

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER IV: ASEAN SECURITY MECHANISMS

Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN)

ASEAN's 1971 endorsement of Malaysia's Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) proposal has been an effective diplomatic device to project a regional image of neutrality while maintaining the guarantees of friendly external powers. The Zone is for the purpose of contributing towards the promotion of world peace and security by reducing the areas of international conflict and tension while the major powers endeavour to reduce the level and types of armaments.

The basic thrust of the ZOPFAN concept is the denial of acts of illegitimate interference in the affairs of the region by the big powers while providing a framework for their legitimate involvement. Realizing the validity and relevance of ZOPFAN, the ASEAN countries is continuing to seek its gradual acceptance and phasing in of the concept in the region. The concept has already received endorsement by a number of countries including the Non-Aligned Conference and the Commonwealth.¹

¹Foreign Affairs Malaysia, Vol. 17, No. 4, (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1984), p. 385.

ASEAN's view of ZOPFAN, particularly during the Cold War, had not been effective in curbing the military buildup of either the Americans or the former Soviets in Southeast Asian waters as each seeks to protect its sealanes.

The ZOPFAN concept has lacked the support of the United States because it would exclude foreign powers from having a presence in the region. ZOPFAN conceptual framework requires certain modifications to be effective in making Southeast Asia a more peaceful and stable region. Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr. Abdullah Fadzil Che Wan had said that there was a need for the framework to be made more acceptable to all countries in the region. Datuk Dr. Abdullah cited recognition and respect by major powers as an important criterion to ZOPFAN's realisation. It also required the full commitment of all ASEAN countries and the support of other Southeast Asia nations. However, the United States reaction towards ZOPFAN had been ambivalent.²

If the concept were reworked to take away the concept of neutrality, a zone of peace and freedom would be created that would accept the presence of the great powers. In the context of its original formulation, a zone

²The New Straits Times, February 20, 1993.

of neutrality in the face of impending American withdrawal from Indochina, was entirely plausible. ASEAN neutrality at that point of time meant that ASEAN did not want to be in a position where they had to choose between communism and capitalism or between United States and the former Soviet Union.

The essence of neutrality at that time was considered correct as it means not choosing between or among two or more contending parties. In other words, it means "not to take side". The stand or strategy taken by ASEAN on neutrality in 1971 was understandable and relevant at that time. However, with the dramatic changes that had taken place in the international political arena, the concept of neutrality may be now obsolete.

Alan Ortiz is of the view that the concept of "neutrality", especially after the Cold War has become irrelevant and needs to be discarded and replaced by a more appropriate concept. He argued that economic issues will predominate in next century and that he proposed the word "neutrality" be dropped and the word "enterprise" be put in instead. Alan Ortiz felt that the word "enterprise" reflects the evolving world order. ³

³Alan T. Ortiz, "Redesigning ZOPFAN: The Search for a New Security Paradigm," in B. A. Hamzah ed., Southeast Asia and Regional Peace (Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1992), p. 137.

With regard to prospect for ZOPFAN, it is timely now that the signatories to the Kuala Lumpur Declaration should renew their endeavour to secure its realisation. Europe has reached a milestone in the creation of ZOPFAN when at the Conference in Paris on November 19, 1990, ten NATO members, six Warsaw powers and twelve other states attended the historic opening ceremony of a three-day Summit Conference on European Security. The point that need to be stress is that if the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality has been created in Europe it is timely that the states of ASEAN and other Southeast Asian countries take the initiative to turn Asia or for that matter Southeast Asia into a ZOPFAN.

ZOPFAN when it was declared in 1971 has a clear purpose of "promoting world peace and security by reducing the areas of international conflicts and tensions."⁴ This was intended to complement the efforts at arms reduction which was then being negotiated by the big superpowers by increasing the zones of Peace. Unfortunately, the global cold warriors "bashed" the concept out of proportion. However, with the end of the Cold war, the prospect for ZOPFAN looks very good. It seems that the United States and the Russian Federation are willing to play a more constructive role for the realisation of ZOPFAN.

⁴ZOPFAN Declaration, Kuala Lumpur, November 27, 1971.

Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) in Southeast Asia

Introduction

The Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) embodies ASEAN's long-term regional approach on nuclear disarmament and its desire to strengthen the non-proliferation treaty. It results from ASEAN's conviction that it is the right and the duty of every nation to work toward nuclear disarmament. The idea of establishing a NWFZ in Southeast Asia was launched for the first time at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Annual Meeting in Jakarta, 1984.

The idea of a SEANWFZ is not a new one. Already in the 1971 Kuala Lumpur ZOPFAN Declaration, ASEAN took cognizance of the significant trend towards establishing nuclear free zones. Before discussing further, let us take a look at the definition of NWFZ. The NWFZ as defined by the UN General Assembly in 1975, is any zone, recognised as such by the United Nations General Assembly, which any group of states had established by virtue of a Treaty or Convention prescribing the absence of nuclear weapons, the procedure for the delimitation of the zone, an international system of verification and control to be established to guarantee compliance with obligation.⁵

⁵Phan Wannamethee, "ZOPFAN: A Blueprint for Regional Co-existence," in B. A. Hamzah, ed., Southeast Asia and Regional Peace, p. 100.

The idea of a Southeast Asia NWFZ, at the height of the Cold War, was discouraged by the U.S. as the American felt that the spread of NWFZ around the globe would prejudice the U.S. position in the nuclear arms race with the former Soviet Union. Efforts by ASEAN to establish the Southeast Asia NWFZ was never abandoned. The goal of establishing a Southeast Asia NWFZ was finally included in the 1987 Manila Summit Declaration. The establishment of the South Pacific Nuclear Weapons Free Zone earlier by the Treaty of Raratonga in 1985 had received attention by ASEAN as a source of guidelines that could be applied to Southeast Asia.

The ensuing years were used to develop further the concept of a Southeast Asia NWFZ, while trying to persuade the nuclear powers to accept the idea. During this period the NWFZ concept was increasingly treated and seen as a necessary corollary of ZOPFAN in a nuclear world. As far as Malaysia is concerned, Malaysia is likely to pursue efforts in the direction of creating a NWFZ and regard it as an important element of ZOPFAN.⁶

The situation has radically changed since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union leaving the U.S.A. as the only super power in possession of a fully operational nuclear weapons arsenal.

⁶Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, "The Role of Great Powers in Southeast Asia," Opinion (Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1988), p. 5.

The relevance of NWFZ after the Cold War

The issue in question is whether there is still a need of NWFZ after the Cold War? According to Professor Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, it seems that there is now even a greater need for ZOPFAN and the Southeast Asia NWFZ. The reason as put forward by Professor Mochtar is that the regionalisation of the threats to peace and security is still conceivable even after the end of the Cold War.⁷ A necessary consequence of this development is a greater responsibility of the regional powers for the peace and security in their respective region.

Despite warnings of an impending "power vacuum" in Southeast Asia by some quarters, ASEAN is actually well prepared to face this new development in the world order of an uneasy "neither war nor peace situation".

ASEAN has a workable concept for regional peace and security in ZOPFAN which has stood the test of time. It has the appropriate philosophy of regional strength and endurance in the concept of regional resilience, which was mentioned earlier in Chapter II. Its concept of security is a comprehensive one not limited to military security and defence. The ASEAN concept of security is closer to the

⁷Dr Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, "Nuclear Issues in the Pacific with special reference to the Prospects for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in Southeast Asia," Paper presented at the Seventh Asia-Pacific Roundtable, Kuala Lumpur, June 6-9, 1993.

Japanese concept of "comprehensive security" than the Western concept of security which tends to be limited to military security.

ASEAN is concerned of the possibility of other countries, besides the U.S. and Russia, which have a nuclear arms capability i.e. China, India and possibly North Korea and potentially Japan. The technical potential of Japan of becoming a nuclear arms power should not be ruled out, although political constraints make it very unlikely that it will become one. It is argued that even the removal of a nuclear balance make the present day world a more dangerous place to live in.

It is well noted that Southeast Asia is strategically located in that the ASEAN sub-region sits astride important sealanes that connect Japan and the Asian Far East with the Middle-East and Europe. The sealanes also provide a vital link between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. For the members of ASEAN this means that the legitimate interests of their people and their very security and existence has to be safeguarded in peace as well as in time of war.

Prospects for a Southeast Asia NWFZ

Let us now examine the prospects for such a NWFZ in becoming a reality. The objective of making the region a NWFZ could only be attained if major powers accept this regional quest. It seems that the only serious obstacle standing in the way of the realisation of a Southeast Asia NWFZ was opposition from the U.S. However, the prospects now for its successful establishment are better than ever, as the objections made by the U.S. at the time are no longer valid. As far as the former Soviet Union is concerned, the former USSR is in favour of such an idea for the creation of a non-nuclear zone in the region.⁸

When the former U.S. Secretary of State, George Schultz, made the objection during the ASEAN Annual Foreign Ministers meeting in 1985, he did so on the grounds that its establishment would jeopardize the U.S. position world wide vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in the nuclear arms balance. According to Dr. Mochtar, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US objection was no longer valid.⁹

⁸Igor A. Gogachev, "Soviet Policy Towards the Asia-Pacific Region," ISIS Pacific papers (Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1988), p. 20.

⁹"Kusumaatmadja: US objection no longer valid," New Straits Times, June 8, 1993.

But, at the 26th ASEAN Post-Ministerial Meeting held in Singapore, the United States' stand on ZOPFAN and SEANWFZ has been welcomed. US Assistant Secretary of State and Pacific Affairs Mr. Winston Lord had said that although the US previously had reservations over ZOPFAN and SEANWFZ, its concerns have been considerably eased. Mr. Lord added that "We are now willing to listen more about these concepts. But we cannot make a decision on them until the specifics have been finalised."¹⁰

In view of its interest and security, ASEAN should not only conclude a Treaty on SEANWFZ, but also to find ways to achieve the goal of the Treaty by convincing greatpowers in the region to support and sign the Treaty. Judging from the action taken at the last ASEAN Summit in Singapore in 1992, the prospects for an early establishment of a Southeast Asia NWFZ look quite good. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers at its 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore in July 1993 have noted the significant progress made in resolving the outstanding issues relating to the draft Treaty of the Southeast Asia NWFZ and they have directed the Senior Officials Working Group on ZOPFAN and SEAFWFZ to continue its work.

¹⁰"Major Powers are now receptive to ZOPFAN concept," The New Straits Times, July 29, 1993.