# Threat Construction in Post-9/11 US Foreign Policy Discourses: Implications for (Critical) Security in Southeast Asia

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**Abstract**


     Due to its inherently constructive properties, the US "war on terror" discourse has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This idea is explored specifically with regards to how the American articulation of threat in "war on terror" discourses informs a foreign policy that in turn has active consequences for state and non-state actors in Southeast Asia. The importance of discourse is explained with a focus on the discursive construction of threat as intrinsic to the "security project" (Campbell 1998) of the American state, as well as to American national identity more generally. Throughout this analysis, attention is drawn to the relationships between US foreign policy and the characterizations, within its discourse, of "threat" as being distinctly alien and pathological. From this analytical perspective, the emphasis is shifted away from a focus on "threat" and instead moves towards the role that the *characterization of threat* plays in constituting identities, and in constituting the parameters in which the politics of "security" play out. This paper contends that irruptions of post-9/11 US foreign policy discourse in the East Asian region can be observed in the "securitization" (Buzan et. al. 1998) of US economic and trade policy; the doctrinaire understanding of Islam-identified political movements; and the trend towards the re-militarization of US relations with Southeast Asian actors. Importantly, these manifestations of discursive construction engender consequences that contribute to the possibility of an increase in terrorist activities aimed at "Western" targets, and a proliferation of anti-democratic and repressive behaviours by Southeast Asian governments under the guise of anti-terror measures.

***Threat Construction in Post 9/11 US Foreign Policy Discourses: Implications for (Critical) Security in Southeast Asia[1]***

United States' foreign policy discourse vis-à-vis the so-called "war on terror" takes on constructive properties that have active consequences for the populations that are the subject of these discourses. Here, this idea is explored specifically with regards to the American articulation of the threat of terrorism; and how this articulation of threat in "war on terror" discourses informs a foreign policy that in turn has active consequences for state and non-state actors in East and Southeast Asia.[2] First, key facets of official US foreign policy, both pre and post-September 11th, are highlighted. Throughout this analysis, attention is drawn to the relationships between the articulation of US foreign policy and the characterizations, within its discourse, of "threat" as being distinctly alien and pathological. The importance of discourse is explained with a focus on the discursive construction of threat as intrinsic to the "security project" (Campbell 1998) of the American state, as well as to US national identity more generally.

Second, the "irruption"[3] of this discourse into Southeast Asian security politics is suggested. It is theorized that the "securitization" of US economic policy in the region (see Higgott 2004); the doctrinaire understanding of the region's various Islam-identified political movements (see Leheny 2005, Hamilton-Hart 2005, Collier 2006); and the trend towards the re-militarization of US relations with several key Southeast Asian countries (see Gershman 2002, Leheny 2005), are all functionally related to the construction of threat in contemporary US foreign policy discourse. Importantly, these manifestations of discursive construction engender consequences that contribute to increased possibilities for the enactment of terrorist activities aimed at "Western" targets, linked to rising levels of anti-American sentiment; and a proliferation of anti-democratic and repressive behaviours by Southeast Asian governments under the guise of anti-terror measures.

It is important to frame this analysis with the following qualifications in mind. While attention to discourse is key to developing a comprehensive understanding of the substance and effects of official US foreign policy, I would argue that there are two intellectual correctives in terms of the importance of discourse. First, it is important not to

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[1] This paper arises out of work to improve a preliminary version presented at the CIIA Youth Symposium in Montreal, QC (March 21, 2007). This paper also draws on several points made in a recent publication: Jennifer Mustapha (2007), "Re-Assessing East Asian Security Regionalization After 9/11," in Anita Singh and David McDonough eds. *Defence to Development: Resolving Threats to Global Security.* (Centre For Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University:Halifax).

[2] "East Asia" here is a largely arbitrary designation that refers to the Western rim of the Pacific, from the Koreas down to Indonesia. "Southeast Asia" refers more specifically to the members of ASEAN-Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar/Burma. Both designations are used because, while the focus of this paper is on the effects of US foreign policy in Southeast Asia in particular, US foreign policy towards Southeast Asia is greatly influenced by the dynamics that come into play when China, Taiwan/Chinese Taipei, North Korea and Japan are brought into the picture.

[3] Jennifer Milliken and David Sylvan (1996) usefully characterize the nexus of state identity executed *as* foreign policy as an "*irruption* of one world into another" (Milliken and Sylvan p. 342, emphasis added), where beliefs and words are translated into active consequences.

fall into the trap of unsophisticated discursive reductionism, where discourse is seen as wholly constituting foreign policy in a simplistic cause-and-effect formulation. Rather, discourse is an inextricable component of the variety of complex factors (material and ideational) that arise out of and constitute "international relations" and "security." Conversely, it is equally important to avoid casting discourse as nothing other than a tool of material interests and ignoring its fundamental constitutive properties in the process. Further, this paper does not suggest that there is no actual terrorist activity in the Southeast Asian region, merely that it has been misconstrued and magnified by US foreign policy discourses in ways that might actually increase terrorist activity, as well as contribute to other forms of insecurity. Taking these caveats into consideration, what emerges from this analysis is a nuanced understanding of the security environment that is created vis-à-vis US foreign policy in a post-9/11 world.

## I. US Foreign Policy: Discursive Constructions and the Evolution of the Bush Doctrine

As David Campbell (1998) observes, the "objectification and externalization of danger that are central to contemporary assessments of security and politics… need to be understood as *the effects of political practices rather than the conditions of their possibility*" (p. 16, emphasis added). It is problematic to accept the conventional understanding that foreign policy is but a reaction to the "realities" of an antagonistic international milieu, and is independent from the theories deployed to understand them. In rejecting a "false demarcation of a theory/practice divide so that theory is outside of the world it purports to simply observe," it is possible to employ an interpretive and inter-subjective approach "…that sees theory *as* practice" (Campbell 1998, 17). In other words, the "truths" that are taken for granted as the foundation for policy are actually discursively constructed "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1980), which contain powerful political and cultural meaning (Gusterson 1998). These regimes of truth come to be through "multiple political practices, related as much to the constitution of various subjectivities as to the intentional action of predetermined subjects" (Campbell 1998, 17).

From this analytical perspective, the emphasis is shifted away from a focus on "threat" and instead moves towards the role that the *characterization of threat* plays in constituting identities, and in constituting the parameters in which the politics of "security" play out. In the context of the Cold War, Campbell emphasizes that it was the *characterization* of the external threat of Soviet Communism upon which US national identity became highly dependent. This was achieved through a "scripting" of US identity that was contingent upon its opposition to the identity ascribed to that threat (Campbell 1998, 30). Importantly, this threat was "othered" in a visceral way, and depicted as pathological and alien. Ultimately, the emphasis on fear and danger within the discourse became crucial to its effectiveness at accentuating the scripted identity of the US as a defender of freedom and upholder of civilization (Campbell 1998, 30-33). Hence, the repetitive articulation of danger in (any) foreign policy discourse is not just a reference to "…threats to a state's identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility" (Campbell 1998, 13). The current "war on terror" has arguably resurrected the scripting

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of American national identity in this manner. We can observe that in some crucial ways, current US foreign policy has in fact gone "back to the future" (Mark Beeson 2007a 9).

**i. *Interregnum*: Post-Cold War US foreign policy discourses (prior to 9/11)**

During the Cold War, America's official security policy in East Asia was predicated on establishing successful, pro-capitalist liberalized economies "to stand as a bulwark against communist expansion, which led them to pour aid and investment into [the region]" (Beeson 2007a, 4). This integrated foreign policy approach, characterized by a merging of military purpose with economic tools, was executed as a "hub and spokes" model of bilateral strategic-military relationships in efforts to contain communism in Asia. As a result, many of Washington's economic policies during the Cold War were actually offshoots of strategic-military goals. After the end of the Cold War however, and particularly with the ascension of the Clinton administration, American foreign policy became more economics-focused than it had ever been during the decades-long confrontation with the Soviet Union.[4] American foreign policy during the Clinton administration was thus characterized by the subordination of conventional strategic-military policies to neoliberal economic interests. Clinton's oft quoted dictum- "It's the economy, stupid"- informed much of his administration's policies both at home and abroad. The approach of American policy makers during this period "…[was] replete with assumptions about the need to make the world safe for the liberal economic enterprise" (Higgott 2004, 429). This approach also rested upon the widely held presupposition in Washington, that the US was the world's unrivalled military superpower- a moment that allowed Washington to pursue these neoliberal economic goals unhindered by military distractions.

Freed from the operative and narrative strictures of the Cold War, US foreign policy during the Clinton era was thus "open-textured" and especially commercially focused, and this was observable in policies towards East and Southeast Asia (Dittmer 2002, 47). Observers of American East Asia policy during this period would cite the significant trend away from a strategic-military focus in the region and towards a distinctly neo-liberal economic approach to engagement (Acharya 1999, Christoffersen 2002, Dibb et al. 1998, Higgott 2004, Rosenberger 2001). The focus was on upholding the stability of the status quo in the region, which was favourable to American economic and political interests, and which was underwritten by policies favouring economic growth and trade liberalization (Chistoffersen 2002, 371). As with US foreign policy writ large, in East Asia specifically there was also "a preponderance of the multilateralisms geared towards neoliberal economic globalization" (Dibb et al. 1998, p. 18). The discourse and enactment of US foreign policy during this period thus indicated that the "scripted" identity of the United States "was one of making the world 'safe' for an American-style neoliberal economic globalization project" (Mustapha 2007, 260).

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[4] Recognizing that some of what might be called "conventional" strategic-military concerns continued to have a place in post-Cold War US foreign policy. This was evidenced in the examples of military intervention in the former Yugoslavia and the strong involvement of the Clinton administration in the Oslo Peace Accords regarding Israel-Palestine. Notable as well, is that China was widely perceived by many in Washington in the early 1990s as the "next great threat" to US strategic-military interests.

In the late 1990s and following the Asian financial crisis, US foreign policy shifted even further away from Cold War-*esque* strategic-military matters as the US secured its economic primacy in the global economy, both functionally and ideationally. As Richard Higgott (2004) surmises:

> The US had enjoyed a decade of steady growth, the high tech boom was in full flight and the Asian Economic Miracle had run out of steam across the board. Following sustained stagnation in Japan and financial crisis in other parts of Asia the "miracle" was pronounced dead. The atmospherics of the US-Asia relationship saw Asian hubris of the early 1990s give way to American *schadenfreude* in the late 1990s. US preponderance was firmly established- unipolarity seemed to be more than just a moment (428).

This securing of American economic primacy underscored further changes in US foreign policy in the latter days of the Clinton administration, which ultimately became centred on the preservation of the United States' preponderance of economic power (Higgott 2004, 429).

The newly elected Bush administration took over at this apex of American military, ideational and economic pre-eminence. The hawkishness of key figures in the new White House became manifest immediately, and this was prior to 9/11. While Clinton took advantage of the post-Cold War moment of American strategic primacy to pursue largely economic objectives, Bush in turn took for granted America's moment as an unrivalled economic superpower. Realist concerns with nuclear proliferation, missile-defence and strategic balance-of-power matters were re-written into national policy documents and into policies towards East Asia. Secure in the achievement of American economic primacy and in keeping with the Republican adherence to realist strategic notions, Bush's White House began to view China in particular as primarily a *military-strategic* competitor. North Korea was also gaining the dubious distinction of renewed attentions under Bush's national security agenda. The pre-9/11 Bush approach to Asia was thus characterized primarily by a containment strategy with regards to China, as well as continued efforts to moderate North Korea's nuclear designs (Mustapha 2007).

Importantly, Bush's East Asia strategy was highly dependent upon the US-Japan security relationship (Christoffersen 2002, 371), a post-World War II artefact that continues to be the lynchpin of US strategic policies in the region. The continued importance of this relationship to Washington is evidenced by numerous declarations to that effect in national security documents, speeches, and policy meetings. For example, a joint statement by President Bush and then Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori on March 16th 2001 (White House Press Release) states, "…the U.S.-Japan alliance is the foundation of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region…we need to continue to carry out commitments under the 1996 U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security," and the two leaders "reaffirmed the particular importance of maintaining close consultations and coordination regarding North Korea, both bilaterally and trilaterally with the Republic of Korea." On June 30th 2001, Bush and then newly elected Japanese PM Koizumi issued another joint statement re-affirming the US-Japan Security Treaty (White House Press

Release). Among other things, they "…emphasized the importance of encouraging China's constructive role in the international community and… working with the Republic of Korea to achieve peace on the Korean peninsula, furthering non-proliferation efforts around the globe."

Bush's policy shift towards East Asia was further underscored by a downturn in US relations with the region (vis-à-vis China), which had already begun under Clinton with the allegedly accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. This was followed by a gradual rolling-back of US participation in East Asian multilateralism, the EP-3 spy-plane incident,[5] official US support for an independent Taiwan, and the re-introduction of ballistic missile defence (BMD) onto the American national security agenda. Consequently, up until 9/11, all signs pointed towards US foreign policy in East Asia as moving in a direction mostly defined by the strategic containment of China. For example, on September 4th 2001, the White House issued a press release promising that officials from Washington and Beijing would meet "in the coming weeks" to discuss the subject of ballistic missile defence and China's own development of offensive nuclear forces. This planned meeting was considered by many observers to be in response to Beijing's concerns that the US BMD program is at least partially directed towards China (Mustapha 2007). This White House press release confirms Washington's then containment-focused approach towards Chinese proliferation:

> …[we] will make clear that the U.S. missile defence program does not threaten China but seeks to counter limited missile threats from rogue states and the danger of accidental or unauthorized launches.  Only those foreign parties with hostile intent toward the United States have grounds to fear U.S. missile defence…No one should try to blame the modernization of China's offensive nuclear forces on our missile defence efforts.  China's ongoing modernization effort was initiated years ago... [Our] missile defence is an important element of our broader strategy to combat proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction.  The export of Chinese missile technology continues to be a concern (which is why we imposed sanctions on a Chinese company on Saturday), as does the Chinese build-up of short-range ballistic missiles… (*U.S., China to*

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[5] On April 2nd 2001, a Chinese fighter jet collided with an American EP-3 spy plane over the South China Sea. The EP-3 was forced to make an emergency landing on an airfield on Hainan Island, China. The Chinese aircraft and pilot were lost in the incident. The US crew was not immediately returned to the American authorities and the Chinese government declined all access to the EP-3 plane in the days immediately following the collision. The event precipitated a political crisis between the two countries, which was resolved 11 days later upon the return of the crew to the US. Following the crisis, Bush issued a statement that included these words: "China's decision to prevent the return of our crew for 11 days is inconsistent with the kind of relationship we have both said we wish to have. As we move forward, the United States and China will, no doubt, again face difficult issues and fundamental disagreements.  We disagree on important basic issues such as human rights and religious freedom…I will always stand squarely for American interests and American values.  And those will, no doubt, sometimes cause disagreements with China" (*Remarks by President Bush Upon the Return of U.S. Service Members*, Press Conference, Rose Garden, Washington DC, April 12 2001).

*Discuss Missile Defence***,** Statement by the White House Press Secretary, White House Press Release, September 4th 2001)

But then the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 occurred, and a new stratum of security discourse was added to articulations of American foreign policy around the globe, overtaking other issues on the agenda. Notably, the scheduled discussion regarding Chinese missile technology never took place. When American and Chinese officials did finally meet in October of 2001, the talks were primarily on "shared concerns" about terrorism. Missile defence was briefly mentioned in subsequent statements by the two governments, but the promised challenge to China's development of nuclear forces never materialized (Mustapha 2007).

## ii. *The New American Century***: The Bush Doctrine after 9/11**

Even prior to the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil, the foreign policy doctrine of the Bush administration was founded on a scripted identity steeped in nationalist myths about America's role in the world as a responsible superpower. The events of 9/11 cemented and reinforced this scripted identity, which was actualized in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Key elements of the post 9/11 Bush doctrine find their roots in this scripted identity and can be summarized as follows: a declared belief in democracy and liberalism at home and the historical "responsibility" to restructure and rebuild the world towards allegedly universal values of democratic freedom; the perception of great threats that can only be staved off by forceful policies that include "preventive" war; the willingness to act unilaterally in combination with the conviction that unilateralism can be both necessary and more effective than multilateralism; and the belief that the US must assert its primacy and hegemony in world politics, whereby "American security, world stability, and the spread of liberalism require the US to act in ways others *can* not and *must* not" (Jervis 2005, 583). These elements signal a re-ordering of US foreign policy in ways that largely reflect a shift in the psyche of American policy makers after 9/11. In this way, the "war on terror" and the Iraqi invasion can be seen to result from a confluence of factors that are best described as a change of "beliefs" held by the Bush administration. These beliefs rest upon two key underlying themes: American *fear*, which arises out of an inflated and misconstrued "threat" assessment of terrorism vis-à-vis Saddam Hussein; and an American sense of *responsibility*, which arises out of a latter-day, Wilsonian, *mission civilisatrice* to cure the world of its undemocratic ills (Jervis 2005, 580-591).

With regards to the heightened fear of terrorism following 9/11, it is notable that there is also a palpable fear *of* fear that emerges in the discourse of the Bush doctrine (Jervis 2005, 580). This relates to an understanding of security as a "thick signifier" (Huysmans 1998), where "security" becomes something more than an unproblematic axiomatic condition or practice. As such,

> …the meaning of security does not just depend on the specific analytical questions it raises, it also articulates particular understandings of our relation to nature, other human beings and the self. 'Security' refers also to a wider

framework of meaning (symbolic order… or culture… or discursive formation) within which we organize particular forms of life. (Huysmans 1998, 228).

When understood as a thick signifier, we can better articulate how the story of security "requires the definition of threats, a referent object, and also how it defines our relations to nature, to other human beings and to the self" (Huysmans 1998, 231). "Security" then, can be seen as a self-referential practice rather than assuming an external reality to which it refers. In other words, the signifier of "security" serves "a performative rather than a descriptive force…[and] rather than describing or picturing a condition, it organizes social relations into security relations" (Huysmans 1998, 232).

Notably, the discursive construction of threat is intrinsic to the practice of security. Following this, the externalization of fear through threat construction raises the question of who (or what) to fear (or not to fear). Hence, "the fear in security stories is a double fear… it is both the fear of biological death and *the fear of uncertainty/ the undetermined condition*" (Huysmans 1998, 235 emphasis added). It is this latter aspect of Huysman's double fear that is particularly observable within the Bush doctrine. For example, in his letter accompanying the *2006 National Security Strategy*, President Bush states:

> …America now faces a choice between the path of fear and the path of confidence… history teaches that every time American leaders have taken [the path of fear], the challenges have only increased and the missed opportunities have left future generations less secure… (2006 NSS)

Such axioms are repeated throughout the NSS and in Bush's speeches following 9/11.

Built on this fear, a powerful psychological link between the 9/11 attacks and the drive to depose Saddam Hussein was carefully constructed. The *US National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (2006) skilfully conflates the issues of terrorism, BMD and "rogue states" via the threat of WMD procurement by terrorist groups. Related to this, core elements of the current American *National Security Strategy* are characterized as preventative, which marks a clear departure from established norms of international law (Jackson, 2005). Under Section III of the NSS, the US seeks to "1) *Prevent* attacks by terrorist networks *before* they occur; 2) *Deny* WMD to rogues states and terrorist allies who *would* use them without hesitation; 3) *Deny* terrorist groups the support and sanctuary of rogue states, and 4) *Deny* the terrorists control of any nation that they *would* use as a base and launching pad for terror" (NSS 2006, 12, emphases added).

Bush's persistent exhortations against living in fear along with the elevated threat level promoted within the security discourse, whereby any state or group that *may* have the capability and *may* have the desire to harm America needs to be dealt with pre-emptively, reminds us of Campbell's concept of the "evangelism of fear" (Campbell 1998, 49). This is where the "security project" of the state utilizes anxiety as an end as well as a means, in the same way that the mediaeval Church utilized anxiety as an end and a means towards its "salvation project" (Campbell 1998, 13). It is the continued fostering of anxiety itself that becomes instrumental to the organization of political and social relations in the state's project of security. Furthermore, threats and anxieties are

primarily construed and located within the "texts"[6] of foreign policy. In the case of the Bush doctrine, this has been achieved in a way that conflates the imminent danger of *potential* terrorism with the Hussein regime in Iraq, and now possibly Iran, Syria and tangentially, North Korea (Mustapha 2007).

Since the foreign policy texts that guide national security "actively concern themselves with the scripting of a particular American identity" (Campbell 1998, 32), then the fact that the Bush doctrine collapses the fear of terrorism into the "responsibility" to restructure the world as part of a 21st Century civilizing mission, speak to the central place of threat in current US identity. The same foreign policy discourse, which is typified by statements like "the greater the threat, the greater the risk of inaction" (*National Security Strategy 2002*, 15. *National Security Strategy 2006,* 18), is also typified by Bush's oft stated desire to restructure the world toward "freedom and democracy". In other words, we can observe that the manifestation of American national identity under the Bush doctrine as a paternalistic purveyor of democracy and freedom is at least partially constructed by a discourse rooted in threat and fear (Mustapha 2007).

Threat discourse is thus a powerful tool in the rendering of danger as "the backdrop against which the US policy disposition is regularly vindicated" (Loeppky 2005, 87). This is achieved through the construction of the image of the terrorist as simultaneously rational and irrational, which appeals to both the citizen's "reasonable logic of possibility" *and* "their fear of the unknown" (Loeppky 2005, 88-89). For example, the characterization of threat within the discourse surrounding bio-terrorism was amplified post-9/11 despite the lack of compelling evidence that a mass-casualty biological attack was forthcoming. This amplification of threat was achieved due to the "discursive power of consecutive 'what if?' statements" (Loeppky 2005, 91) that have the effect of equating potential vulnerability with the palpable existence of a real corporal threat. Furthermore, it is arguable that the "reproduction and renewal of 'danger discourse,' [and] the recurring invocation of externally originating threats to the well being of American society against which American identity is defined" (Loeppky 2005, 92) is a frequent theme in the country's foreign policy discourse.[7]

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[6] Texts, both in the literal sense of official foreign policy documentation, and in the non-literal sense of the social/cultural/political practices of foreign policy.

[7] Where Loeppky goes further is in his attempts to show that this is part of a larger strategy to legitimize and reinforce the primacy of American pharmacological and biotechnology groups' interests in the exercise of American foreign policy. Loeppky posits that these industry interests' inform American approaches to intellectual property, trade, and biotechnology regimes, and that these industry groups are structurally favoured to have a disproportionate amount of input in US policy approaches (pp. 100-105). For Loeppky, material interests play the strongest causational role, rendering discourse as more of a tool to be used by scheming policy makers who wish to mollify and mislead their unsuspecting citizenry. As he puts it, "US foreign policy, as a form of public policy, may discursively section off the pathological 'other' as a dangerous, often external, threat, but it rarely does so without underlying material motivations" (p. 111) I find such simplistic cause-effect arguments less plausible than the argument advanced in this paper, that discourse is an inextricable component of a variety of complex factors (material and ideational) that both arise out of and constitute "international relations" and "security." The problem with Loeppky's argument is that it presupposes an improbable degree of cohesiveness and unity in the agency of these "sinister" elements that are alleged to be shaping official discourses. The stuff of conspiracy theories to be sure, but such an understanding does not allow us to interpretively "read" US foreign policy like a text so much as it

## II. *Irruptions*: The Bush doctrine in Southeast Asia

The significance of this latest construction and articulation of threat in US foreign policy resides in the fact that the discourses of the Bush doctrine take on constitutive properties that have active consequences for the populations that are the "subject" of these discourses. In defining new threats, they are actually created, and this sets out a range of new "security" questions. While the "war on terror" does not necessarily supplant the existing modalities of the many actors in the region, it nevertheless creates an additional set of factors, considerations and constraints that affect the populations involved (Leheny 2005). This can be observed vis-à-vis the effects of these key features of the Bush doctrine in Southeast Asia: the securitization of US economic policy in the region (Higgott 2004, Beeson 2007b); the doctrinaire understanding of the region's terrorist groups (Leheny 2005, Hamilton-Hart 2005, Collier 2006); and the re-militarization of US relations with several key Southeast Asian countries (Gershman 2002, Leheny 2005). These features of the Bush doctrine in Southeast Asia are all functionally related to a constructed, and probably overstated, assessment of threat in US foreign policy discourse with reference to the "war on terror". More importantly, these features of the Bush doctrine have real consequences for economic conditions in East Asia, the strength of democratic movements and institutions, and the relationships between local populations and their governments.

### i. *Terrorists for Trade*: The securitization of economic relations

The concept of "securitization" was articulated by Ole Waever of the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al. 1998). The main idea behind this concept is that "security" is actually a practice or "speech act," because to cast something in terms of "security" is profoundly political due to the suspension of "normal politics" that invariably results. This idea introduces the fact that there are political and ethical implications of something being placed on the security agenda (Buzan et al. 1998). How and why something is placed on the security agenda depends on the authority and legitimacy of those committing the securitizing speech act, and securitizing has successfully occurred only when the receiving audiences of the securitizing message accept it as such. Since the security agenda is largely determined by state leaders, the state remains central in this formulation but as a "sedimented" social fact, rather than as a normative "reality" (Buzan et. al. 1998).

As an example, migration can be understood in tangible terms as the movement of people across borders. But when migration is framed as a "security" problem as opposed to a human rights issue, for example, it is drawn into a specific contextual narrative that frames how the people who cross borders are perceived (as potential "security" threats). Buzean et al. (1998) suggest that securitization can occur across several sectors, and Richard Higgott (2005) and others (see Beeson 2007a and 2007b, and Ikenberry 2002)

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disciplines our understanding of those texts to realize pre-conceived ideas.

argue that the Bush doctrine has introduced a securitization of neoliberal economic discourse. As such, we can observe that "some elements of US foreign economic policy [are] subsumed within the wider contextual discourse of the US security agenda" (Higgot 2005, 426). In this foreign policy approach, economic policy is used as an arm of security policy but in a much more direct way than during the Cold War. Hence, "the aim of securitization is to justify the imposition of conditions and measures in the area of foreign economic policy that would not usually be considered the norm in the policy domain… [and this] securitization discourse is one of reward and threat." (Higgott 2005, 427)

In other words, since 9/11 Washington has been wielding bilateral *economic* agreements as carrots and sticks to drum up support for the US *security* agenda under the "war on terror". For instance, (then) US Trade Representative Bob Zoellick testified at the 2003 House Agriculture Committee Hearings on international trade negotiations, that an FTA with New Zealand was unlikely due to a combination of sensitive agriculture issues and "some things done recently" (Hearing Transcript, House Agriculture Committee 2003 p. 23).[8] It was widely believed by trade observers in New Zealand, the US and elsewhere, that the "other things" referred to by Zoellick included the continued refusal to allow US ships carrying nuclear materials to traverse New Zealand's waters, and Prime Minister Helen Clark's vocal opposition to the war in Iraq (Mustapha 2007). In June 2003, Zoellick's actions further revealed the Bush Administration's securitization of trade policy. In a speech to the Institute of International Economics in Washington DC Zoellick stated, "A free trade agreement [with the US] is not something one has a right to. It's a privilege. But it is a privilege that must be earned via the support of US policy goals… [the Bush administration]… expects cooperation- or better- on security issues" (cited in Asia Times 2005).

US policies under the "war on terror" have also affected Washington's containment policies towards China specifically. While changes in the Sino-American relationship are linked to the fact that China has increasingly been seen as an economic opportunity rather than merely a strategic threat, it is arguable that the "war on terror" has further complicated this relationship. Beijing was quick to express a degree of support for the war on terror, and Washington has acknowledged and welcomed this support. Beijing, in turn, has not only taken this historic opportunity to divert American attention away from its missile defence plans and its regionalization efforts with Central Asia[9], it

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[8] Zoellick: "….New Zealand is a challenge, Mr. Boehner. It is a challenge because when we set up the notice on Australia, there was put in a paragraph that said we sort of take a sense of Congress. But there really are kind of two issues that have caused some impediment. One is, just to be frank with the committee, a lot of their agricultural exports are ones that are very sensitive here; and we have to bring something back that we can get some broad-based support on. And if you start thinking about dairy and others, it is not the easiest thing to be able to carry here. Then the question is how we can handle that and whether we can handle it, given the overall relationship; and there are *some things done recently* that I think made that a little bit harder for us to carry." (Hearing Transcript, House Agriculture Committee 2003 p. 23, http://agriculture.house.gov/hearings/108/1085.pdf )

[9] China, Russia and some central Asian republics (the "__stans") have formed a coalition of countries called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The organization was formed prior to 9/11, and its original focus was primarily on energy issues and cooperation against secessionist terrorism in those countries.

has also used this occasion to crack down on its Uighur minority in Xianjing Province.[10] All is not rosy however, and despite the warming relations between Washington and Beijing, there are suspicions in Chinese policy circles that the US is using the war on terror to "encircle China" (Leheny 2005, 252). Whatever the case:

> The war on terror has created a bewildering array of possibilities for states and new security institutions in Asia... If Washington pursues primarily bilateral arrangements… it risks encouraging further reactions, particularly by China, that would engender new regional institutions that exclude or challenge American hegemony. (Leheny 2005, 251)

These potentialities would obviously have an adverse affect on the status quo that the US seems so keen to maintain, which reveals just how counter-intuitive the securitization of something like trade policy can be. More importantly, as the case of the Uighurs suggests, it increases opportunities for the suppression of certain minority populations within countries whose elites are eager to co-opt the "war on terror" discourse to suit their own agendas.

### ii. *Those Crazy Terrorists*: "Expert" myopia and the construction of threat

"Expert" discourses play a powerful role in setting political agendas. Notably, the nature of these "expert" discourses is instrumental in constructing the parameters of a security problem: Who are the "experts"? What version of "common sense" do they put forward? What constitutes legitimate knowledge and how can knowledge about something like terrorism claim objectivity? When inter-subjectivity is acknowledged, the notion of "expertise" becomes profoundly political. To paraphrase Robert Cox's pithy axiom: *knowledge* is always for someone and for some purpose. "Expert" knowledge and language then, becomes a tool to both exclude individuals who are non-experts, and to exclude ideas that cannot be spoken of in that same language (Cohn 1987, 708). "Expert" discourses "inevitably draw boundaries around themselves by celebrating certain kinds of statements while excommunicating others, which then take on the status of 'subjugated knowledges'" (Gusterson 1999, 326). In the "war on terror" discourse, we can observe a particularly doctrinaire understanding of terrorism in the "expert" discourses espoused by the US foreign policy and academic establishments.

In a compelling discursive analysis of these "expert" accounts of terrorism in Southeast Asia, Natasha Hamilton-Hart (2005) sets out some of the common assumptions (she calls them "errors") that are characteristic of them. The main concern is with how these "expert" discourses marginalize discussion of the potentially legitimate political grievances that are at the root of some terrorist groups' activities. Hamilton-Hart refers to four main instances of miscalculation by the terrorism "experts." The first occurs in

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After 9/11, the anti-terrorist aspect of the SCO agenda has gained more prominence and has received verbal endorsement from US officials, who were otherwise quite leery of the SCO.

[10] China's treatment of the minority Muslim Uighur population has become cloaked in the post 9/11 anti-terrorist rhetoric, despite the fact that there is no evidence of militant fundamentalism among the Uighur secessionists. (Leheny 2005).

analyses of the nature of global terrorist linkages, which contributes to the threat discourse by suggesting that *al Qa'eda* is everywhere and is lurking around every corner. This means that a sense of urgency and fear is created by claims that terrorist activity is no longer confined to local groups with local grievances and goals, but has acquired an international and more threatening dimension via a web of highly organized linkages with *al Qa'eda* (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 305). This is reminiscent of Loeppky's suggestion that there exists a "discursive power of consecutive 'what if?' statements," that have the effect of equating potential threats with the palpable existence of imminent threats (Loeppky 2005, 91). Linkages with *al Qa'eda*, as they are understood in the "expert" discourses, often have nothing to do with the local nature of these groups' grievances, nor do they necessarily make them prone to violence (Beeson 2007b, Collier 2006, Hamilton-Hart 2005). Unfortunately however, there is political utility, both for governments and by the groups themselves, in claiming these linkages to *al Qa'eda*.

In attributing global importance and scope to regional and local terrorist groups, US foreign policy discourses actually give these groups more currency in their ability to invoke fear. This despite the fact that the basic concerns and tactics of these groups have not necessarily undergone any substantive change since before 9/11. These groups are also not as cohesive as they are often portrayed. One notable example would be the *Jema'ah Islamiyah* group (JI) in Indonesia, which is usually credited with masterminding the terrorist attacks in Bali, the Jakarta Marriott bombing, and the Jakarta Australian Embassy bombing, *in a well-coordinated and organized fashion*. However, all evidence actually points to the fact that these attacks, though conducted by individuals and groups claiming JI affiliations, were not in fact carried out by anyone operating within the larger JI hierarchy. Instead, "the JI is deeply divided over such operations, which are the initiative of a few ultra-militants drawing on diverse personal networks, not a cohesive corporate entity" (Collier 2006, 28).

A second faulty area in the "expert" discourse on terrorism resides in the characterization of Islam the religion. Conventional discourse on these matters suggests that terrorism appears always to exist on the spectrum of *this* religion in particular. As such, "Categories such as *moderate, fundamentalist, militant* and *terrorist* are sometimes presented as potentially progressive stages through which individuals may move" (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 312). Therefore, the solution is simply to keep all Muslims from getting to that end-point on the continuum. The difficulty with this is that the problem of terrorism becomes defined in terms of Islamic religiosity, rather than in terms of what the political, historical and social context of these groups might be. Such formulations undermine "the political nature of grievances such as opposition to the US attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan" (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 313), the desire for self-determination, or opposition to long-standing suppression by local governments.

Notably, the American *National Security Strategy* is dismissive about acknowledging these sources of terrorist activity. As the 2006 NSS suggests, any earlier manifestations of a traditional hearts-and-minds approach, which entertained the idea that poverty and political disenfranchisement could be an obvious source of militant radicalization, has been largely abandoned. In section III, the 2006 NSS states, "we must be clear-eyed about what does and does not give rise to terrorism" (2006 NSS, 9). Among

the laundry list of things that do *not*, according to the NSS, give rise to terrorism are poverty[11], hostility towards US policies in Iraq, and the Israel-Palestine conflict. As if to counter the growing realization by many that the "war on terror" itself may now be a contributing factor to fomenting more conflict, the NSS is unequivocal:

> … terrorism is not simply a response to our efforts to prevent terror attacks. The al-Qaida [*sic*] network targeted the United States long before the United States targeted al-Qaida [*sic*]. Indeed, the terrorists are emboldened more by perceptions of weakness than by demonstrations of resolve. Terrorists lure recruits by telling them that we are decadent and easily intimidated and will retreat if attacked… (2006 NSS p. 10)

Among the things that *do* cause terrorism and fuel the terrorists, according to the NSS, is a lack of democracy, "blaming others for problems", "keeping old wounds fresh and raw," and religious ideologies that justify murder. In other words, all causes of terrorism are exogenous to the US and to US policies.

This relates to the third feature of the "expert" discourses on terrorism. This is the characterization of the US as a benign hegemon who is a victim of pathological and ideological hatred rather than a possible source of angry reactions to its policies. US funding and support of militant groups in Afghanistan in the 1980s has received very little attention in the relevant "expert" literature (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 314). In the "war on terror" discourse, invocations of this historical feature of US foreign policy is regularly dismissed as un-American. Furthermore, any actual recognition that US security policy has been an aggravating factor for expressions of terrorism is usually seen as anomalous to the Bush administration rather than as part of a historical process that has long been inimical to the political goals of "Islamists," who may or may not be prone to violence. Related to this, "war on terror" discourses cause non-violent Islam-identified groups, to be seen as a threat akin to *al Qa'eda*. This can have the unintended consequence of marginalizing legitimate groups who do have democratic political support among certain populations. While these groups may have views and positions that are at odds with Western liberal values on some issues, they are not necessarily also terrorists. One such example is the *Parti Islam se-Malaysia*, or PAS, an Islam-identified opposition political party in Malaysia, which is often clumsily lumped in with militant and illegal groups such as JI, KMM and *Abu Sayyaf*. Another example is *Nadhatul Ulama*, an Indonesian Islamist organization with 30 million followers, and one that has actively and consistently supported anti-terrorist efforts by the Indonesian government

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[11] It is interesting to note then, that in the official statement of the joint agreement between the US and the Philippines shortly after 9/11, where Washington rewarded Manila's support for the war on terror with several military, trade and development initiatives, both leaders "…agreed that sustainable peace in Mindanao in the southern Philippines requires addressing Mindanao's root economic and social problems… Mindanao Assistance Package will provide direct support for the nascent peace process by integrating the ex-combatants and their communities into the peacetime economy; creating an environment in Mindanao that is attractive for investment, job creation and economic progress; and providing improved public services in Mindanao, especially in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao" (The White House, *Joint Statement Between the U.S. and the Philippines*, Press Release, Washington DC, November 20 2001).

(Gershman 2002, 64). The corresponding policy recommendations in response to the militant Islamism that is perceived by the "experts" to be virulently spreading throughout the world, include calls for "more inclusive American diplomacy and outreach to 'moderate' Muslims, as if the problem was largely a PR bungle, not an issue of fundamental US policy" (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 314). Furthermore, the presupposition that American hegemony is benign or benevolent is out of touch with the widely held international perception of the US as a country bent on maintaining its pre-eminence and "more inclined to use military force than legal rules, with a longstanding history of pursuing violent strategies and supporting repressive regimes in the non-Western world" (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 314).

The fourth key feature of the "expert" discourse on terrorism is that terrorism is consistently positioned in terms of pathology and sickness. Terrorism as a phenomenon is portrayed as a pathological outcome of religious deviancy or political repression. The emphasis however, is on the *pathological* nature of it (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 316). The language of the "war on terror" discourse is deployed to construct the identities of the Americans and the terrorists in stark opposition to one another:

> …the terrorists- 'enemy aliens'- were created as evildoers, savages and barbarians, cruel and inhuman, while Americans were constructed as innocent, decent, kind, loving, peaceful, united and heroic. The function of this language is to establish clear boundary markers between 'them' and 'us'- between citizens and aliens, foreign and domestic, inside and outside… it functions to demonise and dehumanise the enemy to such an extent that any counter-violence towards them appears acceptable and proportionate. (Jackson 2005, 5).

This reminds us of Campbell's thesis that threat is often characterized as alien and pathological and the use of medical "contagion" discourse imbues these threats with an agency that is disconnected from its root causes. This means that the threat is something that needs to be contained, quarantined and exterminated, rather than prevented in the first place. It further reinforces the contingency of identity on difference- the need to resort to extreme forms of alterity to articulate and legitimize one's own identity (Conolly 1991). Hence, "terrorism is seen as a mental disease propagated by demonic preachers," (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 317) and this depiction creates blind spots in the analytical literature and the proposed solutions outlined in official policies. Arguably then, terrorism does not arise out of a specifically "Islamic" set of discontents but rather, one might more reasonably conclude that anger rooted in social, economic or political discontents is "expressed as the product of the values one holds" (Hamilton-Hart 2005, 319). This is not the same thing as saying that Islam *causes* anger, which is too often what the "expert" discourses suggest. Importantly, positing that Islam itself if the cause of the use of terrorism by certain groups means that the actual sources of their discontents can never be recognized by conventional security discourses.

### iii. *The Military and The Militants*: Implications of US military presence in Southeast Asia

One of the arguments put forth here, is that the "war on terror" and its discourses may actually encourage the development of new grievances for militant groups who do display a willingness to deploy violence against civilians. An area where this potential is very real relates to the resumption, escalation, and establishment of US military presence and cooperation in several Southeast Asian countries. This has implications that result from the direct involvement of US forces in anti-terror operations, but they also result from the co-optation of the US anti-terror discourse by local elites in order to launch harsher crackdowns on secessionist movements and political dissidents. These two points are discussed in what follows.

In January of 2002, the Bush administration quietly deployed 660 US troops to the southern Philippines to "assist" the local military in hostage rescue and counter-terrorist operations against Muslim separatist groups in those areas. Notably, this occurred despite the fact that a decade earlier the Philippine Senate had discontinued its prior agreement to allow US military bases in the country. In the post-9/11 context however, the Philippines occupies an important place once again in US military-strategic policy for the region (Gershman 2002, 61). The situation in the Philippines is an interesting case because the larger population of the Philippines supports the US military operations there. The Muslim separatist movements in the South are extremely unpopular with the majority in the overwhelmingly Catholic country, and there is little sympathy for their cause. As a result, Washington can rely on goodwill to shore up support for its "war on terror" in the Philippines (Leheny 2005). However, the situation in Indonesia, Malaysia, and to some degree in Singapore and Thailand is more complicated. Unlike the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia are principally Muslim countries, and Singapore and Thailand border Muslim countries and have close relations with them. In fact, most of these countries (with the exception of Singapore) have historically expressed discomfort with US military bases in the Philippines. Nevertheless, the "war on terror" has re-introduced the issue of US military presence/support in Southeast Asia, and in some cases has caused a complete about-face with regards to US military involvement.

In Indonesia, several high profile terrorist attacks on "Western" targets have lent credence to US fears of terrorism in the region. As a result, the US military has re-established relations with a country that had long been suspicious of US military presence in any capacity. Prior to 9/11, Washington was itself highly critical of the Indonesian government and ABRI's[12] human rights abuses, especially with regards to the East Timor situation and sectarian violence in Aceh, and had cut-off all military ties with the country. The post 9/11 security mindset however, led to a Congressional move to resume military aid to Indonesia under the auspices of supporting counter-terrorism (White House Press Release, Jan 6th 2001). The Indonesian government and military were content to accept it.

Notable about these sorts of changes in US military policy towards the region is that they alter both the local governments' framing of domestic political issues, as well as the characterization of secessionist groups and political dissidents. This relates to the fact

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[12] *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* or the The Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia.

that US policy towards the region fundamentally misconstrues the wide variety of "Islamist" movements in the region, the majority of which do not espouse violence as part of their agendas (Hamilton-Hart 2005, Leheny 2005, Gershman 2002, Beeson 2007b). Furthermore, there are good arguments for why the threat posed by radicalized Islam in Southeast Asia is not nearly as great as it is often portrayed (Gershman 2002). There is no indication that any form of Islamic terrorism in Southeast Asia is state-sponsored, and the extreme diversity of Muslims in the region works against the establishment of a fundamentalist hegemony by any one group (Gershman 2002, 62).The fact that "intensifying US involvement in Southeast Asia reflects a somewhat hysterical tone … about the strength and scope of the terrorist threat there" (Gershman 2002, 61) contributes to an obfuscation of a variety of social and political issues that local populations must grapple with, sometimes in opposition to their own governments.

Depictions of the "Islamic" threat in US foreign policy discourses, combined with Washington's decision to become involved militarily in several Southeast Asian countries can thus lend to ever-rising levels of anti-American sentiment in the region. Such sentiment is not confined to dissidents and separatists, but finds expression in pro-democracy movements and the general population as well. This is largely attributable to American complicity (or at least the perception of American complicity) in human rights abuses and harsh suppression of political dissidents by local authorities. For example, Washington has indicated strong support for "terror-related" arrests by the Malaysian government under the country's controversial *Internal Security Act*, which provides for indefinite detention without trial. This is the same Act vocally criticized by American delegates at several past APEC meetings. In 2003, the Malaysian authorities apprehended 48 alleged Muslim extremists who were said to be members of both PAS, which is a legal political party, and the *Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia* (KMM), which is an illegal militant organization with suspected links to terrorism. PAS leaders and democracy advocates have repeatedly denied any connections to the KMM and opposition parties have demanded that the detainees be put on trial rather than being held under the ISA, "but it is obvious that the government feels little pressure to provide a full explanation of the security threat facing the country" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 18 2002). On more than one occasion, Malaysian politicians have invoked the US PATRIOT Act as justification for the legitimacy of the ISA. This despite the fact that the ISA is also used to detain non-Muslim political "dissidents," has been around since 1960, and was actually enacted by the British colonial government during the *Malayan Emergency*.[13]

The Thai government has also been implicated in several disturbing human rights abuses in their own difficulties with a Muslim-identified minority in the South. In 2004, Thai police rounded up several hundred members of the southern Muslim population after civil disturbances, which were in response to government crackdowns in the region following a string of attacks by militant insurgent groups. In a disturbing turn of events, at least 78 of the detainees died due to dehydration en route to Bangkok, because they had been placed in the back of non-air conditioned, unventilated trucks for several hours

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[13] Over 10 000 people have been arrested under the ISA since its enactment. (Aliran ISA Watch, http://www.aliran.com/oldsite/monthly/2001/3e.htm)

in the tropical heat (Amnesty International). The incident caused an uproar among human rights groups, including in neighbouring Malaysia. Between 2004 and 2007, the secessionist insurgency in the Southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani had resulted in the deaths of at least 2,000 people (New Straits Times, 14 February 2007). Unfortunately, the cycle of bombings and crackdowns has only seemed to escalate. In early 2007 in particular, Thailand saw a sharp increase in secessionist terrorist bombings in Bangkok and in several areas in the South. Notably, regional analysts have linked the escalation of violence by southern militants directly to the fierce crackdown on them by the Thai government.

Not only have these developments threatened the economic livelihood of a population that thrives on the tourist industry to survive, but they have also threatened to strain good relations with neighbouring Malaysia. This is because in an interesting development, the Thai government sought help from the Malaysian government to assist in mediating the conflict in the South. The Muslim Thais in the Southern regions have an affinity for their Malay neighbours due to shared ancestry, religion, a high incidence of inter-marriage, and a relatively large number of dual citizens (which is actually illegal in both countries). The Malaysian government has indicated a willingness to help with the problem, but is in the delicate position of not wanting to be associated with militant Muslims in the international arena. Furthermore, domestic opinion in Malaysia is highly critical of the Thai authorities' recent crackdown on the militants, which is widely perceived as being disproportionately harsh and anti-Muslim in nature, and there is a lack of support for their government's involvement in helping the Thai authorities (New Straits Times, 14 February 2007).

Written in 2002, a widely read *Far Eastern Economic Review* article adroitly points to the ironies of a "war on terror" discourse that simultaneously preaches freedom while supporting fundamentally anti-democratic practices:

> …amid media reports that [the] *al Qa'eda* network is deeply entrenched in Southeast Asia, the US has deployed troops in the Philippines, praised Singapore and Malaysia for jailing suspects without trial and is pushing Indonesia to follow suit… but many people are now saying that US efforts to battle global terrorism are in danger of doing as much harm as good… driven in part by its own political considerations, the US has plunged into domestic politics in a way that threatens to make complex issues even messier and harder to solve… (*FEER*, April 18 2002)

Related to this, another concern is that these inconsistencies in the "war on terror" will actually increase the potential for non-militant Muslim groups to *become* militant, to develop more global grievances and widen their agendas, and to increase local sympathies and recruitment opportunities (Gershman 2002, Leheny 2005).

As Leheny (2005) points out, "There is little evidence that these fundamentalist movements have succeeded in socially regionalizing Muslim Southeast Asia…. But through unintentional action or simple mishap, the US government and other states might succeed where *al Qa'eda* itself has not- in encouraging the creation of an Islamist region" (252). Heavy government crackdowns can have a poignant mobilizing or uniting effect,

and if the US military were to find itself in a violent confrontation with any radical group in the region, such an event could be a rallying point for the Islamist leaders that *are* interested in regionalizing or globalizing their linkages and grievances. (Leheny 2005). This type of cycle, where marginalized and suppressed politics become radicalized vis-à-vis undemocratic acts of oppression, has been witnessed on countless occasions in the authoritarian countries of the Middle East which was, after all, the "first front" in the "war on terror". The "expert" discourses that guide US foreign policy after the attacks of 9/11 appear blinkered to this simple historical lesson. The potential for wider regional instability that results, inevitably implicates all levels of society in Southeast Asia.

### Conclusion: The Question(s) of "Security"

Picking up on the ideas of critical post-structuralists like David Campbell, William Connolly, and Jef Huysmans, I have suggested that the state project of "security" can be understood as a self-referential practice. As Campbell (1998) observes, the "objectification and externalization of danger that are central to contemporary assessments of security… need to be understood *as the effects of political practices rather than the conditions of their possibility*" (16). This is because the practice of security requires the definition of threats, along with the identification of the referent objects/subjects that must be "secured". The externalization of danger and fear through threat construction thus raises the question of who (or what) to fear (or not to fear). With this in mind, my analysis has introduced the idea that due to its inherently constructive properties, the US "war on terror" discourse has become, in essence, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The constitutive eventualities of post-9/11 US foreign policy have thus become the ultimate example of "irruption," where the "world of [American policy makers'] words becomes implemented" (Milliken and Sylvan 1996, 323). Irruptions of US foreign policy discourse in the East Asian region can be observed in the "securitization" of US economic and trade policy; the doctrinaire understanding of Islam-identified political movements; and the trend towards the re-militarization of US relations with Southeast Asian actors.

Importantly, these manifestations of discursive construction engender consequences that contribute to increased possibilities for the enactment of terrorist activities aimed at "Western" targets, and a proliferation of anti-democratic and repressive behaviours by Southeast Asian governments under the guise of anti-terror measures. This lays to bare the ironies and dangers inherent in a hegemonic security discourse that simultaneously preaches democracy while enacting and supporting anti-democratic practices. This type of analysis also urges a re-thinking of the "threats" posed in a post-9/11 environment and brings to light several important questions, too often ignored, that are at the very root of the larger "security" question: what is the nature of "threat" and who, or what, is "threatened"? Who or what needs to be "secured" from these "threats", and what is the nature of "security/insecurity"? What are the implications of understanding that the "war on terror" discourse is itself instrumental to the construction of threat and in/security? These are important questions that deserve more attention than they get- when they are asked at all.

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