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Author(s): Ralf Emmers

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REGIONAL HEGEMONIES AND THE EXERCISE OF POWER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A Study of Indonesia and Vietnam

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Ralf Emmers

Abstract

This article investigates efforts by Indonesia and Vietnam to achieve hegemony within their respective sub-regions of Southeast Asia. The two countries have exercised both benevolent and coercive power in their foreign policy. The article examines under which circumstances uses of benevolent and coercive instruments have helped the countries attain hegemony.

Introduction

The significance of hegemons and their exercise of power in international politics have been thoroughly studied in the international relations literature. The on-going academic debates about hegemony and the types of power in foreign policy have been translated since the end of the Cold War era into a vast body of writing examining the United States's position of primacy and the relative value of soft and hard forms of power in its foreign policy. In contrast, little has been written on the exercise of power by regional hegemons in specific geographic areas. This article studies the exercise of power in the international relations of Southeast Asia by discussing the foreign policies of two regional powers, Indonesia and Vietnam. It asserts that both states have a sense of entitlement over their immediate neighborhood, discussing how they have sought since independence to establish a hegemonic

Dr. Ralf Emmers is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He wishes to thank John Ciorciari, Evelyn Goh, and an anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments. E-mail: <isremmers@ntu.edu.sg>.

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order in parts of Southeast Asia. Both Indonesia and Vietnam have exercised power within their respective sub-regions of maritime and continental Southeast Asia in two distinct ways: they have used power benevolently by fulfilling their aspirations through leadership, accommodation, shared ideology, and persuasion and they have relied on coercion when necessary by imposing their will through the use of military force.

It is important to define the concepts of coercive and benevolent power and to locate them in the theory of hegemony. A readiness to use military force to impose one's will is a central component of coercive power, which is related to a realist tradition of international relations that analyzes the exercise of power through a military dimension. In contrast, neo-liberals and constructivists have paid more attention to benevolent power that derives from the "soft power" of ideas, values, and institutions. This form of power is "exercised through attracting others to subscribe to, and thus legitimize, the order established by the dominant power."¹ In contrast to coercion, the exercise of benevolent power is broadly perceived by those upon whom the power is exercised as being rather benign and non-threatening to their survival. Hegemony assumes that the distribution of power is asymmetrical and hierarchically organized and can either be imposed or led by a single state. While hegemonies can take different forms,² our framework focuses on the benevolent and coercive types. In the case of the latter, a hegemon directly and aggressively dominates weaker states. It prevails as a result of its capability to use force, its willingness to exercise its predominant power, and the relative military weakness of other states.³ Moreover, a hegemon that relies on coercive means can be expansionist by challenging the territorial status quo and extending its own territory. On the contrary, benevolent hegemony is based on leadership, persuasion, and accommodation. Ikenberry explains that such types of hegemony are "organized around more reciprocal, consensual, and institutionalized relations. The order is still organized around asymmetrical power relations, but the most overtly malign character of domination is muted."⁴

This article asks under which circumstances the exercises of benevolent and coercive power may have helped Vietnam and Indonesia achieve hegemony. It claims that benevolence has contributed more to their regional acceptance as hegemonies than has coercion. The article consists of three sections. The first

1. Evelyn Goh, "Hegemonic Constraints: The Implications of September 11 for American Power," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 57:1 (April 2003), p. 79.

2. Shambaugh refers, for instance, to four possible types of hegemony: isolationist, hierarchical, cooperative, and coercive. David Shambaugh, "Chinese Hegemony over East Asia by 2015?" *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 9:1 (June 1997), pp. 7–28.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–25.

4. John G. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 28.

reviews Indonesia's and Vietnam's influence on the international relations of Southeast Asia and illustrates their past experience in becoming hegemons in their respective sub-regions. The second section discusses more specifically Vietnamese and Indonesian foreign policies and their successful exercise of benevolent and coercive power until 1989 and 1997, respectively. This section indicates how a benevolent exercise of power can be more effective than a coercive one by contrasting Indonesia's participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Vietnam's rather benign involvement in Laos to their respective invasions of East Timor and Cambodia. The final section analyzes why recent attempts by Vietnam and Indonesia to exercise benevolent power have not been successful in maintaining their status as hegemons within their respective sub-regions. It argues that in recent years the two countries have acted benignly to the best of their abilities, being too weak militarily and/or economically to coerce recalcitrant neighbors, and questions whether they should still be regarded as hegemons in Southeast Asia.

Regional Hegemonies in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is a distinct security complex where Indonesia and Vietnam exercise most of their power.⁵ The Southeast Asian security complex can be further divided into maritime and continental sub-regions. Indonesia and Vietnam have never been direct strategic competitors. Vietnam has primarily exercised its power in Indochina, while Indonesia, as an archipelagic state, has focused its influence on maritime Southeast Asia. Moreover, the Indonesian and Vietnamese armed forces have generally perceived China as a common external threat. Jakarta has historically regarded Vietnam as a useful buffer against China's regional expansion. The question remains, however, why Indonesia and Vietnam should be considered as hegemons in Southeast Asia. Kapur focuses on the ability of a regional hegemon to "inflict punishment on a regional and an international rival, to cause a change in the distribution of power as well as the pattern of relationships by its ability to act alone, and to develop a process to achieve consent and restraint among rivals within a region."⁶ Most of these attributes apply to Vietnam and Indonesia and their exercise of power in Southeast Asia up to 1989 and 1997, respectively.

Indonesia's foreign policy has traditionally been conceived in terms of two types of emotion: feelings of vulnerability stemming from domestic weaknesses and fragmentation and of regional entitlement emanating from the country's

5. Buzan defines a security complex as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another." Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (London: Harvester Wheateaf, 1991), p. 190.

6. Ashok Kapur, *Regional Security Structures in Asia* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 9.

military struggle for independence, geographical dimensions, large population, strategic position, and natural resources.⁷ In addition to its vast land area, the largest in Southeast Asia, Indonesia consists of an extensive maritime territory that derives from its status as an archipelagic state. Moreover, it is the largest Muslim nation in the world, though its state identity has never been defined through Islam. Indonesia has felt entitled to a position of natural leadership within ASEAN and has been recognized by the other members as first among equals. During the New Order period (1967–98), Indonesia played the role of a benevolent hegemon within the association and contributed to regional stability and security in Southeast Asia. Yet, contrary to its policy of benevolence within ASEAN, Indonesia acted coercively toward East Timor, invading the territory in 1975. Indonesia's status as a benevolent regional hegemon has significantly diminished since 1997, leading to a loss in regional standing. The consequences of the Asian financial crisis and the collapse of the Suharto regime in May 1998 led to domestic unrest and severely reduced Indonesia's role in regional affairs. Jakarta has since then exercised benevolent power to the best of its ability in light of its domestic weaknesses and recently adopted a more active foreign policy in tune with its natural position of leadership in ASEAN. Yet, its current attempt to use benevolent power has not brought it closer to its goal of achieving hegemony.

Vietnam's status as a potential hegemon in mainland Southeast Asia has derived from its military might and geostrategic location. When the country was reunified in April 1975, its communist leadership boasted the largest armed forces in the region and had demonstrated its military capabilities by uniting North and South Vietnam despite decades of successive intervention by external powers. At the time, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew declared that "there is no combination of forces in Southeast Asia that can stop the Vietnamese on the mainland of Asia."⁸ Vietnam has traditionally competed with Thailand for a position of hegemony in continental Southeast Asia. Vietnam succeeded in imposing a relationship of dependency on Laos in 1975, essentially through benevolent means. In contrast, Pol Pot's government of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) was keen to preserve its independence and rejected any Vietnamese interference on Cambodian soil. Supported by China, the hostile DK government ordered frequent military incursions into Vietnamese territory. Vietnam's hegemonic ambitions over Indochina (i.e., Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) were eventually realized through its invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 and occupation of the country for the next 11 years. Once Hanoi was no longer able to rely on Soviet assistance, it was forced to

7. Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 173.

8. Quoted in Rodolfo C. Garcia, "Military Co-operation in ASEAN," *Pointer* (Singapore) 12:3 (April–June 1986), p. 9.

withdraw its troops. In the post-Cold War era, Vietnam has played a more benign role in regional affairs, reconciling much of the past with the other Southeast Asian actors, as indicated by its membership in ASEAN. It has also lowered its expectations vis-à-vis Cambodia and Laos and tried to exercise benevolent power as best it could, not being strong enough economically to control its neighbor through other methods. Vietnam's dominant role in Indochina has also been undermined by Thailand's new assumption of economic leadership in mainland Southeast Asia.

This review of Indonesia's and Vietnam's potential for hegemony in parts of Southeast Asia will be followed by a closer analysis of their use of benevolent and coercive power to achieve that goal. The following discussion therefore examines the circumstances under which the exercises of benevolent and coercive power can produce a regional hegemon. It first explains what has been possible for Vietnam and Indonesia in the past, before analyzing why in the more recent period neither coercion nor benevolence has been a successful instrument for achieving regional hegemony.

Quest for Hegemony: The Exercise of Benevolent and Coercive Power

Indonesia

Indonesia exercised coercive power in the mid-1960s. President Sukarno resisted the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia, which he viewed as a British neo-colonial design in Southeast Asia, by starting a campaign of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) based on coercive diplomacy and small-scale armed activities.⁹ A similar policy over Irian Jaya,¹⁰ which had remained under Dutch authority since Indonesia's independence in December 1949, led to a diplomatic settlement in August 1962 by which Jakarta gained control over the territory. Confrontation with Malaysia further weakened Indonesia's economy, which was terribly neglected by Sukarno. Indonesia's exercise of coercive power was transformed after an abortive coup in October 1965 that led to Sukarno's gradual political downfall. General Suharto was elected acting president in March 1967 and initiated an era in Indonesian politics known as the New Order. He saw the end of *Konfrontasi* as a first necessity. Suharto was

9. See J. A. C. Mackie, *Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute, 1963-1966* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Donald Hindley, "Indonesia's Confrontation with Malaysia: A Search for Motives," *Asian Survey* 4:6 (June 1964), pp. 904-13.

10. *Irian Jaya* (Triumphant Irian) is the Indonesian name for the western half of New Guinea. The Dutch called it West New Guinea when the region was still part of the Netherlands East Indies. With the transfer of power, the Indonesians renamed it Irian Jaya. Seeing this as a foreign and imposed term, the indigenous population, however, has preferred the name *Papua Barat* (West Papua).

aware that Indonesia would only succeed in playing a central role in regional affairs after it reached a level of domestic socioeconomic viability. The start of reconciliation between Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur made regional cooperation possible as a means to avoid future confrontation; this led to the creation of ASEAN in August 1967.¹¹

Suharto's policy toward ASEAN was influenced by a desire to reassure his partners and diminish their fears of a coercive Indonesian hegemony. The new leadership in Jakarta was aware of the on-going mistrust toward Indonesia and adopted an approach to regionalism characterized by self-restraint.¹² Leifer argues that "regional cooperation with Indonesia's enthusiastic participation . . . was envisaged both as a means to satisfy its natural ambition and also to contain its more objectionable hegemonic disposition."¹³ Indonesia still felt that it was entitled to a position of natural leadership within the association. Djiwandono explains that Indonesia's "membership in ASEAN may accord it, implicitly, the status of first among equals without resort to an aggressive confrontation policy."¹⁴ Indonesia's regional vision thus had not changed in principle. The legacy of Sukarno's regional policies can be seen in the Suharto regime, for example, when the latter requested that Indonesia's demands on the future of foreign military bases in Southeast Asia, previously integrated in Maphilindo,¹⁵ be included in the ASEAN Bangkok Declaration. A paragraph was eventually added in the declaration:

Affirming that all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of States in the area or prejudice the orderly processes of their national development,¹⁶

Such Indonesian demands within the ASEAN framework symbolized a continuing sense of regional entitlement. Central to that vision was Jakarta's aspiration to play a managerial role and organize Southeast Asian relations independent of external (non-ASEAN) interference. Indonesia expected to

11. The original ASEAN members were Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Singapore.

12. Arnfinn Jorgensen-Dahl, *Regional Organization and Order in South-East Asia* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1982), p. 228.

13. Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy*, pp. 120–21.

14. Soedjati J. Djiwandono, "South-East Asia and the South Pacific: The Role of ASEAN," in *Security in South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific: Challenges of the 1990s* (New York: International Peace Academy, 1989), p. 160.

15. Established through the Manila Agreements of 1963, Maphilindo was a loose confederation consisting of Malaya, the Philippines, and Indonesia. It preceded ASEAN as a diplomatic attempt at establishing inter-state cooperation in Southeast Asia.

16. The ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration), August 8, 1967, <<http://www.aseansec.org/1212.htm>>.

become the prime manager of the regional order, although its sense of entitlement was articulated in a benevolent hegemonic fashion. As a result, rather than reverting to coercive power, the New Order expected to attain its natural regional position through benevolent means.

In November 1971, the ASEAN states signed in Kuala Lumpur the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration. It called for regional autonomy and reflected Indonesia's expectations of a regional order influenced by its own managerial position. Yet, the declaration was also a compromise between the ASEAN states, because it did not restrict the right of member countries to host foreign bases on their territory or to rely on defense links with external powers. Indonesia again demonstrated its exercise of benevolent power during the first ASEAN summit of heads of state and government, held in Bali in February 1976, which endorsed the Declaration of ASEAN Concord and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ The latter established a norm-based code of conduct for regional interstate relations and introduced as ASEAN's central principles the idea of respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of other states. Indonesia's adherence to a code of conduct further reassured its immediate neighbors.

The implementation of the ZOPFAN principle was delayed by the outbreak of the Third Indochina Conflict (1978–91), focused on disputes over Cambodia. As a front-line state in the conflict, Thailand increased its influence over ASEAN in the 1980s by imposing on its partners its tough stand on Vietnam and tacit alliance with China. This frustrated Indonesia's managerial ambitions in Southeast Asia. Yet, Indonesia succeeded in organizing the Jakarta Informal Meetings (JIMs) in July 1988 and February 1989, which opened negotiations with Phnom Penh and Hanoi and later enabled Indonesia to co-chair the International Conference on Cambodia. By acting as a mediator in the Cambodia conflict, Indonesia exercised benevolent power in the region and preserved its position of leadership in ASEAN.

In the early 1990s, Indonesia increased its managerial role in ASEAN by launching the Workshops on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea. By avoiding the question of sovereign jurisdiction, the Workshops were meant to encourage a multilateral dialogue and enhance a peaceful management of the conflict. In January 1990, an initial Workshop was organized in Bali that gathered the six ASEAN states for a preliminary meeting. Held in Bandung in July 1991, the second event brought together the members of ASEAN, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Laos. In his opening statement, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas declared that "our attention and efforts have been and should continue to be directed towards finding ways to

17. The Declaration of ASEAN Concord, <<http://www.aseansec.org/1216.htm>> and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, <<http://www.aseansec.org/1217.htm>>.

transform potential sources of conflict into constructive forms of cooperation for mutual benefit.”¹⁸ By hosting the Workshops, Indonesia as a non-claimant party in the territorial dispute exercised benevolent power and consolidated its position as a leading regional player. The Workshops were therefore partly motivated by calculations resembling those that had led Jakarta to organize the JIMs. Indonesia’s managerial role was once again demonstrated in 1990, when it rejected Malaysia’s initiative for an East Asian Economic Group (EAEG). President Suharto, together with other ASEAN leaders, refused to endorse Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad’s proposal, which the Malaysian leader modified into an East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) in October 1991.¹⁹

In contrast to its policy of benevolence within ASEAN, Indonesia exercised its power coercively over East Timor, leading to a direct denial of self-determination and a violation of international law. East Timor had been under Portuguese control since 1520. In April 1974, political change in Portugal accelerated its decolonization. At first, Jakarta sought to exercise power benignly by supporting the Timorese Popular Democratic Association (in Portuguese, Associação Popular Democrática Timorense, APODETI), which called for the integration of East Timor into Indonesia.²⁰ Yet, Indonesia’s initial attempt to exercise hegemony over East Timor through political interference was rejected by the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente, FRETILIN), which proclaimed the territory independent in November 1975. The Indonesian army invaded East Timor in December, incorporating it as the 27th province of the Republic of Indonesia in July 1976. Contrary to the Konfrontasi period, the exercise of coercive power was made without a prior formulation of irredentist claims or strong nationalist rhetoric. The invasion was followed by a relative absence of foreign opposition, including from the United States and Australia. With the exception of Singapore, which abstained, the ASEAN states all voted against a resolution in the U.N. General Assembly in December 1975 condemning Indonesia’s action. Having sent a diplomatic signal to Jakarta, Singapore was keen to preserve its relationship with Indonesia and voted against future resolutions condemning its neighbor. In short, Indonesia was able to

18. Ali Alatas, minister for foreign affairs of Indonesia, “Address Opening the Second Workshop on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea,” Bandung, Indonesia, July 15, 1991.

19. The EAEG would have consisted of the ASEAN countries, China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and excluded non-Asian states. Meant to enhance economic cooperation in East Asia, the group would have been a response to newly established economic arrangements in North America and Europe. The notion of an economic group was transformed into a caucus within the wider structure of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

20. Leifer, *Indonesia’s Foreign Policy*, p. 155.

count on the support of its ASEAN partners despite its use of coercive power within its archipelago.

Vietnam

In just a few years after the reunification of Vietnam, Hanoi established its hegemonic control over all of Indochina. But it exercised its power over Laos and Cambodia in different ways. With external support from Vietnam, the communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party took power in late 1975, leading to the creation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in December. Hanoi succeeded in exercising a benevolent form of control over Laos after the communist victory, placing Vientiane in a position of economic and political dependency through a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in July 1977.²¹ Vietnam also stationed 40,000 troops in the country. In contrast to the situation in Laos, the communist victory in Cambodia led to the emergence of a xenophobic regime that was keen to preserve its independence from Vietnam.²² Moreover, while Lao-Vietnamese relations had generally been historically harmonious, ties between Phnom Penh and Hanoi had been strained by feelings of animosity, racial factors, and border disputes.²³ A series of clashes on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border created a deteriorating situation and convinced Hanoi and Phnom Penh of the need to reinforce their links with the Soviet Union and China, respectively. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia began on December 25, 1978, and led to the establishment of a pro-Vietnamese government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), on January 8, 1979. A Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation was signed in February giving Vietnam a legal justification for maintaining military forces in Cambodia. In this manner, Vietnam coercively imposed a relationship of dependency on Cambodia, having already established one in Laos through more benevolent tactics. Vietnam was also influenced in its military action by the close ties that had developed between Cambodia and China. Vietnam's actions in Cambodia thus were the result both of hegemonic ambitions in Indochina and defensive considerations against China.

Vietnam's coercive hegemony over Cambodia was undermined by a military, economic, and diplomatic response that transformed Vietnam into an international pariah state. China viewed Cambodia as an effective check on Vietnam's expansionism in continental Southeast Asia and thus considered

21. Robert Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China's Vietnam Policy, 1975-1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 123-25.

22. Michael Leifer, "The Role and Paradox of ASEAN," in *The Balance of Power in East Asia*, ed. Michael Leifer (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1986), p. 125.

23. See Nguyen-vo Thu-huong, *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict* (London: McFarland & Company), 1992.

Hanoi's control over the country to be unacceptable. Beijing was also highly suspicious of Vietnam's alignment with Moscow and perceived the invasion of Cambodia as part of a Soviet regional expansion. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping authorized a punitive offensive across Vietnam's northern border that lasted from mid-February until mid-March. The attack did not change Vietnamese actions in Cambodia but reminded Hanoi of a constant Chinese threat on Vietnam's northern border. Afterward, China imposed military pressure on Vietnam through a large deployment of forces on their joint frontier. Beijing also actively supported the Khmer Rouge resistance, which had established sanctuaries along the Thai-Cambodian border. China's policy of attrition and its support for the guerrilla warfare made it impossible for Vietnam to achieve complete victory on the battlefield and frustrated Hanoi's ambition to preserve an Indochinese federation under its control. Beside the military pressure exerted by China, the United States and Japan imposed economic sanctions on Vietnam, while ASEAN member states lobbied effectively at the U.N. to ensure the annual condemnation of the occupation of Cambodia.

Furthermore, Vietnam's coercive hegemony over Cambodia was undermined by its dependence on military and financial assistance from the Soviet Union and Vietnam's need for urgent domestic reforms. Vietnam lacked the economic strength to sustain its expansionist policy in Indochina. The coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985 led to Soviet attempts to reach a *détente* with the United States and China. This was made dependent, among other issues, on the cessation of Soviet support for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. Domestically, Vietnam's Sixth National Party Congress announced in December 1986 the policy of *Doi Moi* (Economic Renovation), whose core objective was to end the decline of the Vietnamese economy by instigating a transition from central planning to a market-oriented economy. *Doi Moi* was dependent on resolution of the Cambodian conflict. No longer able to rely on external assistance and in urgent need of economic reforms, Hanoi started to withdraw its troops from Cambodia in 1989. Vietnam had withdrawn its military forces from Laos in 1987–88, numbering at the time more than 50,000 troops.²⁴ The settlement of the Cambodian conflict was signed in Paris in October 1991 at the International Conference on Cambodia, which put an end to Vietnam's ambition to establish an Indochinese federation under its control.

Successful Conditions for Hegemony

Indonesia's ambition to become a regional hegemon was realized through its exercise of benevolent power in ASEAN. Indonesia was perceived as the

24. Martin Stuart-Fox, "Foreign Policy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, eds. Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 193–94.

backbone of regional security and as first among equals within the association. Its position of natural leadership would essentially remain unquestioned until 1997. While not transforming its regional vision in principle, Indonesia succeeded in reassuring its neighbors by adopting a policy of benevolence and self-restraint. Suharto's willingness to follow a constrained policy in ASEAN should be contrasted to the Sukarno period and its *Konfrontasi* policy, which had led to the failure of *Maphilindo* in 1963. Benevolence, rather than coercion, was therefore more successful in contributing to Indonesia's acceptance as a regional hegemon. Jakarta had more to gain by applying a strategy of benevolent hegemony. Relatively weak in military terms, Indonesia had to exercise its power in ASEAN through non-coercive means, relying on soft power, persuasion, and accommodation to extend its influence. The other members were willing to accept its position of leadership in the association in exchange for Indonesia's adoption of a non-threatening foreign policy.

This is not to say, however, that Indonesia succeeded in realizing its vision of a regional order based on the exclusive managerial role of the Southeast Asian states to the exclusion of states from without the region. Distinct from the regional vision of Indonesia, three nations—Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore—associated the quest for order in Southeast Asia with the workings of the balance of power. They continued, therefore, to rely on the availability of external countervailing power, primarily through their tacit or formal alliances with the United States, to ensure their security and react to any threats. Thailand and the Philippines were signatories to the Manila Treaty and members of the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Singapore had close security ties with the United States and was a member of the Five Power Defense Arrangements that also included Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia. After joining ASEAN in 1984, Brunei also maintained its defense ties with Britain that ensured the continuing presence of a Gurkha brigade in the sultanate. In short, Indonesia's influence on the management of regional order remained limited despite its reliance on a benevolent foreign policy and position of leadership within ASEAN.

The initial "success" of the annexation of East Timor via coercive means can be explained through the specific circumstances of the Cold War. The fear of communism was at its peak: the Indonesian invasion of the territory coincided with the 1975 communist victories in Indochina. The invasion was viewed, therefore, in the context of the containment of China and seen as eliminating a potential threat of communist intervention within the Indonesian archipelago. In contrast to the Cambodian question, the annexation of East Timor did not modify the regional distribution of power and was generally regarded as insignificant in the context of the Cold War. Nonetheless, Indonesia's long-term exercise of coercive power over East Timor was a failure. The annexation had enduring negative repercussions for Indonesia in

the U.N. and undermined its leading position in the Non-Aligned Movement, which had relied on anti-colonialism as its key doctrine since the Bandung Conference of 1955. The annexation of East Timor thus denied Suharto of his hope of becoming a leader of the Third World. Moreover, persistent resistance in East Timor to Indonesia's occupation led over a period of 24 years to a drain on Jakarta's precious economic resources as well as prompting a policy of constant repression and severe violation of human rights. Indonesia eventually renounced its sovereignty over East Timor in 1999 after a referendum in the territory that had led to an overwhelming vote in favor of independence.

Vietnam succeeded as a hegemon over Laos essentially through the use of benevolent power. Key to this success was the shared Marxist-Leninist ideology uniting the Vietnamese Communist Party and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Vietnam developed a patronage relationship over Vientiane, exercising its power through leadership, a common ideology, and military assistance. In contrast, Vietnam imposed its coercive hegemony over Cambodia through military force and territorial expansion. In contrast to Indonesia, Vietnam was a dominant military power in its sub-region that could expect to gain from applying a strategy of coercive hegemony over its neighbor. The Khmer Rouge regime was weak militarily despite its aggressive attitude toward Vietnam and Vietnamese forces quickly succeeded in invading Cambodia and establishing a puppet government. Yet, Vietnam's coercive hegemony over Cambodia was resisted by external powers. China, in particular, implemented a policy of attrition against Vietnam that made it impossible for Hanoi to impose political and military control over Cambodia. Without China's military pressure against Vietnam's hegemonic policy, Thailand and the other Southeast Asian states would probably have had to accept the Vietnamese occupation of their neighbor as a political fait accompli.²⁵ Vietnam's exercise of coercive power was also constrained by the country's economic weakness. Its hegemonic policy in Indochina depended on economic assistance from the Soviet Union, and Hanoi was obliged to abandon the policy when such external assistance disappeared. Moreover, Vietnam badly needed the foreign aid and investment that were cut off as a result of its military occupation of Cambodia. The Cambodian conflict by the late 1980s had become a threat to Vietnam's economic security and, as a result, to the preservation of its communist political system. Hanoi abandoned its coercive hegemony because continuing the occupation was too costly but also because dwindling fears of China lessened Vietnam's need to control Cambodia militarily.

25. Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of South-East Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 105.

Benevolent Power and the Absence of Regional Hegemony in the Post-Cold War

This final section analyzes why recent attempts by Vietnam and Indonesia to exercise benevolent power have failed in achieving hegemony within their respective sub-regions. The two states have not been in a position over the past few years to exercise coercive power, essentially because they lack military and economic strength to coerce neighboring states. They have sought instead to exercise benevolent power in light of their weak capabilities and domestic problems.

Vietnam and the Shift toward a Benevolent Exercise of Power

In June 1991, the Seventh National Party Congress in Vietnam adopted a “new outlook” on foreign policy based on Vietnam’s desire to be “friends with all countries,” with priority given to neighboring states. Hanoi adopted an omnidirectional diplomacy aimed at promoting diplomatic and economic ties with others while not binding Vietnam into military alliances. Sino-Vietnamese relations were normalized in November 1991 during the official visit of Vietnam’s Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet to Beijing. The 1991 Paris Accords also started a process of détente between Hanoi and the ASEAN states. Vo Van Kiet visited Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore in November 1991, and Vietnam signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in July 1992. Its membership in the regional organization was made official at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) of 1995. Vietnamese participation in ASEAN symbolized the institutionalization of a process of diplomatic reconciliation between Vietnam and the member states.²⁶ Though Vietnam had been invited to join the TAC in 1976, its membership was unthinkable until the end of the Cold War because the region was polarized ideologically. Let us examine how Vietnam’s shift toward a more benevolent exercise of power has affected its traditional quest for hegemony in Indochina.

The external factors affecting Laos shifted in the 1990s from Vietnam’s political and military dominance to Thailand’s cultural influence and economic leadership. Increasingly focused on its own economic growth, Vietnam was unable to compete with Thailand for economic leverage and presence in Laos. In March 1996, the Sixth Laotian Party Congress indicated that Vietnam still remained, at least in principle, Laos’s primary political partner, followed by China and Cambodia, respectively.²⁷ Vientiane’s expression of its special rela-

26. Michael Leifer, “The ASEAN Peace Process: A Category Mistake,” *Pacific Review* 12:1 (1999), p. 27.

27. Joseph J. Zasloff, “The Foreign Policy of Laos in the 1990s,” in *New Laos, New Challenges*, ed. Jacqueline Butler-Diaz (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona State University Program for Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series, 1998), pp. 128–29.

tionship with Hanoi and to a lesser extent, Beijing, was made in light of the need to balance Thailand's rising influence in Laos.²⁸ In August 1997, Vo Van Kiet also visited Laos to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the TAC, which again demonstrated the strong ideological fraternity between Vientiane and Hanoi. The Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 drastically reduced Thai investments in Laos, which enabled Beijing to increase its influence there. China helped Laos to stabilize its currency in 1999 and has since then become its leading foreign investor. China's improved relationship with Vientiane has been a source of concern for Vietnam; a sense of rivalry has existed between Hanoi and Beijing over Laos since the late 1990s.²⁹ Yet, Laos has continued to value its special relationship with Vietnam. Although China has a lot to offer economically, as Freeman observes, it is still Laos's and Vietnam's common concern over "China's might that helps ensure that relations between the two countries remain particularly close, above and beyond their ideological affinities."³⁰ Vietnam's ties with Laos have also gained from strained Laotian-Thai relations over disputed islands in the Mekong River and other issues. Moreover, Vietnam has continued to provide military assistance to Laos. For instance, an antigovernment offensive by members of the Hmong minority in early 2000 led to the deployment of Vietnamese military personnel to support the Laotian army, a move that alarmed Bangkok.³¹

Since its military withdrawal in 1989, Vietnam has been keen to ensure that an independent Cambodia does not threaten its security. Yet, rather than aiming to impose a new coercive hegemonic relationship, Vietnam has exercised its power through benevolent means. Hanoi has adopted a policy of non-interference in Cambodia's domestic affairs and has said it wished for the country to be peaceful, independent, and non-aligned.³² Vietnamese officials have also tried to develop good bilateral contacts with Phnom Penh through repeated visits. Still, ties have continued to be complicated by two outstanding issues: the demarcation of common land and sea borders and the ethnic Vietnamese refugees living in Cambodia.³³ These bilateral disputes have been made more volatile politically because of accusations by the Cambodian opposition that

28. Yves Bourdet, "Laos: The Sixth Party Congress, and After?" *Southeast Asian Affairs 1997* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), p. 156.

29. Nick Freeman, "Laos: Sedately Seguing into the Twenty-first Century," *Southeast Asian Affairs 2002* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), p. 152.

30. Nick J. Freeman, "Laos: Exiguous Evidence of Economic Reform and Development," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2004* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), p. 132.

31. Bertil Lintner, "Laos: Signs of Unrest," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2001* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001), p. 184.

32. Ang Cheng Guan, "Vietnam-Cambodia Relations from the Paris Peace Conference (1991) to Membership of ASEAN," *Southeast Asia Research* 8:1 (March 2000), p. 77.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodia's People's Party (CPP) are too closely linked to Hanoi.³⁴

In addition to enhancing its good ties with Phnom Penh, Vietnam has also acted as a benevolent supporter of Cambodia in ASEAN. Cambodia was supposed to become a member, together with Laos and Myanmar, at ASEAN's 30th Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur on July 23, 1997. But antagonism between Cambodia's two prime ministers, Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen, led to the latter's seizing power in Phnom Penh on July 5. While Vietnam did not condemn the coup and was still willing to admit Cambodia, ASEAN reluctantly decided to delay membership.

Elections were eventually organized in Cambodia in July 1998 and its admission was again discussed at the sixth ASEAN summit in Hanoi in December. Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines wanted to delay membership, while the other members favored Cambodia's early participation. Among the ASEAN members, Vietnam was most supportive of an immediate Cambodian admission.³⁵ This led Lee Kim Chew of Singapore's *Straits Times* to argue that Vietnam could "arouse suspicions that it is reviving its old dream . . . of leading a *de facto* Indochina Federation with Cambodia and Laos, this time within the ASEAN fold."³⁶ Vietnam announced Cambodia's future membership at the end of the summit, although no specific date was given. Cambodia finally joined during an official ceremony in Hanoi in April 1999. Vietnam's strong support for Cambodia's entry can be interpreted as Hanoi's taking a leading role on the question of the Indochinese states' membership in ASEAN. For Vietnam, Cambodian membership also meant a reduced risk of Phnom Penh aligning itself again with China in a security arrangement, which would have had a destabilizing impact on continental Southeast Asia.

Despite its reliance on benevolent means, Vietnam's overall influence in Cambodia has been reduced by China's rising power and Thailand's search for economic leadership in mainland Southeast Asia. Since the Paris Accords, the Cambodian question has been less of a source of tension in Sino-Vietnamese relations, although Beijing has continued to increase its influence in the country. Then-Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Cambodia in November 2000. At the ASEAN summit hosted by Cambodia in November 2002, then-Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji announced that China had decided to write off Cambodia's old debts. Osborne argues that "[w]arm relations with China have not replaced Hun Sen's close association with Vietnam, but China's much greater power and capacity to offer aid have certainly qualified Cambodia's relationship with

34. John Marston, "Cambodia: Transnational Pressures and Local Agendas," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2002* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), p. 104.

35. Ang, "Vietnam-Cambodia Relations," p. 57.

36. Lee Kim Chew, "ASEAN Shows It Means Business," *Straits Times*, December 18, 1998.

its immediate eastern neighbour.”³⁷ As in the case of Laos, Vietnam has benefited from on-going difficulties in Cambodian-Thai relations. For example, anti-Thai riots broke out in Phnom Penh in January 2003 following comments allegedly made by a Thai movie star on the Thai origins of Angkor Wat and its return to Thailand. The riots led to the storming of the Thai embassy and destruction of numerous Thai businesses in Phnom Penh.

*Indonesia's Loss of Regional Standing and
New Exercise of Benevolent Power*

Indonesia's status as a regional hegemon has greatly diminished since 1997. It has faced deep internal difficulties that have reduced its regional influence and undermined its position of leadership in ASEAN. Indonesia was severely affected by the financial crisis of 1997–98, which drastically worsened its socioeconomic problems and provoked the unexpected downfall of President Suharto in May 1998. Indonesia was embarrassed by the International Monetary Fund's imposition of strict conditions on loans required to stabilize its domestic economy. It has yet to fully recover from the consequences of the financial crisis and has been desperate for foreign direct investment. As mentioned above, Indonesia was also forced to renounce its sovereignty over East Timor in 1999. The loss of this territory was a deep humiliation for Jakarta, particularly for the armed forces. Separatist movements in Aceh Province and Irian Jaya and sectarian violence in the Moluccas have brought further instability to domestic politics. ASEAN members in 1999 officially declared their support for the territorial integrity of Indonesia in light of the domestic conflicts in Aceh and Irian Jaya. The need for such a collective position humiliated a state that had represented the political core of the association. Since then, the situation in Aceh has further deteriorated. The breakdown of peace negotiations with the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakin Aceh Merdeka, GAM) in May 2003 was followed by the launch of a new military operation by the Indonesian military in Aceh.

Consequently, Indonesia was already significantly weakened when it was forced to cope with the post-9/11 world and the threat of international terrorism. The ambivalence and lack of political will of Indonesia's President Megawati Sukarnoputri led to inertia and frustrated the United States and some ASEAN partners, as indicated by remarks delivered by Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in February 2002. He declared that the city-state would be at risk of terrorist attacks as long as leaders of regional extremist cells were at large in Indonesia.³⁸ The seriousness of the terrorist threat in Indonesia was

37. Milton Osborne, “Cambodia: Hun Sen Firmly in Control,” *Southeast Asian Affairs 2003* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), p. 90.

38. Asad Latif and Karen Wong, “Danger of Terror Attack Not Over Yet,” *Straits Times*, February 18, 2002.

demonstrated by the devastating bomb attacks on the island of Bali on October 12, 2002, and the car bomb explosion at the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in August 2003.

Indonesia's lack of regional leadership has weakened ASEAN. There are, however, some signs that Indonesia is again exercising benevolent power by adopting a more active foreign policy in tune with its traditional status of first among equals in ASEAN. In 2003, Indonesia acted as chair of the ASEAN Standing Committee and indicated its reengagement with the region by submitting the idea of an ASEAN Security Community (ASC). Indonesia's central motivations were to regain its lost leadership position and ensure the success of the ASEAN summit in Bali by proposing a new long-term strategy. The formation of a security community is expected to complement the establishment of an economic community in Southeast Asia, the latter having been initially proposed by Singapore. The ASEAN heads of state and government endorsed the Bali Concord II at their summit in October 2003, which adopted a framework for the establishment of a Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community in Southeast Asia by 2020.³⁹ ASEAN cannot be expected to move forward without the active participation of its leading and largest member state; the new, constructive regional role played by Indonesia has therefore been an important development.

Yet, Indonesia's new use of benevolent power has not been a successful instrument for achieving hegemony. Jakarta's vision for the future of ASEAN has sparked controversy and caused discomfort among some member states wishing to preserve the status quo and the lowest common denominator in regional cooperation. As part of the ASC scheme, Indonesia drafted a plan of action with over 70 specific proposals and shared its ideas with the other members at the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting in Yogyakarta in May 2004. The plan included some controversial proposals such as a call to establish an ASEAN peacekeeping force to help member countries facing intrastate conflict and demands for the promotion of democracy and human rights. Inherent in the Indonesian proposals was a realization that the traditional ASEAN model—based on strict application of the non-intervention principle—represents a stumbling block for effective cooperation in Southeast Asia. The Indonesian objective seemed, therefore, to retain this central principle while finding ways of making it more flexible. Jakarta was forced to redraft its plan of action after some of its proposals were criticized. Wain argues that some member states “made it clear by rejecting the plan that they don't regard Indonesia as first among equals within ASEAN.”⁴⁰ At the 2004 AMM, the foreign ministers

39. Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II), Bali, Indonesia, October 7, 2003, <<http://www.aseansec.org/15160.htm>>.

40. Barry Wain, “ASEAN-Jakarta Jilted,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 10, 2004, p. 20.

agreed on a watered-down version of the ASC Plan of Action, which no longer included the peacekeeping force provision and other controversial ideas. The Plan of Action was later adopted at the ASEAN Summit in Vientiane in November.⁴¹

Benevolence and the Failure to Achieve Hegemony

Recent attempts by Vietnam and Indonesia to use benevolent power have not brought them closer to achieving hegemony in their sub-regions. This indicates the limited efficacy of using benevolent instruments when the two countries experience certain domestic and regional circumstances. Indeed, Vietnam's and Indonesia's exercise of power has been severely restricted over the past few years by domestic factors, primarily deriving from economic difficulties and/or political transformations, the rising influence of neighboring actors, and on-going interference from external powers.

Vietnam's current position of influence in Indochina cannot be compared to its political and military dominance in the 1980s. Lacking external assistance and having to concentrate on its own economic development, Vietnam is in no position to compete with its neighbors to provide economic opportunities and aid to Laos and Cambodia. In contrast to China, Vietnam has not forged ahead with transition to a market economy, despite the implementation of some market reforms. It has also failed to compete with Thailand's surge for economic leadership in mainland Southeast Asia. Having lost the economic battle, Vietnam has also had to share its political influence over Laos and Cambodia with China and Thailand. Yet, Vietnam has at least succeeded politically in maintaining its special ties with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and Cambodia's Hun Sen government. Close relations have persisted with Vientiane because of shared ideological affinities, and Hanoi has benefited from Laos's need to balance China's and Thailand's rising influence in its domestic affairs. As demonstrated by the diplomatic negotiations that led to Cambodia's entry, Vietnam has also acted as a benevolent supporter of Cambodia in ASEAN, and good bilateral ties with Hanoi have remained a "pivotal feature of Cambodian foreign policy."⁴² Still, Hanoi has not translated its benevolent means of exercising power into a new hegemonic relationship with the two smaller Indochinese states. Vietnam's need to focus on its own economic and military security, combined with rising Chinese and Thai influence in Indochina, partly explains why Hanoi has preferred that Cambodia be independent and non-aligned. Moreover, Laos and Cambodia themselves have succeeded in reversing

41. Chairman's Statement of the 10th ASEAN Summit, Vientiane, November 29, 2004, <<http://www.aseansec.org/16632.htm>>.

42. Milton Osborne, "Cambodia: Hun Sen Consolidates Power," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2000* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 107.

decades of isolation and are no longer forced to rely on one external power to ensure their security. This has provided them with more flexibility in their foreign policy options.

Indonesia has experienced growing economic problems since 1997 in the wake of the Asian financial crisis and domestic unrest. In addition, its exercise of benevolent power and efforts to achieve hegemony have been undermined by domestic political factors. Indonesia has faced political instability and fragmentation, leading some to speculate on its possible disintegration as a nation. Rather than exercising a benevolent hegemony within ASEAN, Indonesia over the past few years has lost its managerial position within the association. Although Suharto's commitment to regional cooperation was viewed regionally as a pillar for Southeast Asian security, Indonesia has recently been included in regional calculations as a source of instability.⁴³ The country does not represent a conventional threat to the region. Instead, the primary danger for its neighbors arises from non-traditional security problems and the consequences of its domestic instability. These issues include the threat of radical Islam but also the illegal migration of Indonesian workers, the rise of pirate attacks in the Straits of Malacca, and the recurrence of ecological disasters with regional repercussions. Indonesia's proposal for a security community in Southeast Asia can, however, be interpreted as its most recent attempt to exercise benevolent power and regain its leadership position. Yet, its new vision for the future of ASEAN, based once again on its own preference for an autonomous regional order free from external interference, has been met by most other members with reservations.

In addition, Indonesia's hegemonic aspirations in Southeast Asia have continued to be undermined by external interference, despite the end of the Cold War and the resolution of the Cambodian conflict. While the U.S. withdrawal from Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base in the Philippines by November 1992 led to expectations early in that decade of a U.S. strategic retreat, Washington was quick to reassure its Southeast Asian allies of its long-term commitment to the region. Most ASEAN members have continued to rely on the American presence for their security, and the United States has increased its strategic involvement in Southeast Asia since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. China's regional influence has grown substantially over the past few years, although its power projection and capability to sustain military force in Southeast Asia have remained relatively weak.⁴⁴ Although Indonesia

43. See Tim Huxley, *Disintegrating Indonesia? Implications for Regional Security*, Adelphi Paper, no. 349 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

44. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2004–2005* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 161–67, 170–73; and David Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order,” *International Security* 29:3 (Winter 2004/05), p. 85.

continues to call for an autonomous regional order free from external intervention, Jakarta has indicated that it prefers some U.S. involvement and deployment in Southeast Asia as a counter to China's rising power.

Conclusion

Indonesia and Vietnam are two traditional regional powers with a sense of entitlement over maritime Southeast Asia and Indochina, respectively. This article has analyzed how the two countries have used benevolent and coercive means of exercising power to establish hegemonic orders in parts of the Southeast Asian region. In doing so, we have sought to examine under which circumstances benevolence and, alternatively, coercion may have helped them achieve hegemony. Vietnam and Indonesia have acted more as benevolent hegemons by fulfilling their aspirations through leadership, accommodation, shared ideology, and persuasion (Indonesia in ASEAN until 1997 and Vietnam over Laos) but they have also imposed their will through the use of military force (East Timor and Cambodia, respectively). A spectrum of foreign policy options ranging from benevolent to more coercive methods has been used by the two regional powers to exercise their power and fulfill their sub-regional hegemonic aspirations. This study has indicated the value of soft over hard forms of power when seeking to achieve hegemony. In the case of Vietnam and Indonesia, the adoption of more benign methods over military ones has positively affected the response of neighboring countries and contributed to a better acceptance of the two states' status as regional hegemons. The other ASEAN members, for example, were willing to accept Indonesia's leadership position in the regional grouping in exchange for its adoption of a non-threatening and constrained foreign policy. However, recent use by Indonesia and Vietnam of benevolent instruments has not helped Hanoi and Jakarta achieve their traditional goals.

The limited efficacy of Indonesia and Vietnam in exercising their power and fulfilling their regional hegemonic aspirations over sustained periods of time has derived from various circumstances. It results in part from the on-going role of external actors and their influence on the management of order in Southeast Asia. Vietnam's coercive hegemony over Cambodia was thwarted by external powers, particularly China, which implemented a policy of attrition against the occupation. Since its military withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia, Vietnam's influence in Indochina has been further reduced by China's rising power and Thailand's new search for leadership in mainland Southeast Asia. Indonesia has been unable to realize its vision of a regional order based on the exclusive managerial role of the Southeast Asian states. The United States has maintained its strategic involvement and military deployment in Southeast Asia, while China's regional influence has risen substantially since the end of the Cold War. Significantly, many of the ASEAN countries have

continued to rely on their tacit or formal alliances with the United States to ensure their security and balance a rising China.

Combined with these international circumstances, domestic economic difficulties have chronically weakened Vietnam's and Indonesia's exercise of benevolent and coercive power and undermined their status as regional hegemons. Indonesia has experienced severe socioeconomic problems since 1997; Vietnam has been much slower than China in its transition to a market economy. With the possible exception of its ties with Laos, Vietnam's continued profession of a Marxist-Leninist ideology has also failed to compete with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his focus on business entrepreneurship. The economy as a weakening attribute of Indonesia's and Vietnam's overall exercise of power is not a new factor, however. Already during the Cold War period, their respective exercise of power was constrained by their lack of economic strength. Vietnam's hegemonic policy based on coercive means was conditional on Soviet economic assistance. Even during its many years of political leadership in ASEAN (1967–97), Indonesia was unable to fulfil its aspirations and sense of regional entitlement partly because of external interference but also as a result of its own economic weakness. Leifer wrote in conclusion to his book on Indonesia's foreign policy that "the Achilles heel lies in the economy" and referred to remarks made by Suharto in 1969 that "[w]e shall only be able to play an effective role if we ourselves are possessed of a great national vitality."⁴⁵ These comments on Indonesia's exercise of power and place in the region are still valid today.

45. Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy*, p. 181.