and head of government, see Samuel E. Finer, The Man on Horseback. The Role of the Military in Politics, London, 1962.
authority. At the moment of writing this chapter, there is only one country in Asia in which the military openly rules by force, Burma/Myanmar.

In spite of this development, asserting civilian control of the armed forces remains high on the political agenda in many emerging democracies. South and Southeast Asia have been no exception. In most of these countries, the military used to be a key player, ruling through authoritarian regimes. Even today in 2010, after two decades of democratic development in East Asia, civilian control is still not an uncontested norm in the region. The only exception is Myanmar, where soldiers have controlled politics since 1962, though an opportunity for democratization did appear to open briefly in 1990.

These democratic changes have inspired an entirely new generation of comparative analyses of democratic change in the region. In recent years, various comparative studies have been published which deal with institutions of democratic governance, their internal processes, and their impact on the consolidation of new democracies in the region. Additionally, there are several works which analyze relevant political decision-making institutions and organizations.

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However, the research on Asian politics in the age of democratic transition still exhibits considerable shortcomings. This is especially the case when it comes to the question of whether democratic change in the region is being accompanied by a new political role for the military. While there have been some outstanding works on the military in Asian politics, there has been very little research on the subject in the past decade. Furthermore, most of this research is confined to single country studies. There has only been very limited, systematic, in-depth research of the relationships of politics and the military in multiple cases. For many reasons, this is startling. First, there are strong theoretical and empirical arguments in favor of the thesis that civilian control over the military is a *sine qua non* for democracy and the consolidation of democracy. As argued in one of the chapters of this book, without civilian control, liberal democracy is impossible. Democratic constitutions tend to be worth little more than the paper on which they are written if the political process is under military control. Civilian authorities might be legitimized by popular elections to rule; however, they lack the effective power to govern if soldiers do not follow their command. Second, the so-called “third wave” of democratization since 1974 has witnessed the replacement of authoritarian regimes by democratically elected governments at an astounding rate, including in Asia. For example, in South Asia, military rulers had to agree to share their power with democratically elected civilians in Pakistan in 1987-88, and in Bangladesh in 1990/1. Southeast Asia’s recent wave of democratization began with the demise of the personal dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986. Thailand (1988, 1992), Cambodia (1993), Indonesia

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(1999) and East Timor (2002) followed in successive order. Another transition to democracy even briefly seemed to be occurring in Myanmar in 1990—though it failed.

Despite these regional democratic trends, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh continue to be beset by unstable parliamentary institutions, weak rule of law, inchoate systems of political representation, chronic corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a lack of social justice. Meanwhile, the wave of democratization and people-power that swept through Southeast and South Asia in the 1980s and 1990s has had little effect on the military government of Myanmar. In addition, Cambodia’s nascent democracy eroded into a new kind of electoral authoritarianism under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen in the late 1990s. Furthermore, East Timor, Asia’s youngest nation and one of the United Nations’ prestigious showcases of post-conflict state building and democratization, continues to stand in a condition of severe state fragility. Moreover, the 1999 military takeover in Pakistan, the 2006 coup in Thailand, the military interventions in Bangladesh in 2006-8, and multiple military mutinies in the Philippines indicate that democracy in many Asian countries is under deep strain from military interventionism and adventurism.

Even though a major part of democratization efforts has involved removing militaries from the political arena and subordinating them under civilian control, such efforts have encountered a multiplicity of obstacles in most countries. Apart from Myanmar which today offers a case of failed transition to democracy in the face of massive military control over political space, in the emerging democracies of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, and especially Pakistan, the military has shown itself more or less resilient in

7 See Duncan McCargo, Cambodia: Getting away with authoritarianism”, *Journal of Democracy* 16 (2005), 98-112.
guarding its prerogatives in the post-authoritarian era. This seriously impedes the democratically elected authorities’ effective power to govern in these countries and has facilitated democratic deterioration in virtually all of the countries analyzed herein.

Such military resilience owes to the fact that its disengagement from political and economic governance was only partial at best. Indeed, ambiguous institutional development has attenuated the tentative nature of civilian supremacy. As such, emerging democracies in South and Southeast Asia have been plagued by continuing instances of military assertion and a lack of civilian control, though Indonesia appears to be in better shape than the other cases. Given the deep entrenchment of the militaries in the respective political systems, the manifold problems of consolidation of democracy in general, and the persistence of internal conflict, civilians lack sufficient tools for confronting the military and can hardly be expected to diminish military decision-making power in the political arena. The principal problem for emerging democracies in South and Southeast Asia is how to challenge resilient militaries which threaten to set their countries on a course for democratic demise.

Ultimately, this monograph represents the culmination of a workshop/public forum sponsored by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) under Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, held on September 1, 2009. Each country-case chapter has, however, been updated to account for more recent events. In addition, the cases of Pakistan and Bangladesh have been included to provide a larger picture of civil-military relations across two sub-regions of Asia.

The contributions in this volume thus aim to situate civil-military relations in six countries of South and Southeast Asia, within the context of continuing democratic stress. Each case presents a different contemporary reality with regard to the balance of power between civilian governments and the armed forces. Thailand today is experiencing a military resurgence. On the other hand, in Indonesia and Bangladesh, the military seems to
be at bay. In the Philippines and Pakistan, the military continues to challenge civilian control. In Myanmar, the military monopolizes power. All six cases illustrate different degrees of challenges to democratic control over the military. The authors in this volume investigate what accounts for these situations, how they reflect the state of democracy in different countries of South and Southeast Asia and the implications of military challenges to civilian control for democracy in the future.

Two concepts are particularly crucial for this volume: democracy and civil-military relations. The most influential definition of democracy in comparative politics is provided by Robert Dahl. Dahl makes ‘open contestation’ and ‘public competition’ the centre of his conception of Polyarchy, which includes eight procedural and institutional minimal: 1. Freedom of association, 2. Freedom of opinion, 3. Right to vote, 4. Right to be appointed to public office, 5. Right of political elites to compete for votes and support, 6. Existence of alternative, pluralistic source of information, 7. free and fair elections, 8. institutions, whose policy depends on elections and other expressions of the citizens’ preferences. More recently, a growing number of scholars have used an even broader and expanded conception of democracy under the banner of liberal democracy. These more substantial conceptions of democracy also require provisions for horizontal accountability (checks and balances), the rule of law, and the absence of reserved domains for the military. Meanwhile, civil-military relations are defined herein as refers to those interactions between the military and civilian actors that in some way relate to the power to make political decisions. In other words, civil-

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10 Ibid.
military relations are a continuum of distribution of decision making power between the civilians and the military. Civilian control, then, marks one pole of the continuum of decision making power, a situation in which “civilians make all the rules and can change them at any time” On the other pole of the continuum is the military regime, in which military officers make all the rules and can change them at any time.

This monograph is structured into conceptual and empirical sections. In the first section, Chapter 2 proposes a new approach to the understanding of civil-military relations in young democracies. Meanwhile, in the second section, Chapters 3-8 present empirically-based examinations of the specific interactions between soldiers and civilian governments in six countries of South and Southeast Asia.

In Chapter 2, Aurel Croissant and David Kuehn, highlighting the need for a universally-accepted definition, conceptualize civilian control as “a set of decision-making areas” and emphasize the need to view civil-military relations as a scale of “political decision-making power” which offsets civilian governments from the armed forces. The authors stress that civilian control is a sine qua non requirement for the development and consolidation of liberal democracy. They further contend that the extent of civilian control in emerging democracies is dependent upon civilian elites’ skills and readiness in developing short or medium-term tactics for devising institutions that restrict the armed forces’ political activities. The authors then delineate several strategies and contexts in the institutionalization of civilian control over the military. They conclude that an understanding of civilian control must transcend an over-concentration on military coups, adding that though there is no single

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path to civilian control, the consolidation of democracy necessitates the purging of armed forces’ prerogatives from political decision-making.

In Chapter 3, Paul Chambers borrows from the approach introduced in Chapter 2 to describe the current state of civil-military relations in Thailand. As such, he disaggregates civil-military relations into the five decision-making areas of Elite Recruitment, Public Policy, Internal Security, National Defense, and Military Organization. In three of these areas, the decision-making authority of soldiers vis-à-vis civilians is seen to have risen since the 2006 coup. He states that the period of 1979 to 2010 has witnessed the steady assertion of political control by one particular military faction. He adds that even following the end of direct military rule in late 2007, soldiers have continued to exercise great power. Indeed, 2009 has seen the military exert autonomy from civilian control. He concludes that the armed forces have located a politically-strategic “niche,” becoming an essential actor in Thai politics. At the same time, amidst growing military tutelage in politics, Thailand is increasingly veering toward democratic erosion.

In Chapter 4, Win Min argues that, given the nature of civil-military relations in Burma/Myanmar—where military control has long been entrenched—one must talk about military-civil relations rather than civil-military relations. He further contends that the upcoming 2010 general elections do not mean a diminution in armed forces’ supremacy over the country given that the military will remain largely independent from any elected government. Moreover, he adds, to ensure their continued rule, Myanmar’s top brass intend to maintain a preponderance of power by enfeebling civilian sources of power. He further states that the military leadership will attempt to dominate the country as long as possible, utilizing prerogatives granted in the 2008 constitution. He concludes that any political opening and move toward national reconciliation can only occur from within the armed forces if and only if a reformist senior officer ascends to the top of the military establishment.
Chapter 5, by Katherine Marie G. Hernandez and Herman Joseph S. Kraft, sheds light on the state of civil-military relations in the Philippines. They maintain that, as in other Southeast Asian nations, soldiers have influenced politics and society, but that multiple insurgencies have provided an excuse for a larger scope of armed forces involvement in Philippine politics. They continue that, given the general fragility of civilian governments, the military has exercised enormous influence in the domestic political arena, allowing it to become a crucial “veto actor” in competing with the country’s non-military elites. They add that the nature of the Philippine military precludes it from attempting to take power directly, instead opting for intervention in a more indirect and latent fashion. The authors find it unlikely that a reform-minded President will ever successfully consolidate civilian control. As such, they conclude, soldiers will maintain robust influence in Philippine politics “for some time to come.”

In Chapter 6, Rizal Sukma affirms that in Indonesia reforms in civil-military relations have been a top priority for political reform since the 1998 fall of General (ret.) Suharto. At that time, he continues, many believed that military interventions in politics were a thing of the past. He adds that even today, many insist that the chance of the armed forces returning to play a political role is “slim.” Yet though Sukma agrees that soldiers have mostly departed from the political arena, the degree to which civilian control over the military has been established “remains problematic.” Indeed, he adds, after ten years of military reforms, the armed forces still possess “a degree of autonomy” in relation to the civilian government. He concludes that, amidst resistance by the armed forces as well as incompetence and inaptitude by civilian governments, there still remains much to be done to bring the Indonesian military more fully under civilian control.

Chapters 7 and 8 shift attention to problems of civilian control in South Asia. In Chapter 7, Siegfried Wolf and Seth Kane employ the approach developed in Chapter 2 to analyze civil-military relations in Pakistan. They argue that Pakistan has evolved into a
classic “praetorian state” where the Army sees itself as the only true guardian of national sovereignty, political integrity, the principal initiator of any national agenda, the chief resolver of socio-political conflicts. They further contend that soldiers hold enormous sway over civilian governments in terms of political decision-making: elite recruitment, public policy, internal security, national defense, and military organization. The authors conclude that the military “will certainly maintain itself as the chief stakeholder in Pakistan’s political system. Furthermore, they stress that though the Army has in 2010 withdrawn from directly ruling the country, it will definitely resume its interest in the political process whenever it feels that its professional or corporate interests are becoming challenged.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Siegfried Wolf argues that in Bangladesh, the armed forces have on occasion managed to play a significant role in politics since independence in 1971, though their influence appears to be receding. He adds that a variety of military endogenous and exogenous factors have shaped the evolution of civil-military relations in Bangladesh. Yet he contends that though internal and external security needs have contributed to unity among soldiers, several factors have created a situation inhibiting the build-up of a substantial regular armed force. These have included factionalism in the military, an active civil society, and particularly-effective (though informal) civilian government strategies, all of which have proven successful in ensuring civilian control. Wolf concludes that, though the military will continue playing a major political role in Bangladeshi politics, it will increasingly be confronted by civilian governments that have successfully led Bangladesh for close to twenty years.

Ultimately, when comparing the chapters in terms of the prognosis for civilian control and democracy for each country case, two general trends can be discerned: long-term, measured in terms of decades, and short-term, meaning the exact current situation. Over the long-term, political space has tended to grow (or at least the façade of space in the case Myanmar) in each of the cases presented. Five countries can at least argue that they possess
the formal trappings of a democracy where voters can determine who governs them. Of these five, Thailand has transformed itself from absolute monarchy while Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Indonesia have progressed from being colonial possessions of European powers. This is not to say that limited rights to vote were possible in each of these countries’ previous regimes for certain citizens. Yet compared to today, such rights were negligible. Again, Myanmar arises as the bogeyman exception to the trend. Though top generals drew up a farcical (2008) constitution leading to general elections set for 2010, these appear to be more or less a veneer behind which leading generals can retain power. As such, an argument can be made that with regard to the long-term trend in Myanmar, political space grew after independence but that any civilian control which was achieved is today virtually sealed over.

Turning to civilian control over the military in the short term, the news is not good. The fact of the matter is that authoritarianism is on the rise in South and Southeast Asia. Military actors are playing an especially interventionist role in the politics of Myanmar—though the election which has been promised for 2010 may bring forth at the least some sham form of democracy. Yet soldiers are also politically active in Pakistan and, increasingly, in Thailand. Meanwhile, the armed forces have successfully applied pressure to civilian governments in Bangladesh and the Philippines. Finally, the apparent beacon of civilian control—Indonesia—is also experiencing growing, though more latent political influence by its military.

Ultimately, the countries examined in this volume, offering variations in degrees of civil-military relations, can be placed across a continuum (see figure 1 below). Indonesia offers a case where democracy has been shorter but more successful. As for Bangladesh, civilians dominate politics, with soldiers possessing a lesser albeit political role. Thailand exemplifies a country where the military is clearly resurgent. The Philippines represents a mid-range case where the state of civil-military relations remains tentative. In Pakistan, the
armed forces exert enormous power, though civilians at least possess formal power.

Myanmar, at the other end of the continuum from countries with robust civilian control such as Japan, presents an example of failed democratization where the military has succeeded in establishing thorough control over political space.

The placing of the six South and Southeast countries along the continuum in Figure 1 comes from information derived out of the chapters on the countries in this volume. As for Japan, it is placed on the continuum as an opposite example from the disproportionately high patterns military control existing in other countries of Asia (e.g. Myanmar). Indeed, the case of Japan exemplifies well-established (since World War II) constraints on the role of the armed forces in politics and society—a “restrictive approach to maintaining [civilian] control over the military.”

It must be emphasized, of course, that this continuum represents only a very crude “measurement” which aims to illustrate the approximate position of each of the four cases analyzed in this volume on the continuum and the distance between the cases instead of clear-cut differentiations and exact measurements.

**Figure 1: Continuum of Decision-making Control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myanmar</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Control</td>
<td>Military Control</td>
<td>Military Control</td>
<td>Military Control</td>
<td>Civilian Control</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1 below meanwhile offers an approximation of the position which the countries examined in this volume might be placed in regard to level of civilian control, including the two dimensions of institutionalized and informal decision-making power. The institutional dimension refers to the formal powers or regulations which are supposed to guarantee civilian

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14 The positioning of Japan in Figure 1 is based upon information gleaned from the following: P.D. Feaver, Shaun Narine, Takako Hikotani, “Civilian Control and Civil-Military Gaps in the United States, Japan, and China,” *Asian Perspective*, vol. 29 no. 1 (2005).
supremacy over the military when there is civilian control. On the other hand, the informal (contestational) dimension refers to the actual, *de facto* conduct of the military vis-à-vis civilians with regard to political decision-making, despite the law. Again, Japan has been included, as the ideal comparison—a country possessing both very high levels of institutional and informal civilian control.

Table 1: Level of Civilian Control across South and Southeast Asia: Institutionalized and Informal Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance of Decision-making Control in 2010</th>
<th>Institutionalized Dimension</th>
<th>Informal Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Military Control</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Myanmar, Pakistan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Equilibrium of Control between Military and Civilians</td>
<td>Pakistan, Thailand</td>
<td>Thailand, Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Civilian Control</td>
<td>Indonesia, Bangladesh, The Philippines</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 renders a daunting depiction of civilian control’s tenuous standing vis-à-vis the military in five young democracies of South and Southeast Asia (with Myanmar democratization efforts stillborn). Though Myanmar’s position is hardly surprising, the most disheartening situation is found in the right column. There we find five democratizing states experiencing substantial informal military control levels (including Indonesia). Of course, these countries’ ratings are not static but instead fluid. But for Thailand the flow in the level of civilian control has been on a negative trajectory since the September 19, 2006 military coup d’état. Such tidings provide meager food for those who consider uniformed usurpers a phenomenon of the past and any recent informal intervention a mere anomaly. Skeptics need only look to the enshrinement of greater military prerogatives into law despite the 2007 return
to civilian rule. In this same box exists Pakistan, a country which, caught in the throes of political pandemonium, is slipping increasingly back toward failed democracy.

Based upon the analyses of civilian control offered in this volume, any short-term prospects for civilian control in the young democracies of South and Southeast Asia are gloomy indeed. Yet there is no time to pretend to view democratic trends through rose-colored glasses. The authors herein have sought to identify a growing challenge to the development and consolidation of democracy in the region. More than ever, civilian leaders and civil society need to understand that excluding the military from the political realm is a current issue of critical importance. Moreover, civilians need to start ensuring that in the political realm, they maintain institutional control over the military at all times. This means altering any laws which bestow political authority to military officials. At the same time, civilian governments must educate and involve citizens to increase vigilance in the face of any informal military political intrusions over the institutionalized rights of civilians to exercise political power. Without such efforts, civilian control can hardly expect to dislodge the growing influence of the armed forces in politics and thus diminish current military threats to democratization.

Works Cited


