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ASIAN MILITARY ELITES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIABLE POLITICAL PROCESSES

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Asian Military Elites and the Development of
Viable Political Processes

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SUMMARY

The military elites of many emerging nations are playing increasingly larger roles in the political development of their countries. It is the purpose of this essay to make some tentative judgments with respect to the role of the military elites of Pakistan, India, South Korea, South Vietnam, and Thailand in the development of viable political processes.

Since World War II, large military forces have been established, equipped, trained, and deployed to deter or to fight aggression against each of the five countries. The armed forces of these nations have contributed indirectly, and in varying degrees, to political development through the conduct of military civic action programs.

While the military elite of India has remained in an essentially nonpolitical posture, the elites of the remaining countries have become directly and profoundly involved in domestic political activities. This intervention is attributable primarily to the failure of the civilian political leadership to cope with pressing internal and external problems and to the lack of cohesion within and between the civil elites. In each case the military elite was the only organized and disciplined group capable of establishing the conditions of order and stability conducive to economic, social, and political progress.

The present domination of domestic politics by the military in Thailand, Pakistan, South Korea, and South Vietnam is, hopefully, a condition which exists to be transcended. However, we must not expect these nations to conform in time to a Western model of democracy. At best, we can anticipate and advocate forms of democracy suited to the needs and capabilities of each country. The managerial and technical skills of the military elites and their control over the means of violence will continue to assure them of cardinal roles in the evolution of these political systems.

The United States should recognize these elites as significant elements of their societies whose competence is not limited to purely military matters. Under the aegis of the Military Assistance Program we should attempt to improve the quality of their contribution to political development in these areas: (1) the achievement and maintenance of the politico-military proficiency necessary to provide an adequate defense against the manifold forms of subversion and aggression, and (2) the planning and implementation of military civic action programs with particular emphasis on basic citizenship and literacy programs and on the training of technicians to staff government and private institutions. Additionally, selected members of the elites should be prepared for their contingent employment in high level posts in government and in private life.

The role of the military elites in the political development of the emerging countries of the world has only recently become a subject of serious and sustained research. Hindsight provides us with an explanation for this apparent lack of interest in what have become key decisionmaking elements in many of the Afro-Asian nations. Throughout the first decade of the post-World War II era it was generally assumed that the future of the newly independent states lay in the hands of their politicians, their bureaucrats, or their intellectuals. Few students of the developing areas identified the military as a group that might play a central role in nation-building. During the late 1950's and early 1960's, however, it became apparent that the military elites were playing an increasingly larger part in the domestic affairs of many of the emerging states. Concurrently with this development, the nature and scope of the military's political role began to engage the attention of statesmen and scholars alike.

Members of the academic community are in the process of developing strategies to describe and to measure the contributions, positive and negative, which the military have made and can make to the political development of the new states. Until these strategies are tested and refined, the literature on this subject must be confined to the formulation of hypotheses to be confirmed or refuted by the application of proven strategies to specific countries of the world.

Sufficient empirical evidence is available to make some tentative judgments with respect to the role of several of the Asian military

elites in the development of viable political processes in their respective nations. I have chosen arbitrarily to analyze three facets of the political roles of the elites in Pakistan, India, South Korea, South Vietnam, and Thailand. These facets are: (1) the general characteristics of military elites that facilitate or limit their involvement in the political development of their countries, (2) the diverse roles played by the five military elites in domestic politics, and (3) the contribution of the US Military Assistance Program to the enhancement of the political sophistication of these military elites.

There is little consensus among political scientists as to the definition of viable political processes. Within the framework of this paper, viable political processes are considered to be those practices and mechanisms which enable a government in power to cope with the immediate political, economic, military, and social problems while developing, over the long run, the ability to respond effectively to popular or elitist demands for greater economic opportunity, increased social equality, and wider political participation. If such processes are to evolve and flourish in the developing nations, certain prerequisites must be met. Public order must be maintained and the nation made secure against aggression and subversion. Institutions of administration and government must be created and staffed with qualified personnel to plan and to execute national programs. Continuing progress must be made in economic and social development. Citizens must be given a sense of participating in the

process of nation-building. Finally, procedures must be established for the orderly transfer of political power at all levels of government. The military elites can assist in creating most of these necessary conditions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MILITARY ELITES

A military elite can be defined as a relatively small group of professional military officers who are in a position to exercise the greatest influence or control over the behavior of others within the military establishment. Military elites are usually composed of the highest ranking officers within the armed forces. This is not to suggest that officers of middle or junior rank in some nations never wield considerable power. Neither should it be forgotten that senior officers often depend on the expertise and advice of lower-ranking officers in the making of military decisions.

Traditionally, military officers have been classified broadly as commanders or staff officers. The increase in the complexity of warfare during the past century has led some sociologists to devise new classifications for the members of the professional officer corps. Professor Morris Janowitz, for example, conceives of them as heroic leaders, military managers, and military technologists:

The heroic leader embodies traditional themes of martial spirit and personal valor. By contrast, the military manager reflects the growth of the organizational and pragmatic dimensions of warmaking. He is the professional with effective links to civilian society, but he is still concerned with the calculus required for the management of violence. Finally, the military technologist is

concerned with incorporating scientific and technological developments of civilian society into the military.¹

The military elites of the emerging nations of Asia are, in the main, members of Janowitz's military manager class. Because ground forces comprise the bulk of the military strength in the region, most of the military managers are army officers.

The attitudes of the members of the elites toward domestic politics and their effectiveness in assisting in the development of viable political processes are conditioned by their civilian backgrounds, by their professional training and experience, and by the political and social environment in which they function. Listed below are several general characteristics which appear to be typical of the elites of the Asian nations under consideration.

1. The elites exhibit a professionalism which impresses the civilian element of the population with its apparent promise of order and efficiency, its relatively dynamic approach to "getting things done," its ability to make decisions, and its adeptness at controlling mass organizations, albeit through the use of authoritarian methods.

2. The mentality of the elitist is characterized by a practical approach to problem solving, a bold assertiveness, and a belief in "doing" rather than in "thinking." In its extreme, this characteristic embraces anti-intellectualism.

¹Morris Janowitz, The Military in the Political Development of New Nations, p. 41.

3. The professional and political ideologies of the elites are distinguished by a strong sense of nationalism and public service, a puritanical outlook toward corruption and decadence in the civilian segment of society, and a conviction that social, political, and economic change can be achieved through collective public enterprise.

4. Professional contacts with the Western nations have made the elites aware of the differences between the status of their own countries and that of the more advanced nations. As a result, they are advocates of "modernization" and "Westernization."

5. The internal cohesion of the military elites is often a tenuous matter because of differences in education and training, operational experience, and intergenerational cleavages.

6. The elites harbor an antipolitician bias. They are suspicious and intolerant of the politicians' propensity to negotiate, compromise, and temporize.

7. The elites are not always conversant with the subtleties involved in providing rational, coherent, and responsive political leadership to their nations.

8. With rare exceptions, the elitists have had no formal training or experience in dealing with the problems of social and economic development which confront their nations.

Certain of these attributes can be cited to support the argument that favors the direct participation of the military elites in national political affairs. Professor Guy J. Pauker urged as long ago as 1959 that ways be found to use the organizational strengths

of the armies of Southeast Asia and the leadership potential of their officer corps as

temporary kernels of national integration, around which the other constructive forces of the various societies could rally, during a short period of breakthrough from present stagnation into a genuine developmental take-off.²

In recognizing the military's lack of political skills, Pauker argued that the officer corps could acquire competence in this area faster than the existing political systems could "acquire enough organizational strength, ideological consensus, and purposefulness to give them a chance against totalitarian activists."³

Other observers of the Asian political scene, particularly those imbued with the liberal traditions of the Western democracies, consider the military elites especially ill-suited to enter the political arena. They maintain that the soldiers, impeded by their authoritarian attitudes and their dearth of political experience and sophistication, would create more problems than they would resolve. The contribution of the military to a nation's political development, this argument continues, should be limited to the maintenance of the military proficiency necessary to provide an adequate defense against aggression and subversion, and to the implementation of civic action programs.

These arguments need not be evaluated here. Such an undertaking

²Guy J. Pauker, "Southeast Asia as a Problem Area in the Next Decade," World Politics, Vol. XI, Apr. 1959, p. 342.

³Ibid.

has been relegated to the status of an academic exercise by the march of events. Military elites are directly and profoundly involved in domestic political activities in Pakistan, South Korea, South Vietnam, and Thailand. Only in India have the military remained in an essentially nonpolitical posture. We turn now to an examination of the nature of the political roles played by these elites and to a consideration of the circumstances under which they assumed these roles.

POLITICAL ROLES OF THE MILITARY ELITES

Since the end of the Second World War the international tensions created by Communist belligerence and by the prolonged dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir have resulted in the establishment of large standing military forces in South Korea, South Vietnam, Thailand, Pakistan, and India. These forces have participated in a variety of military activities: some have served primarily as deterrents to aggression; others have taken part in large scale, extended combat operations; still others have fought relatively shortlived border clashes. The activities of these armed forces have not been limited to purely military actions. All have contributed indirectly, and in varying degrees, to political development through the conduct of civic action programs in the fields of education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health and sanitation.

As the threats to national security have persisted or even

increased, the military elites have become conspicuous segments of society. They have, with one exception, developed a significant potential as a political force. This potential has been realized by intervention in domestic politics at the highest level. In so doing, the four elites have assumed the roles of constitutional caretakers or reformers.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CARETAKERS

When playing the role of constitutional caretakers, the military seize the reins of power ostensibly to establish conditions under which political authority may be eventually returned to a civilian government through constitutional procedures. A variant of this role is being played by President (General) Park of South Korea who became a civilian in 1963 and was elected to the presidency in the fall of that year.

Thailand

Military elites have played a dominant role in the politics of Thailand since 1932 when a group of army officers and civil servants brought an end to absolute monarchy and established a constitutional government. Subsequently, the military have been either caretakers or behind-the-scenes supporters of the civil regimes in power. When the elitists have deemed it necessary to switch from the supporter to the caretaker role, they have justified their seizure of political power by pointing to the inefficiency or irresponsibility of the

incumbent government, to the seditious actions of some of its members, or to its inability to cope with an immediate Communist threat.

The position of the military elite as a primary source of Thai political power and political change can be ascribed to its control over the means of violence, to its firm stand against communism, and to its organizational ability. Another important factor has been the lack of a viable political alternative. The rigid social structure of Thailand has obstructed the evolution of effective political parties and social organizations.

South Vietnam

Unlike its counterpart in Thailand, the military elite of South Vietnam has only recently begun to play a decisive role in domestic politics. The political machinations of this elite following the overthrow of President Diem in November 1963 have been amply publicized and analyzed.

At the time of the coup, the military constituted the only element in a melange of conflicting ethnic, religious, political, and economic interests that was sufficiently strong and integrated to depose Diem and his authoritarian regime. Possibly the compelling factor in alienating the army leadership from the Diem government was the attempt of the President to identify the military with the policy of oppression of the Buddhists. The military elite felt that its honor had been tarnished and took action to "carry out a comprehensive revolution in order to build a truly democratic regime, to

increase measures against communism, and to insure a free and happy life for every citizen."⁴

South Korea

Elements of the military elite of South Korea seized control of that country's government in 1961 and proclaimed two primary objectives: the saving of the nation from chaos and communism, and the establishment of conditions conducive to the creation of a democratic system suitable to the needs and nature of Korean society.

One year earlier, public dissatisfaction with the corruption, stagnation, and autocratic character of President Syngman Rhee's administration had been reflected in student riots which led to Rhee's enforced retirement. John Chang became Prime Minister in the parliamentary government formed by the Korean National Assembly after Rhee's departure. Chang not only failed to eliminate corruption and inefficiency within the national government, but he was incapable of maintaining public order: mass demonstrations were held by dissident groups on all major political, economic, and social issues.

By the spring of 1961 many influential Koreans began to search for a strong leadership which could reverse the trend toward total chaos. The choice appeared to lie between the army, many of whose officers had been trained in the United States, and the Korean

⁴Nguyen Khanh, as quoted by Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams; A Political and Military Analysis, p. 457.

intelligentsia, which was largely Western-oriented. The intelligentsia, unlike the elite of the army, did not possess the organizational skill and sense of purpose needed to seize and to retain control of the government. A military junta overthrew the Chang government and took office in May 1961. Steps were taken to restore public order, to reduce the level of corruption, and to initiate a program to stimulate economic growth.

National elections were held in the fall of 1963. General Park, sans uniform, was elected President when his political opposition was rendered ineffective by its internal disunity.

THE MILITARY REFORMER

The military reformer assumes power to sweep away all vestiges of the old order and to create new political institutions. President (Field Marshal) Ayub Khan of Pakistan is a successfully practicing reformer.

Pakistan in 1958 was beset by a myriad of problems which had accumulated when the leading politicians and civil officials failed to provide the requisite stability and organization for the progressive social, economic, and political development of the country. The military elite, while stemming from the British tradition of apolitical professional officers, considered the situation serious enough to warrant its intervention.

As Ayub Khan put it at the time of the military takeover, "History would never have forgiven us if the present chaotic

conditions were allowed to go on any further."⁵ Ayub's military government declared martial law and proceeded systematically to restructure the existing political mechanisms. Pakistan was introduced to the concept of "basic democracy," based on the election of one representative for every one thousand to fifteen hundred people.

In accordance with the provisions of a new constitution promulgated in 1962, a presidential election was held in 1965. Ayub Khan emerged victorious from a contest whose primary issue involved the merits of "basic democracy" as opposed to parliamentary democracy.

THE APOLITICAL MILITARY ELITE OF INDIA

The military elite of India has remained essentially outside of the political maelstrom. Three major factors account for this apolitical demeanor. First, the Indian political leadership has been relatively effective in discharging its constitutional responsibilities. Secondly, Indian federalism presents an almost insurmountable obstacle to any seizure of power by the military. The chief ministers of the 15 states of the Indian federation occupy are capable of putting up considerable resistance to any military coup designed to alter the existing political power structure. Finally, the military professionals in India were downgraded administratively and socially during the long era of nonalignment which followed Indian independence. Throughout this period resource allocation priorities were given to

⁵Ayub Khan as quoted by Samin U. Khan, "The Revolution in Pakistan," Pakistan Horizon, Vol. XII, Sep. 1959, p. 221.

nonmilitary programs. Although these priorities were changed dramatically after the Chinese Communist attack on India in 1962, the performance of the Indian Army in that conflict did little to enhance the professional reputation of the military.

The fragmentary information available on the accomplishments of the Indian military elite during the recent clash with Pakistan, indicates that it acquitted itself well during that conflict. However, given the current nature of the Indian political system and the relative strength and skill of its leadership, it seems unlikely that any increase in the prestige of the military elite arising from its actions in the encounter with Pakistan will cause it to abandon its traditional apolitical role for that of the caretaker or reformer.

THE TREND TOWARD RULE BY THE MILITARY ELITES

Several broad conclusions may be drawn from the preceding survey of military participation in the domestic politics of Pakistan, South Korea, South Vietnam, Thailand, and India.

1. During the years since the end of World War II, large military forces have been established, equipped, trained, and deployed to deter or to fight aggression against each of the five countries. As threats to the national security have continued or increased, the prestige of the military has risen, and with it the political potential of the military elite.

2. The armed forces of the five nations have contributed indirectly, and in varying degrees, to political development through the conduct of military civic action programs.

3. Intervention in domestic politics by the military elites in four countries is attributable primarily to the failure of the civilian political leadership to cope with pressing internal and external problems and to the lack of cohesion within and between the civil elites. In each case the military elite was the only organized and disciplined group capable of creating those conditions of order and stability which could lead to political, social, and economic progress.

4. In Pakistan and South Korea the military regimes have been legitimatized through constitutional processes, and procedures have been established for the orderly transfer of political power.

5. The continuing Communist threat and the lack of viable political alternatives in South Vietnam and Thailand should keep their military oligarchies in power for the foreseeable future.

Thus, the caretakers and the reformer place the United States in a singular dilemma. Our tradition of liberal Western democracy makes it distasteful for us to associate with governments controlled by professional military officers. On the other hand, we accept the principle of mutual security as a means of combating militant communism. What, then, should be the nature of our relationships with the soldier-politicians whose countries are tied to us by bilateral or multilateral security arrangements? Should we support them without qualification or should we exert our influence to encourage the establishment of governments akin to the representative democracies of the United States or Great Britain?

To begin with, it must be recognized that the United States does not have it within its power to provide each of these nations with the type of government which we might think it should have. The people of the individual countries must determine how they wish to be governed. The range of options open to the people of South Vietnam, South Korea, Pakistan, and Thailand has been limited. The experience of the post-World War II period indicated that the choice lay between some form of tutelage that would lead eventually to a form of democracy suited to the needs and capabilities of each nation, or political disintegration accompanied by social and economic chaos that would make these countries particularly vulnerable to Communist incursion.

While the domination of domestic politics by the military is, hopefully, a condition which exists to be transcended, we must not expect the countries concerned to conform in time to the Western model of democracy. They lack the classic prerequisites for democracy as we know it: a high level of literacy, social homogeneity, and economic prosperity above the subsistence level. At best, we can anticipate and encourage models similar to the "basic democracy" of Pakistan and the "Koreanized democracy" of South Korea. The managerial and technical skills of the military elites and their control over the means of violence will continue to assure them of cardinal roles in the evolution of whatever political systems finally develop.

An important element of the American strategy of containment has

been the policy of providing economic and military assistance to selected non-Communist countries located on the periphery of the major Communist powers. South Korea, South Vietnam, Thailand, and Pakistan, although under the political control of military elites, have been designated "forward defense" countries and have been the recipients of considerable American aid. The events of the past few years have demonstrated that this policy has been, in terms of our national interest, both pragmatic and effective. It is presently undergoing its most rigorous test in South Vietnam.

Our foreign aid policy should recognize the military elites in Pakistan, South Korea, South Vietnam, and Thailand as essential elements of society whose competence is not limited to purely military matters. We should support these "kernels of integration" by helping them to sustain their strengths and to overcome their weaknesses as nation-builders in general, and contributors to political development in particular. Much of the aid required to accomplish these tasks can be provided under the aegis of the US Military Assistance Program (MAP).

THE MAP AND THE MILITARY ELITES

The training of foreign military personnel has been a recognized element of the US military assistance effort since its initiation. The primary purpose of this training has been to increase the effectiveness of foreign officers and enlisted men in performing their military duties. A wide variety of military skills has been imparted

to the trainees both in their own countries and at military facilities in the United States.

In recent years there has been an expansion of MAP supported instruction for foreign officers in nonmilitary subjects. This trend reflects the massive emphasis that has been placed on the tactics and techniques of counterinsurgency and on the contribution of military civic action programs to nation-building. It also stems from the recognition that many MAP trainees have assumed key civilian posts in their countries.

Illustrations of this new direction in officer training abound. They include the exposure of students in the Regular Course at the US Army Command and General Staff College to the basic concepts of international relations and to the economic, political, and social factors which influence national military strategy.⁶ Another example is the Command Course for Senior Foreign Officers conducted by the US Naval War College. In addition to studying the principles of naval warfare, the students in this course are provided the opportunity to further their understanding of politico-military geography, international organizations and defense arrangements, world resources, and the economic aspects of war.⁷

The training included in these and in other courses of instruction attempts to capitalize on the potential of the MAP program for the

⁶US Army Command and General Staff College, Program of Instruction, May 1964, pp. 20-47.

⁷US Naval War College, Catalog of Courses, 1962-1964, p. 24.

creation of nonmilitary side-effects which are beneficial to the recipient countries and favorable to US interests. A more explicit effort should be made, however, to provide present and future military elites with the skill and sophistication required to play meaningful roles in the development of viable political processes within their nations.

This effort should be designed to improve the quality of the elites' contribution to this development in the following areas: (1) the achievement and maintenance of the politico-military proficiency necessary to provide an adequate defense against the manifold forms of aggression and subversion, and (2) the planning and implementation of military civic action to foster economic and social development, with particular emphasis on basic citizenship and literacy programs and on the training of technicians to staff government and private institutions. Additionally, selected members of the elites should be prepared for their contingent employment in high level posts in government or in private life.

Specific items in a program of this nature should include: public administration, the elements of economics and sociology which relate to the problems of economic and social development in the emerging nations, and comparative studies in civil-military relations and political systems. New or expanded mechanisms for the conduct of this training are incorporated into the broad recommendations which follow. It should be noted that the first of these recommendations is applicable solely to Asia. The remaining suggestions could be

applied, on a selective basis, to other regions and countries of the world.

1. The establishment of an Asian Defense College. This institution would be patterned after the NATO and Inter-American Defense Colleges. The curriculum would include instruction in the military, economic, political, and social factors involved in the defense of the non-Communist nations of Asia. The college would offer an unparalleled opportunity for selected senior military officers of the region to establish personal contacts and to exchange ideas and techniques on a whole range of subjects to include those specifically concerned with nation-building. It is recognized that the absence of the cognate cohesiveness of Western Europe and Latin America would complicate the setting up of an Asian Defense College. But the problems inherent in such an undertaking would not be insuperable if the United States would apply liberal dosages of patience, perseverance, and ingenuity toward their resolution.

2. Politico-military training for foreign officers of senior and middle rank. The US Army and Air Force should give consideration to the establishment of courses of instruction at their staff colleges which would parallel the Navy's Command Course for Senior Foreign Officers.

3. Schooling at American colleges and universities. There should be an increase in the present number of high caliber junior officers selected to study political science, public administration, economics, and related subjects at American colleges and universities.

4. Research projects. Additional attention should be given to systematic, discrete, and continuing research into the specific roles of the military elites in the political development of the newly-emerging nations. This research should form the basis for the evolution of future strategy and tactics for providing MAP training to selected members of these elites.

The major objections to these recommendations center around the problem of political sensitivity. However, the central and traditional Anglo-American argument that the proper military role is an apolitical one, does not apply to all of the developing nations. We have seen that the military elites in four Asian countries were thrust into the political arena to fill a vacuum caused by the failure of the civilian authorities to provide satisfactorily for the needs and aspirations of their peoples. The military in Burma, Indonesia, and the National Republic of China have also played influential roles in domestic politics. These are facts and must be confronted. They point to the requirement for a program similar to the one outlined above. The training recommended is aimed at preparing for its broadest national responsibilities an element of the population which has played and is likely to play a major role in the political development of these new nations.

The establishment of politico-military objectives for the MAP training of selected military elitists is not an endeavor to encourage permanent patterns of military rule. Rather, it is an

attempt to cultivate the potential of these individuals to contribute constructively to the creation of viable political processes in their countries.


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