There are plenty of articles and essays examining the foreign policies of Asian countries. The contributions to the cover story in this issue of Global Asia, prepared in cooperation with the East-West Center’s Washington DC office, take a somewhat different approach to what one might find elsewhere. We examine the foreign policies of five key Southeast Asian countries — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam — in an effort to map explicit connections between the enormous amount of empirical data available on a country’s national interests (trade, foreign direct investment, overseas foreign workers and their remittances, and participation in various multilateral organizations and arrangements) and how these countries conduct their foreign affairs. The objective was to assess the main drivers and directions — some of them constantly undergoing change — of these countries’ external roles in the years ahead.

In order to facilitate the “marrying” of this empirical data with the nuanced analysis available from academic specialists from these countries — people who are capable of putting this data in the context of the domestic political, cultural and intellectual influences on external behavior — the East-West Center in Washington prepared a common “matrix” of issues, questions and data for each of the five countries. Each of these five specialists, whose essays follow, was asked to consider three main “data sets:” external eco-

Deconstructing National Interests, Divining Future Foreign Policy
By Satu Limaye
nomic interests; politico-security interests; and multilateral interests. Authors were invited to contest and qualify these data sets, but in doing so, to calibrate the continuities and change in core interests in each of these areas as a basis for understanding the foreign policy choices and behaviors of their country.

Among the questions we asked the authors were:

• Has there been a significant change in the importance of certain variables within an interest area?
• Which countries and/or regions are most important to specific variables within each interest area? Has there been notable change in the importance of certain countries/regions to the variable at issue? For example, one country has seen no change over a decade in its top ten trade partners, but one trade partner has moved up the ranking of importance — making that country more important.
• Which multilateral groupings are most important to each interest area?

The results of this approach have been illuminating. Two findings in particular stand out. First, while domestic considerations always drive foreign policy in all countries, in the case of these five countries, domestic drivers ranging from the fate of overseas citizens to key revenue generating institutions to domestic politics are likely to be even more important in shaping foreign policies in the future than they have been in the past. Second, the “globalization” of each of these countries’ foreign policies is noteworthy. In each case — although for reasons that vary from country to country — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam are being brought into an ever-widening circle of connections and interactions with other countries, regions and multilateral organizations. Put simply, while Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will remain important to each of these five countries, they will likely be less important than in the past.

In terms of the importance of domestic drivers in future foreign policy directions, for example, the article on Vietnam by Hoang Anh Tuan argues that “failures of central planning and self-isolation,” which brought the country to “the brink of economic collapse,” led to the reform policy called Doi Moi, which in turn has shaped Vietnam’s external relations. Even more dramatically, Renato Cruz de Castro argues that in the Philippines external relations are largely “tactics” driven by the need to address “domestic woes.” Specifically, he

### Economics, Security, and Multilateralism

The following three matrices, along with their corresponding data sets, were provided to the authors of the five articles in our cover story, and are included in the fold-out graphic in this issue.

All matrices are comprised of time series data, 1998–2008 (most recent available).

1. Economic interests
   - External Economic Variables

2. Political-security interests
   - Political-Security Variables
     1. What are the top five political security goals of country?
     2. What have been the key ideational/ideological drivers of external behavior?
     3. What disputes/conflicts have the country been in or are in?
     4. What are major internal security threats with external implications?

Continued over
argues that Philippine foreign policy in this century has two primary goals: “the pursuit of national security through mobilization of resources for economic and social development [including ending internal conflicts]...[and]...the protection of overseas Filipino workers whose regular remittances keep the Philippine economy afloat.” In Indonesia, meanwhile, Dewi Fortuna Anwar states that the country’s foreign policy since the 1997-98 financial crisis and the fall of Suharto has also had a heavy domestic focus, including “assisting Indonesian economic recovery and development, helping strengthen Indonesia’s territorial integrity and national security, aiding Indonesia’s democratic consolidation and last but not least enhancing Indonesia’s regional and international standing.” Thitinan Pongsudhirak’s article on Thailand argues that a recurrent tension shaping Bangkok’s external behavior has been the tug-of-war between strong elected leaders such as former Prime Ministers Chatichai Choonhavan and Thaksin Shinawatra and the country’s senior military officers and bureaucratic elite. But now, with a looming royal succession and the “wrenching political maelstrom at home,” he predicts “Thailand’s foreign policy directions are likely to appear inert, hesitant and downright murky.” In the case of Malaysia, three domestic considerations have been and are increasingly important

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This is particularly visible in the graphics that accompany this cover story, showing the dense connections between each of these countries and the wider world.

**Economics, Security, and Multilateralism Continued**

5. What are the main relationships/partnerships/alliances of the country to address political-security goals and challenges?

6. Which are the main sources of military hardware, assistance and training for country? Which are the main destinations of a country’s military hardware, assistance and training?

7. Where is the country involved in external mediation, peacekeeping or other external political-security activities?

4. How has the importance of a country or region to each variable changed over time—if any change?

Political-Security Questions/Analytical Framework

For political-security interests variables:

1. What, if any, important changes have occurred in any of these variables (e.g., no peacekeeping activities to some; end of an alliance)?

2. Which countries/regions are most crucial to each variable?

3. How concentrated on a particular country, region are political-security interests as opposed to a more wide ranging requirement for engagement?
in shaping the direction of Kuala Lumpur’s external relations, argues Tang Siew Mun. First, the national oil company, which provides nearly 50 percent of the government’s revenues, is now more globally engaged in its search for additional crude oil reserves, and this will necessitate a wider, more active government engagement on its behalf around the world. Second, the decline of internal security threats posed by the domestic communist insurgency that dominated government attention for decades before it ended in 1989, has led to a shift in the role of the armed forces from counter-insurgency to regional cooperation and global peacekeeping role. As a result, this too has necessitated a wider and more active foreign policy. And finally, the recent electoral losses of the ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which has dominated Malaysian politics since independence, and the changing nature of coalition politics in the country, may inhibit Malaysia addressing its foreign policy priorities as actively in the near-term as economic and security considerations seem to demand.

In addition to these domestic drivers, a widening net of external relations characterizes these five countries. Across a range of economic, politico-security and multilateral interests, each of these countries has reasons to have more partners in more regions and membership in more organizations. This is particularly visible in the graphics that accompany this cover story, showing the dense connections between each of these countries and the wider world. The US has been and will remain an important factor in each of these countries’ foreign and security policies. But it will increasingly compete with China, India and other countries — as well as with evolving regional organizations. But in the changing domestic and increasingly wide economic, political-security and multilateral environment of each of these countries, US relations with each will demand dedication, attention and effort.

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