

## CHAPTER IV

## OBLIGATIONS OF GUARANTOR STATES

## - A CONVERGANCE OF BIG POWER INTERESTS

The difficulty of agreeing on the terms of neutralisation should not be underestimated, nor should the problems of maintaining the status, once it is agreed upon. Since the obvious role of neutralisation in South East Asia is to remove these small, newly emergant and weak states from the arenas of destructive regional and global competition, it is wise to examine if, in fact the Big Powers would consider these restraints on their part as being in line with their foreign policies.

Nordin Sopiae in his paper writes<sup>1</sup> that the greatest fear of the Great Powers is warfare amongst themselves. In Moscow, after his trip to Peking, President Nixon pointed out that it was necessary for the United States and the Soviet Union not to be "dragged into war, without intending it, by conflicts between small nations. President Podgorny stated that when there was a conflict the two countries, they would seek a "sane balance of

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1 Nordin Sopiae, Neutralisation of South East Asia, Australian Institute of International Affairs, Conference Asia and Western Pacific, Session 2, Paper 5, p. 20.

interests". Neutralisation clearly offers the possibility of ensuring international sanity in South East Asia and of making certain that local wars are not escalated into hell.

At this stage of talks on nuclear parity between the United States and U.S.S.R., (SALT), it can be seen that both powers are eager to cut down excessive military spending. This is also due to domestic pressure on both Moscow and Washington to devote more of their attention to pressing domestic economic difficulties.

The United States - China rapprochement has proceeded briskly. There has now been an encouraging level of dialogue and trust between the two and this will greatly aid the process of accommodation of interests needed in a neutralised South East Asia.

Japan, already an economic giant with extensive investments in South East Asia, will surely want a stable and prosperous South East Asia to dump their goods and obtain raw materials. Though, Japan is non-militaristic and non-nuclear, it is difficult to see her sitting still if developments in the region will adversely affect her economy. The Straits of Malacca is a main lifeline to Japanese industry. She would want it to be free for indiscriminate use. Neutralisation would make it possible for her to safeguard her economic interests without having to resort to military means.

All the Great Powers have a stake in South East Asian stability. It is in the interest of each of the Great Powers that none of the others attain hegemony in the region. One method of ensuring against this is mutual self-restraint. Furthermore, the Great Powers have other world-wide commitments and problems to resolve and they cannot afford to continue confronting each other in South East Asia.

China had stated in a communique that neither the United States nor China "should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony. She also pledged that she would not interfere in the affairs of other states. This means that China will no longer be able to help North Vietnam build an Indo-China and they have to stop rendering assistance to South East Asian communists. It has been argued that "Peking's actual behaviour and her ideological theses on revolution reveal that she is prepared to refrain from direct interference in the competition whether peaceful or violent between communist parties and the "bourgeois" classes in Asian countries, so long as the United States also does not directly intervene in these countries' politics.<sup>2</sup> This seem to be extremely optimistic. It has also been speculated that if American presence in Thailand is reduced, China would respond by

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2 David Mosingo, Containment in Asia, pp. 368-9.

cutting back her support of the Pathet Lao in Laos. The object, it appears, is for China to create a non-hostile belt of mainland South East Asian nations.<sup>3</sup> Neutralisation is a low-risk, high-payoff policy which China has been fond of.

The suggestion has been made today that the U.S.S.R. supports the neutralisation of South East Asia but has kept in the belief that anything it espouses will generate Chinese opposition.<sup>4</sup>

Moscow's support for the idea is not without considerations of the benefits she will gain. Russia wants to check China from achieving a dominant influence in the region and at the same time to challenge America's presence in the area. Neutralisation would legitimise their non-military presence which they had only recently build up. But this would also mean that they have to forego any designs of creating a second front facing China from the South. But they would not have to worry about any Chinese encroachment in the region if the South East States can resist the Chinese by themselves, in a neutralised South East Asia.

The United States wants to reduce its military presence in the region under the Nixon Doctrine. At the same time she is wary of the vacuum being filled in by another Power. Neutralisa-

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3 South East Asia Tomorrow (London, 1970), p. 26.

4 Op. cit.

tion would prevent this from happening. But with the reduction of the United States military might in the region, the United States will have to compete on equal terms with the others. This will definitely result in much of loss of the United States influence in the region because for a greater part the United States power is based on her military presence.

With this competition on equal basis prevailing in the region, Japan will definitely stand to gain in the economic field.

It can be seen therefore that neutralisation will not be without cost to the Powers but it will not be without benefits. In the years ahead, it is highly likely than the gains will outweigh the losses.