

*CHAPTER II*

CHAPTER II: ASEAN AND REGIONAL SECURITY

The New World Order and the end of the Cold War

A "New World Order" was first tabled onto the world agenda by President George Bush in April 1991 in his speech at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. This statement was made in the context of the general euphoria over the Gulf War. The American prescription of a "New World Order" was founded on the principles of; "peaceful settlement of disputes"; "solidarity against aggression"; "reduced and controlled arsenals"; and "just treatment".<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the American President's conception is strictly confined to the political and politico-military dimensions of world order. Dr. Noordin Sopiee suggested that the Asia-Pacific should go along with the idea of a "New World Order" as enunciated by the former U.S. President in order to contribute to the making of not only a "new" world but also a "better", more just and more moral one.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Lonely Superpower," Newsweek, October 7, 1991, pp. 22-23.

<sup>2</sup>Noordin Sopiee, "The New World Order: Implications for the Asia Pacific," in Rohana Mahmood and Rustam A. Sani. eds., Confidence Building and Conflict Reduction in the Pacific (Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1993), p. 25.

Dr. Noordin went on further to stress the need to broaden the concept of the "New World Order" breaking beyond its politico-military intellectual parameter. He added that a consensus on the key design specifications in making of this new World Order need to be reached.

The geostrategic changes of recent years have significantly altered the regional and global security environment. In other words, we have seen the world changes dramatically over the past few years. The ideological conflict of the Cold war has gone. Domestic and international policies and practices around the world are under review and redefinition.

With the end of the Cold War, there is now far more scope than before for cooperation in the prevention and resolution of conflict. Although a new world order has yet to emerge, there have been noticeable developments for regional cooperation where the growth of regionalism look set to play a key role. Regions around the world are sensing a need to build institutions to strengthen themselves as they embark into the next century. The discussion that follows looks at the strategic changes and issues confronting the ASEAN countries after the Cold War and proposals for multilateral cooperation.

Southeast Asia Overall Security Outlook

The security picture in the Southeast Asian region is relatively favourable, certainly in comparison with many other regions of the world. The tensions between the Indochinese states and ASEAN have eased, although lasting peace in Cambodia is yet to be seen. Differences between regional states over territorial issues (the Spratlys, other unresolved border questions) remain at a low level of intensity. No state is engaged in military conflict against another. Regional states have not equipped themselves with nuclear or chemical weapons. The countries of Southeast Asia, notably ASEAN, are experiencing the fastest economic growth rate in the world at this time. They will become even more integrated into the global economic system, particularly with North Asia and to a lesser extent North America. That will be the main focus of their international interest.

Overall, it is reasonable to predict that most of the countries of Southeast Asia are more likely than not to continue down their path of nation building based upon participation in the global economic system.

Security Problems after the Cold War

Let us take a look at the regionally-related issues by focussing on three levels. Firstly, the area of the East Asia as a whole. Secondly, those of the Southeast Asian region and finally those of ASEAN itself.

East Asia Regional Context

Taking the East Asia context into perspective, there are important factors to note. We saw the relative decline of American influence, particularly in the economic dimension, but also in the political and military spheres as well. There is also the decline of Russian power of influence in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia which means the disappearance of a regional balancing force in those regions. It is interesting to note of the continuing of economic reform and political stalemate in China. However, this contradiction might cause a renewal of tensions in China itself. There is no doubt that Japanese influence will continue to grow as Japan is consciously moving the chain of economic development into Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, in Southeast Asia, Japan continues to be regarded with considerable caution.

## Southeast Asia Regional Context

In the Southeast Asian Regional context, the internal problems of several states of the Southeast Asian region are formidable. The future of Cambodia, after the successful United Nations (UN)-organised free elections remain uncertain as this would depend on the attitudes of the Khmer Rouge. Thailand, which has been hit by a number of military and political crises still faces difficulties in developing a democratic system. Meanwhile, the Philippines remains weak in economic and political senses and may be the scene of more violence in the foreseeable future. The events in East Timor, demonstrate that local problems can both threaten the peace of the region and lead to tensions in relations with neighbouring states. Thailand's western neighbour, Myanmar is still ruled by a dictatorial government which has the strength to resist the pressures of those fighting for a democratic society. Myanmar's economic performance is not very promising as compared with that of its ASEAN neighbours.

On the other hand, the external problems of the Southeast Asian region are also significant. Prospects for a smoother relationship between Thailand and Cambodia are unclear as this depend heavily on the progress of the new

Cambodian Government. The peace negotiations between the new Cambodian government and the Khmer Rouge which is an ongoing process would indirectly determine the direction of peace settlement in Indochina. Meanwhile, it is expected that Vietnam and Cambodia will have to learn restraint out of their long period of conflict. It is acknowledged that the border between the two will remain volatile taking into account that there has been a long tradition of hostility between both countries.

Disputed claims over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea have cause tensions in the area, particularly between China and Vietnam. The granting of oil exploration licences by both Hanoi and Beijing for the same areas raised concerns as these would probably lead to skirmishes between the two countries in this area. As regard to the Philippines' claim to Sabah, it looks like the issue is now dormant. Nonetheless, as long as this issue is not settled amicably, Malaysia-Filipino relations could suffer in the future.

Whatever the problems they be, the Southeast Asian region has a strong interest in the maintenance of sovereignty and security in the maritime environment, particularly in the Exclusive Economic Zones.

ASEAN's future relationship with Vietnam would be a key variable in the security of the region. It would be interesting to watch in the next few years the relationship between both sides. However, much will depend upon the course of reform, be it political or economically in Vietnam.

#### ASEAN Regional Context

The possibility of extension of ASEAN's membership to include Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia is now a live issue and it seems as a necessary condition for Southeast Asia future peace and prosperity. However, "tensions" remain amongst ASEAN partners. Each member has its own complex and different perceptions of some problems and issues of the region. And all of them do not think alike on all issues either.

Prospects for military co-operation are limited because the assessments of ASEAN members still differ markedly on both threats and the issues for which force could usefully be employed. Detailed discussion on defence and military cooperation will be highlighted in Chapter III. Prospects for broader, non-military security cooperation look much better because there is already in

existence economic and social cooperation among the nations of the region which constitutes an important component of security enhancing measures. However, on the political front there is much less agreement. This is an area of great sensitivity and it will be quite some time before there can be fully and open discussion of political reforms or a common approach. But at least ASEAN has shown the necessary resilience to cope with this difficult fact of regional life. It appears that in this instance, security could be pursued through three mechanisms, namely, (i) the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, (ii) the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) and (iii) the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ).

The 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation serves as a regional mechanism to guide relations among the countries of Southeast Asia. This view was expressed by Jusuf Wanandi who commented that "the Treaty is basically a regional mechanism not only to solve conflict, but also to enhance functional cooperation, particularly economic cooperation among its signatories."<sup>3</sup> Hence, the proposal adopted in the Singapore Declaration at the conclusion of the Fourth ASEAN Summit, 27-28 January 1992, to invite Laos and Vietnam to join the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation (TAC) was done in the right direction. This seems to be a

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<sup>3</sup>Jusuf Wanandi, "Asia-Pacific security forums: Rationale and options," in Rohana Mahmood and Rustam A. Sani, eds., Confidence Building and Conflict Reduction in the Pacific (Kuala Lumpur: TESIS, 1993), p. 150.

very sensible and desirable arrangement as Laos and Vietnam have acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation by becoming an observer of ASEAN in 1992. That occasion is one of the key landmarks to the road towards lasting peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia. Another interesting point to note is that the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN in its 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore in July 23 - 24, 1993 welcomed the United Nations resolution on the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia which was adopted by consensus at the 47th UN General Assembly in 1992. The Treaty is significant in that it establishes a code of conduct and provides a mechanism for peaceful resolution of disputes in the region. They commended the principles in the Treaty as a basis for preventive diplomacy in the region. Preventive diplomacy refers to the full range of methods which include negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement or other peaceful means - when applied before a dispute has crossed the threshold into armed conflict. The Treaty also contributes to community-building in the Southeast Asian region.<sup>4</sup>

The Singapore Declaration of 1992 recommending that ASEAN should seek avenues to engage member states in new areas of co-operation in security matters is timely.

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<sup>4</sup>Joint Communique of the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, 23- 24 July 1993.

It would be to the interest of ASEAN to use established fora to promote external dialogues on enhancing security cooperation in the region through intra-ASEAN dialogues. Given the less military nature of ASEAN's security problems in future, and their increasingly important social and economic aspects, there should be fewer problems in this form of co-operation than during the Cold War. ASEAN members have much to contribute to each other and the wider region in these regards.

A potentially divisive issue remains on the ASEAN agenda is the debate on the future of the concept of ASEAN as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. The difficulty understandably arises over the point of neutrality, on which there are deep-seated differences in the attitudes of states such as Indonesia and Singapore on their roles within the broader structure of world order. The concept of ZOPFAN will be discussed in greater details in Chapter IV.

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers in their July 1993 Meeting in Singapore also noted the significant progress made in resolving the outstanding issues relating to the draft Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ). This NWFZ concept will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

ASEAN should embark on security cooperation with external powers and this should be pursued positively and constructively. The use of ASEAN's Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) as the vehicle for ASEAN's security dialogue with external powers offers several advantages. Firstly, ASEAN would have a controlling influence over the agenda of discussions, and would not risk being sidelined as might be the case with any institution. Secondly, the ASEAN-PMC would enable ASEAN to pursue a more inclusive approach to security in the context of the growing security concerns and the developments affecting the role of major Asia-Pacific powers such as the U.S., Russia, China and Japan. Thirdly, ASEAN can gain from advice and information on how to approach the new security problems of the post-Cold War era, from access to technology of not only policy-makers but should include defence officials as well. Fourthly, ASEAN will be able to discuss other related problems more fully with key external powers.

From the discussion above, ASEAN has to define its approach to the responsibilities of building a wider structure for the maintenance of world order. Other developing states and regional associations look to ASEAN as an example of how they might organize their own regional networks. There will be many challenges for regional experts in developing new approaches and structures of ensuring peace in Southeast Asia.

Security interests of ASEAN states and Threat Perceptions

The states of Southeast Asia have been struggling with the problems of national security ever since gaining independence. The notion of security in Southeast Asia has been broadened and to be more comprehensive in terms of general political/economic systematic well-being. The security concerns of ASEAN states issue from both their domestic and international environments. ASEAN states have sought to deal with internal threats on their own through what is termed as the development of national resilience.

The concept of "resilience" that is, "the mobilization of all national capabilities - political, economic, social and psychological - in order to maximize the state's potential."<sup>5</sup> In other words, national resilience is a multi-dimensional concept consisting of ideological, political, economic, socio-cultural and security-cum-defence aspects. Although the doctrine of national resilience limits itself substantially to the domestic level of security, it has indirect and serious implications for the external or international strategic environment. The link between national and regional security is the regional international level in the form of

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<sup>5</sup>Dr. Donald G. Weatherbee, "Security as a 'condition' in Southeast Asia," in Dora Alves, ed., Change, Interdependence and Security in the Pacific Basin, the 1990 Pacific Symposium (Washington D.C.: National Defence University Press, 1991), p. 281.

doctrine of "regional resilience" which is the desired expression of security.

The nature and intensity of threat is continuing to change as we move into the last decade of the century. The discussion that follows described the threat perceptions of ASEAN countries during and after the Cold War.

External threat perception in ASEAN, especially during the Cold War centred on three countries, namely, the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), the former Soviet Union and Vietnam. Each ASEAN state has its own complex set of perceptions.

#### Chinese Threat During the Cold War

Almost all the countries in ASEAN perceive the PRC as a long-term threat to their national security but to different degrees. To Indonesia and Malaysia, the PRC is the real long-term threat. According to Muthiah Alagappa this perception is informed by:

- (i) China's size, geographical location and the fear that it may seek to make Southeast Asia its sphere of influence;

- (ii) The Indonesian conviction that the PRC was involved in the abortive coup d'etat of 1965;
- (iii) Domestic political considerations arising from the presence of economically powerful Chinese minorities in their populations; and
- (iv) The fear of a modern and vibrant China competing for investments and markets.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the above factors and taking into account of the scenario during the Cold War, these two countries were apprehensive of any U.S. strategy for Southeast Asia that makes China a "main pillar". They had expressed reservations about U.S. efforts to strengthen China and had also been wary of the developing close relations between the PRC and Thailand. Malaysia, in particular, was in favour of a greater U.S. role in support of Thailand to reduce the latter's dependence on China. Thailand also perceives China as a long term threat.

#### Chinese's position after the Cold War

However, with the current security picture, China is turning inwards and is not likely, during the coming

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<sup>6</sup>Muthiah Alagappa, "US-ASEAN Security Cooperation: Limits and Possibilities Prospects," ISIS Research Note (Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1989), p. 17.

decade, to seek to obtain significant military reach beyond the mainland of Asia and the South China Sea. Internal political problems seem likely to continue, with a leadership which has not so far been able to make the connection between economic reform and political reform. Its main concern will remain the Russian Federation and Indochina, particularly Vietnam. More active assertion by China of its territorial claims in the South China Seas, notably the Spratlys, which would have a potentially destabilizing impact to the region. Further discussion on ASEAN-China relations can be found in Chapter VI.

#### The Soviet Threat During the Cold War

In the late 1980's, Thailand and Singapore, perceived the former Soviet Union (now Russia) and Vietnam as posing serious threats to the security of Thailand and Southeast Asia. Thai perception of the former Soviet threat was informed by Soviet support for Vietnam and Laos, the build-up of Soviet military power in the region and its espionage activities in Thailand. The Soviet was not only the ally of Vietnam but also the adversary of the U.S. and the PRC. This alignment pattern pits Thailand against the former Soviet Union just as the alliance with the U.S. pitted Thailand against the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s.

During the Cold War, Thailand did not envisage a direct military threat from the USSR but expected it to continue to support Vietnam, to undertake political subversion and to undermine ASEAN solidarity. In the long-term, the former Soviet Union was believed to have ideological and imperial designs in the region. Similarly, Singapore has often stated its belief that the then Soviet Union will relentlessly pursue its objective to "communise" the world. Afghanistan and Cambodia were then depicted as manifestations of the then Soviet global design. It is interesting to note that until recently Singapore has downplayed the Russian threat.

In contrast, Indonesia and Malaysia, although concerned with the then growing Soviet military power in the region, were not unduly alarmed. It has been argued that the Soviet military build-up has little to do with the ASEAN states and that it is directed at achieving the status of a superpower and achieving effective deployment of available capability in relation to the American threat to the then Soviet interests.

It was believed that the former Soviets had neither the capability nor the interest to threaten the security of the ASEAN states.

## Demise of Soviet Union and the Decline of the Russian Threat

In early December 1991, the Presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia, that is, three out of the four founding members of the Soviet Union announced a dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). That decision brought to an end one of the greatest global powers in the history of mankind and certainly in modern history. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there has been no authoritative statement from Moscow on Russian foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region, and there may not be for some time. It appears that, presently, Russia is pre-occupied with domestic economic and political issues. Thus, although its severe economic difficulties limit the role the former Soviet Union can seek to play in Southeast Asia, it will seek to play a role and can be expected to do so more skilfully than it has done in the past. Given the current scenario of the region, the former Soviet navy has significantly reduced its naval deployment outside its home waters. In other words, the perception of Russian threat, now, has greatly been reduced. Nonetheless, the "new" Russian Federation will remain a great power and should have a part to play on the international scene.

## Vietnamese Threat During the Cold War

There are also differences within ASEAN in the perception of the Vietnamese threat. The Thai perception of the Vietnamese threat is informed by historical, geopolitical and ideological considerations. The Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia in 1978 and Vietnam's strategic alliance with the then Soviet Union upset the balance of power in mainland Southeast Asia. Consequently, Thailand views Vietnam as the number one external threat to its national security. In the long term, Vietnam is perceived of having designs to bring about a radical change in the political situation of Thailand, which would not be through invasion but through political subversion and support for indigenous insurgency especially in northeast Thailand. So long as peace does not prevail in Kampuchea or Cambodia, there would be tension on the border. The refugee problem has been causing Thailand to waste resources needlessly and this could be a source of tension in the region. Singapore also viewed the Vietnamese threat in the context of perceived the former Soviet aspirations in the region.

In contrast, Indonesia and Malaysia have at various times stated that Vietnam is not a threat. The

Malaysian position on the Vietnamese threat is somewhat more complex. Despite its tolerant attitude towards Vietnam, Malaysia, because of its geopolitical position, was more concerned about the Vietnamese threat to Thailand. It should also be remembered that Malaysia's major defence build-up occurred in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. Indonesia was, for various reasons, sympathetic towards Vietnam and did not want to see a Vietnam under the influence of the PRC or the former Soviet Union. Both Indonesia and Malaysia would like to see a strong and independent Vietnam playing a constructive role in Southeast Asia to contain the influence of external powers in the region. During the period of the Cold War, Thailand and Singapore, however, did not subscribe to this as, in their view, a strong Vietnam will inevitably seek to dominate Indochina with adverse consequences for Thai security. However, looking at the current situation and with the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, relations between ASEAN and Vietnam have improved.

#### Vietnam Today

Vietnam's accession to the Bali Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and its status as observer in ASEAN have marked a new, important step in regional cooperation

development. Vietnam's policy of renewal in the social and economic fields, in foreign relations, particularly in relations with Southeast Asian countries, has recently brought remarkable progress for regional peace and stability in the region. There is a possibility that Vietnam would be joining ASEAN in the future. However, ASEAN would proceed cautiously and wait for a consensus before deciding to accept Vietnam as a member. Details discussion on ASEAN-Vietnam relations can be found in Chapter V.