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Winning at Dominoes: ASEAN and Implications for U.S. Policy

A Case Study by Robert E. Kays

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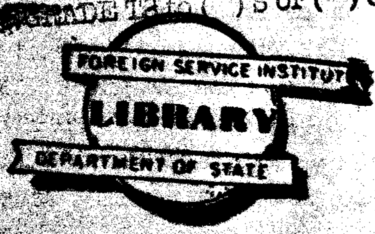

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WINNING AT DOMINOES:
ASEAN AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

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by

Robert E. Kays

SUMMARY

American attitudes toward Asia since the end of World War II have undergone drastic shifts. Initially, China was to be the anchor of our Asian policy. Japan was to be disarmed and reduced to an agricultural and pacifist nation, while the U.S.-Soviet wartime alliance would continue. Not only did Soviet actions soon bring about the confrontation of the Cold War, but China under Mao, changed direction and the Chinese-Soviet alliance became a threat of alarming proportions until the two communist giants split and became antagonists.

Stopping Kim Il Sung at the 38th parallel in Korea was a successful U.S. foreign policy move, albeit one for which we paid heavily. The next move, attempting to shore up the Indochina dominoe, proved to be a long, drawn-out, unmitigated disaster, for which we are still paying a social price. Now, eight years after American combat troops have been withdrawn from Vietnam and six years after Saigon's capitulation, Southeast Asia is the focus of a new struggle involving the three major world powers. Having accepted massive support from both the USSR and China during the long war, Vietnam has now formed a virtual alliance with the former, broken relations with the latter, completely dominates Laos and Kampuchea, and poses a major threat to the stability of the region.

The "other" Southeast Asia today is comprised of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines joined together in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This study provides a brief overview of the region at the beginning of the 1980 decade and concludes that, despite formidable problems, ASEAN has a decent prospect for long-range viability, and that it is in the U.S. national interest to deal with the nations of Southeast Asia, to the extent feasible, through the ASEAN mechanism, attempting thereby to strengthen it as a unifying entity.

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There are two Southeast Asias today. On one side of a clear political demarcation are the three Indochinese states of Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam, all under the present de facto suzerainty of Hanoi. On the other side are the five independent ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) States of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Unlike the militarily coerced solidarity of the Indochinese bloc, the ASEAN grouping is a voluntary one that could come untied anytime. With differences frequently overshadowing mutual interests, cynics pointed out at the end of its first decade that the only accomplishment the organization could point to was its continued existence.

As we enter the 1980's, ASEAN is taken much more seriously, both by those who oppose the organization and by those who wish it well. In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, March 1, 1979, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke, said: "At its inception in 1967 and until a very few years ago, few outside observers believed that ASEAN would be successful. Yet today the organization commands political and economic respect throughout the world. No longer do leaders of these nations speak simply as Thais, Filipinos, Indonesians, Malaysians or Singaporeans; they speak also as members of ASEAN."(1)

Economically, the recent inauguration of the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council is indicative of the importance the American private sector places on the region and its potential. U.S. investment in the region now exceeds $4 billion and is increasing at more than 10% annually. The United States is the single largest foreign investor in Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia, and is second only to Japan in investment in Thailand and Indonesia. Bilateral U.S.-ASEAN trade in 1979 increased by almost 30%, substantially more than the rise in U.S. trade worldwide, and came to more than $16 billion for the year. Total ASEAN GNP is now well over $100 billion, with average growth rates in the past 12 years ranging from 6% to 11%. The ASEAN economy supports a population of 245 million, greater than that of South America and on a land area twice that of the European Economic Community. Per capita GNP ranges from a low of $250 in Indonesia, to a high of $2,700 in Singapore.

The political sands have shifted considerably in Southeast Asia since World War II. The European colonialists were swept away by the Japanese Imperial Army, then returned to resume overlordship, only to be evicted again, permanently, by the forces of nationalism. The U.S. was only belatedly a colonial power in Asia, during the period of the "little brown brother" relationship with the Philippines in this century. U.S. policy in the area for the past several decades has been to check the spread of communism, as most clearly enunciated by the "containment" policy of John Foster Dulles.

Containment relied on treaty relationships backed by military force, primarily American. It succeeded in Korea in 1952, albeit at great cost, but failed completely in the long, agonizing Vietnam experience. Whichever of the oft-repeated arguments or excuses one puts forward for the tragic events leading up to the fall of Saigon, it is doubtful that the United States will ever be able to

determine the course of Southeast Asian history primarily by the use of American military force. This is true not only because the terrain, the ill-defined borders, and the political factionalism make local guerrilla warfare more effective, but also because the major powers are coming to accept the declining utility of military power generally in achieving national objectives.

Fortunately, the dire predictions of the course events would take if American military might were not thrown into the breach have not come to pass. In March 1964, in a memorandum to President Lyndon B. Johnson, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara defined the U.S. objective in Southeast Asia as: "... an independent non-communist South Vietnam.... Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance (all of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), accommodate to Communism so as to remove effective U.S. and anti-Communist influence (Burma), or fall under the domination of forces not now explicitly Communist but likely then to become so (Indonesia taking over Malaysia). Thailand might hold for a while with our help, but would be under grave pressure. Even the Philippines would become shakey; and the threat to India to the west, Australia and New Zealand to the south, and Taiwan, Korea, and Japan to the north and east would be greatly increased."

The ineluctability of the dominoes falling one after the other need no longer be accepted because the Sino-Soviet split has shattered the international communist monolith, because state control of the economy as the panacea is losing its luster for the educated younger generations in the LDC's, and because rising nationalism is incompatible with the socialist requirement for complete subservience to the system. This is not to argue, however, that either Moscow or Beijing or those aspiring local leaders who may legitimately be described as independent-socialist-nationalists, have retreated at all from the conviction that they know what is best for the masses and are going to ram it down the mass throat -- even if millions die in the process -- as the ongoing genocide in Kampuchea amply demonstrates.

It is difficult to be objective when considering the starvation, the killings, the brutal servitude, the family separations and the refugee plight in Southeast Asia today. However, in formulating what a nation's goals should be or what its national interests are, objectivity is a requisite. When a major power such as the United States formulates its policy toward the Third World, there is, despite all demonstrable evidence of benevolence, the inevitable underlying but unarticulated assumption that we too "know what is good for them."

Setting aside the larger task of defining U.S. interests in the world as beyond the scope of this short paper, a general premise can be articulated: Our national interest comprises insuring our survival as a nation, preserving the values and ideals of our people, and securing an international environment favorable to those interests. Within that framework, how important is Southeast Asia to the United States? Rank ordering our priorities around the world is not politically prudent, even if it were possible, but I would posit that Southeast Asia is not as important to the United States as is Europe because of the strong economic, political and

cultural ties, as well as the heritage factor and the historical length of the relationship. This is a fact of life not to be glossed over, despite the racial overtones of those in other areas of the world who criticize our Europe-first policy. I would also argue that Japan is more important to the United States than is all of Southeast Asia since, inter alia, that country plays such a vital role in Southeast Asia's development that loss of the former would predetermine the course of the latter.

In view of the above and in line with securing a favorable international environment, it is clearly in the long-range interest of the United States to support the free nations of Southeast Asia, assist in their development, and aid in their defense against overt outside aggression, as well as against the more insidious means to the same end, internal subversion. This is, of course, what John Foster Dulles had in mind when he forged another link in the steel containment chain by setting up SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, in 1954. India's Prime Minister Nehru, a bitter opponent of the pact at the time, described it as poorly organized, not much of a treaty, and not even Southeast Asian. In the latter aspect, at least, he had a point, in that Thailand and the Philippines were the only two Asian signatories. The others were the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan and the United States, none of whom, other than the U.S., really felt much of a commitment to become engaged militarily in the region.

Leaving nothing to the imagination, Dulles appended to the Treaty an understanding that its provisions relating to armed attack applied specifically to "communist aggression." While the pact committed the U.S. to defend the region militarily, or perhaps more correctly "because" it committed the U.S., it did little to encourage the Southeast Asian nations to enhance or coordinate their own defense. In this sense, it might even be seen as having been counterproductive. One would have to concede, however, that the solid U.S. commitment did buy time in providing a shielded period during which some of the essential foundations of nation building went on.

Amid the kaleidoscopic changes that have recently characterized Southeast Asia, ASEAN, now 14 years old, is rapidly becoming one of the more dependent variables. Though inaugurated as an economic and cultural organization, its role is becoming more openly political and avowedly so. Indicative of the increasing willingness to take firm stands against stronger powers, ASEAN recently joined the European Economic Community in a political statement condemning Soviet aggression in Afghanistan. The organization condemned both Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea and the subsequent Chinese invasion of Vietnam, then played a major role in marshalling the U.N. General Assembly resolution on the Kampuchean invasion. The ASEAN countries also play a moderating role in the North-South dialogue. They support in principle the "New International Economic Order," but they clearly recognize that they have a stake in the present order.

Less spectacular but also more indicative of the organization's broad appeal and permanence is the fact that rarely a week goes by without an ASEAN conference in session in one of the five capitals. Encouraged by the governmental cooperation, supranational organizations now functioning include the Confederation

of ASEAN Journalists, the ASEAN Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Confederation of ASEAN Parliamentarians.

The United States will always deal bilaterally with the nations of Southeast Asia as it will with other nations, regardless of their regional affiliations. (Except for those formerly independent nations subsumed within the Soviet system.) This does not, however, prevent dealing with countries as members of a regional organization when it is in our interest to do so. It is, in my opinion, clearly in the U.S. interest to see a strengthening and continuance of ASEAN as a framework within which each of the member countries can cooperatively pursue its own development more effectively than would be the case without its existence. It follows then, that the United States should deal with ASEAN as an organization whenever convenient, inasmuch as such action would tend to further legitimize the organization and enhance its prestige.

Foreign policy "doctrines" are frequently coterminous with the administration that enunciates them. The Nixon Doctrine, however, while now less often articulated as such, stresses U.S. support for nations that do more to support themselves and thus is more in keeping with the mood of the times than is Dulles' containment policy relying on U.S. military might. ASEAN, as a completely self-generated organization made up strictly of Southeast Asian nations, is a far cry from the anachronistic SEATO, and continued U.S. support of the organization is in keeping with the concept of the Nixon Doctrine as well as being compatible with the American mood of the 1980's.

It was 180 years ago that Thomas Jefferson cautioned his countrymen about forming "entangling alliances." The post-Vietnam American public would not tolerate another SEATO-type entanglement in Asia today, but ASEAN suffers from no such stigma. A premise put forward on several occasions during the 1980-81 Executive Seminar is that American foreign policy starts at home, that it must be rooted in American values and beliefs, and be both understandable and supportable on that basis or be doomed to failure. History credits Woodrow Wilson with being one of our more erudite, selfless and far-sighted presidents, but his League of Nations vision failed because it was out of step with American thinking at the time. Vietnam is a more recent example of foreign policy failure due to lack of domestic support.

The argument should not be carried too far. To exercise only such foreign policy initiatives as are known in advance to have full domestic support would be so limiting as to be immoral. Acknowledging that U.S. supremacy internationally is no longer unchallenged and has indeed been reduced in relative terms, we are still a major power with a world role to play and cannot harbor thoughts of returning to the warm womb of isolation. There will continue to be times when public opinion must be led. It is simply a matter of recognizing that there is a limit to how far it can be led.

George F. Kennan said: "History does not forgive us our national mistakes because they are explicable in terms of our domestic politics. If you say that

mistakes of the past were unavoidable because of our domestic predilections and habits of thought, you are saying that what stopped us from being more effective than we were was democracy, as practiced in this country. And, if that is true, let us recognize it and measure the full seriousness of it -- and find something to do about it. A nation which excuses its own failures by the sacred untouchableness of its own habits can excuse itself into complete disaster.[2]

Kennan's insight is equally applicable to the geopolitical situation in Asia today where the Hanoi-dominated Indochina states with powerful Soviet backing, face the remaining free nations of the area that have formed themselves into a cooperative grouping that needs, deserves and should have strong and consistent U.S. support now and into the decades ahead. It should not be difficult to gain and sustain domestic understanding for a policy that maximizes the U.S. input by supporting five nations that are determined to support and defend themselves and have taken the important step of erecting a framework for cooperating with each other in the effort.

With the exception of Singapore's outspoken Lee Kuan Yew, the ASEAN nations eschew any public posture that can be interpreted as moving the organization along the route to becoming a military alliance. Whether and when that may occur in the future is open to speculation, but all five are showing less resistance now than previously to American military presence in the region. Collectively, they favored and encouraged renewal of the U.S.-Philippines base agreements. Their public statements have consistently made known their desire for more U.S. participation, including, but not limited to the economic.

While there are, among the member states, differences in perspectives on the threat, and due to variant domestic factors some divergence in approach, ASEAN's unity is more noteworthy than its diversity toward the overriding preoccupation in Southeast Asia today -- an unyielding and uncompromising Vietnam, intent on extending its sphere of influence, despite suffering the ravages of decades of continuous warfare, and now with the backing of the Soviet Union.

That Hanoi should come to dominate all of Indochina following the fall of Saigon is in keeping with the pattern of Southeast Asian history. The concept of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea as a geographical unit dates from the colonial era, "Indochina" being a French term. The Vietnamese have always been the most aggressive of the Southeast Asian peoples, having engaged in wars for centuries with their neighbors. They played a role under the French colonialists somewhat akin to the overseas Chinese in other Asian countries. The French used Vietnamese to staff their civil service ranks in the rest of Indochina because they were more hard-working and efficient than their neighbors. The Vietnamese consequently engendered a resentment and hostility from the native populations, again similar to that encountered by the overseas Chinese who still control much of the banking and commerce throughout Southeast Asia.

Vietnamese domination of Indochina might have been eventually accepted by the rest of the Southeast Asian nations, and even by the world, with reasonable equanimity if it were not for the significant difference that today Hanoi is allied

with the Soviet Union, and China perceives that alliance and the extension of Vietnam's hegemony as a major part of the Soviet design of encirclement. Determined to resist this encroachment, Beijing has refused to recognize the Heng Samrin regime, continuing to support Pol Pot, despite the fact that his unsavory reputation is anathema to them even as fellow communists. Ironically, after bitterly denouncing Pol Pot for his savagery against his own people, both the United States and the ASEAN states were forced to support his seat at the United Nations as the only means of preventing the seating of the puppet Heng Samrin regime.

While the Thais deny it, the Vietnamese insist that the Chinese are supplying the Pol Pot forces with military equipment through Thailand, with the latter's concurrence. They also accuse the Thais of arming and supplying refugee groups who become the source of recruits for Pol Pot. Each combatant's fierce attempts to prevent the other from gaining access to scarce food supplies has prevented international relief organizations from effectively distributing vitally needed rice for food and for seed. The vast refugee flood, the displacement of farmers, and successive years of inadequate harvests have made mass starvation the ultimate tragedy.

A long buildup of Soviet-supplied arms preceded Hanoi's December 1978 all-out attack on Phnom Penh that unseated Pol Pot. China was aware of the buildup for the invasion and warned Vietnam against it, but the warning went unheeded. Several months then elapsed during which time presumably Beijing debated its course of action. To have done nothing out of fear of Soviet reprisal along their own northern border would have severely damaged the credibility of their "paper tiger" epithet for the Russians, as well as severely reduced their credibility as a regional power. Accordingly, in February-March 1979, China attacked Vietnam at a number of points along their border, invading the six northern provinces, to "teach Vietnam a lesson."

The Russians growled and there were some uneasy moments, but they did not retaliate with an incursion on China's northern border. The Chinese withdrew, blowing up factories, bridges and rail networks as they went, but the Vietnamese had given a good account of themselves in the fighting. The Chinese accomplished their objective, but military critics have observed that it was anything but a smooth and well executed military maneuver and showed a surprising weakness in Chinese equipment and training vis-a-vis the experienced Vietnamese units.

Nothing has changed since that attack, except for an increase in the stridency with which the Hanoi media lambast Beijing, China, having long ago replaced the United States as Indochina's number one enemy of the people. The Vietnamese have shown not the slightest indication of withdrawing from Kampuchea, and China talks of teaching them "a second lesson," but as time goes by other options may seem more appealing.

Patience is a virtue highly esteemed in Asian society, and this translates no less into the world view of the nations concerned. Without attempting to speculate as to precisely what the next move of any of the participants may be, there is no

doubt that continued Chinese support for anti-Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea, and to some extent in Laos, reflects their belief that a protracted Indochina war will prove so wearying for a Vietnamese government already heavily overcommitted that they will eventually be willing to begin negotiating some kind of alternative.

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With hardly a pause to savor victory after their long debilitating war against a Saigon supported first by the French and then by the Americans, the Hanoi government continued their quest for complete Indochinese domination. They have now succeeded, but have hardly begun to rebuild their agricultural infrastructure, let alone their industry and their cities. Their reliance now on the Russians is for food and economic aid, as well as military supplies. Meantime, they continue to maintain a huge, expensive and economically non-productive military establishment. What they captured when they installed Heng Samrin in Phnom Penh was a wasted and starving Kampuchea left from Pol Pot's decimation, and they are forced now to provide aid that they need themselves. One naturally wonders how long the Vietnamese peasant is going to tolerate the incredible sacrifice he has been called on to make for so long. The Vietnamese leaders have shown beyond the slightest doubt that they are a fiercely determined lot. But being easily disuaded from a goal is not a Chinese attribute either. When the strategists in Beijing discuss their policy of bleeding Vietnam, they may very well be talking not of the next monsoon season or next year, but of unrelenting pressure for five years or ten years or twenty.

Is there an alternative other than this scenario or all-out war, which would be difficult to envision without the Soviets and then the U.S. becoming embroiled? Hanoi will certainly not acquiesce in Pol Pot returning to power with Chinese backing -- and it is obvious that the Chinese do not really want him either. Neither will the Chinese accept the status quo with Heng Samrin installed as Hanoi's puppet. A feasible scenario would be the creation of a new government in Kampuchea, one acceptable to both Hanoi and Beijing. It would require a new leader acceptable to both and hopefully with some claim to bonafide authority -- the return from exile of the indomitable Prince Norodom Sihanouk cannot be ruled out. With Hanoi the power on the scene, and with Moscow in the background, it would be too much to expect that the new government would be neutral anything more than in name. Suffice that it not be so blatantly pro-Soviet and anti-Beijing. A solution along this line is being discussed in ASEAN councils, and ASEAN, perhaps with U.S. support and with Chinese acquiescence, could play a key role in its implementation.

A major factor in the thinking of the ASEAN states, one that is not lost on the Vietnamese and their Russian backers and one that certainly has occurred to the Chinese, is that a strong and unified Indochina, dominated by Hanoi with Soviet support, would be ASEAN's own most formidable bulwark against another replay of the historic periods of domination of the smaller Southeast Asian states by a China now well on its way to regaining the power that in the past elicited tribute and subservience.

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While they continue to maintain a show of unity on the Indochina issue, there are serious differences among them in their assessments of the situation. Thailand, the front-line state bordering Laos and Kampuchea, sees Moscow's backing of expansionist Vietnam as the major threat and favors a stronger anti-Hanoi, pro-Beijing tilt, whereas Indonesia, with memories of the Beijing-supported and almost successful 1965 communist coup, is more concerned about resurgent Chinese power. The geographically further removed Philippines is less immediately concerned with Indochina, but tends to sympathize with the Bangkok view. Singapore is the only ASEAN state that openly advocates turning the organization into a military pact, and takes a strong stand in opposition to Hanoi. Malaysia, with its large Chinese minority living in uneasy balance with the Malays, is the most neutral of the ASEAN states toward the Indochina conflict, but tends toward favoring a strong Vietnam as a counterweight to China.

All of the outlawed communist parties in Southeast Asia are oriented toward Beijing, and Chinese support for them has long been a source of friction. Recent Chinese statements of disavowel of such support has not dissipated the suspicion. Thailand and the Philippines are formally militarily allied with the United States, whereas the other three states have long been members of the non aligned movement. Malaysia and Indonesia are Muslim countries with strong ties to the Muslim world and concerned with the recent phenomenon of resurgent Islam. The other three have Muslim minorities, and the Philippines has a long-standing Muslim insurrection on its hands in Mindanao.

The ASEAN states are all in the LDC category. Some are economically stronger and further along the road to the "takeoff" stage than others, but all are striving toward raising their GNP and standards of living through greater industrialization and are beginning to succeed. There is a long road ahead, but none are economic basket cases. What they need is time and a peaceful environment within which to work out their own destinies. The fact that they have banded together and formed ASEAN to cooperate in this development process, despite the formidable problems they all face and the historic differences and animosities among them, is a development of no small significance. If ASEAN were to come apart, increasing the tendency for each of the nations to make its own terms with one or another of the big powers with interest in the region, the chance for a free and independent Southeast Asia would be considerably lessened.

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Southeast Asia, as a term, gained currency only in World War II as a collective description for the countries under Japanese occupation south of China. The rather sharp three-way cultural division of the strongly Sinicized Vietnam, the more distant and heavily Hispanicized Philippines, and the other countries of the region that owe their ancient cultural heritage to India had previously tended to preclude scholars from viewing the region as an entity. More recently, the era of European colonial subjugation has given rise to the description of the region as a collection of countries facing outward and turning their backs on each other. Starting with the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511 and continuing until the

middle of this century, the nations of Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand, were tied to Western industrial powers, and the major decisions concerning them were made in European capitals. Even today, the educated Laotian is more familiar with Paris than with Kuala Lumpur, while the Indonesian from West Irian would probably look to the Netherlands for advanced education before thinking of Jakarta.

Except for northern Vietnam and the Philippines, the nations of Southeast Asia were first and most decisively influenced by Indic culture. It is interesting to recall, in this context, that Southeast Asia was never colonized or dominated by India nor was it engulfed by swarms of Indian immigrants during the centuries of its steady absorption of the major elements of Indian civilization. In the realms of government, in religion and in the arts, the Indic influence was pervasive. Reminiscent of Japan's actively seeking and adopting Chinese cultural patterns, there was for centuries a flow of Indian scholars along with traders, to Southeast Asia both by ship and by the overland route, while conversely, students from the east went westward to study and return. The collapse of the Han Dynasty and the ensuing domestic upheaval from the third to sixth centuries prevented China from playing a greater role in the cultural evolution of Southeast Asia during this period. Vietnam is the one nation where Chinese rather than Indian cultural influence predominates, it having been once part of the southern Chinese state of Annam.

With the disintegration of the T'ang Dynasty, Vietnam gained its independence from China, but was forced repeatedly over the ensuing centuries to fight off further hegemonistic attempts. The recent protracted and frustrating American involvement in Southeast Asia gains a new perspective when one considers that the most enduring theme of Vietnamese history for well over a thousand years has been its struggle to preserve its independence from China.

Despite its reputation of conquering by the sword, the propagation of Islam in Southeast Asia was a gradual and, for the most part, peaceful process. Moslem traders from the Near East passed through the region en route to China, and there is evidence of Moslem inscriptions on tombstones in Java dating from the early 12th century. The appeal of Islam to the masses was the salvation it offered all men regardless of class or caste, the simplicity of the Prophet's teachings, and the ease with which one could join the faith -- merely by repeating a few phrases, acknowledging Allah as the one divinity and Muhammad as his messenger, one became a Muslim. In a little more than a century, the new religion had spread throughout the trade routes of Southeast Asia, reaching as far as the southern Philippines.

The quest for spices and other exotic commodities, as well as the zeal for spreading Christianity that brought the Portuguese to Malacca in the first wave of Western imperialism, brought the Spanish to the Philippines. The islands were not profitable from a trading standpoint, but proved to be fertile ground for the missionaries. Some 80% of the population of the Philippines remain Catholic today, and the Hispanic overlay makes the islands distinct culturally, as well as geographically, from the rest of Southeast Asia.

The first Dutch ships reached the East in 1596, and by the early part of the next century, the huge Netherlands trading company, V.O.C. (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie), established its base in Java and named it Batavia after the former Roman name for Holland. The canals they dug for cargo transport are still visible in the modern city of Jakarta. The Philippines and Indonesia excepted, western imperial inroads in the countries of mainland Southeast Asia could be said to be relatively peripheral until the beginning of the last half of the 19th century. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 was an event of major importance in facilitating access to and interest in the area. Singapore was a small fishing and trading village when it was ceded to the British East India Company in 1819. The small states of the Malay Peninsula attracted little attention, and it was only when clan warfare erupted among Chinese tin miners that the British, in the name of peace and order, took colonial control of the Peninsula.

Again, it was the Portuguese who were the first Westerners to penetrate Vietnam, but they left little in the way of a permanent legacy, except for their system of Romanization of the language which is still in use today. The country offered little to attract early maritime traders. It was the cross that brought the French, and their early and sustained efforts did make some Christianizing impact. Both political and commercial interests began to weigh more heavily by the mid 19th century. This coincided with persecution of Christian converts and French missionaries by the Vietnamese emperors, providing the excuse for gunboat diplomacy. Rejection of their demands for commercial opportunities and consular representation at Hue led the French to bombard and then capture Danang. Shortly thereafter, in 1859, French troops occupied the provincial capital of Saigon. Then followed a pattern of military moves, alliances of convenience with local rulers, and treaties signed under pressure until, by 1893 with the incorporation of Laos, the French were in control of all of Indochina.

Historians today point to Switzerland and Sweden as examples of countries that have achieved high standards of living without ever having engaged in territorial imperialism, while Japan is an example of a country that has prospered, despite loss of its colonies. There is little question, however, that the European powers of the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries regarded their colonies as essential to their political and economic well being. There were differences among the Southeast Asian states in their degree of profitability to their overlords, in the degree of their acquiescence, and in the skill and degree of benevolence with which they were administered. What was uniform to all the powers was the firm conviction that history and genetics had thrust colonial rule upon the white man, and that his role, if not absolutely pure, was at least inevitable.

The world has witnessed eras of religious ferment, of exploration, of industrialization, of colonization and others to which various names could be applied. The present era in Southeast Asia could be described as one of nationalism. The naivete of the colonial powers after World War II attempting to return to the status quo ante is apparent from the perspective of the 1980's. The incredibly fast Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia in the first stage of the War

and the symbolism of Asians defeating Europeans is often cited as the spark that ignited the spirit of nationalism that shortly thereafter triumphed. It would probably be more correct to regard the Japanese interregnum as a factor that contributed to a process already well underway.

The colonial withdrawal was accomplished in some cases with relative grace and in others was brought about only after prolonged bloodshed. Some states were blessed with a reasonably cohesive body politic and competent national leaders with the requisite charisma and following. Others, such as Laos, are characterized by disparate ethnic groups still lacking a unified sense of nationhood. Four of the five nations that joined together to form ASEAN gained their independence since World War II. All have interests in common, but they also have national and international priorities distinct enough to require an individual look at each in assessing the long-term significance and viability of the organization.

THAILAND

Thailand is the front-line state of the ASEAN countries in that it currently faces hostile troops on its borders. Historically, Laos and Cambodia had acted as buffer states between Thailand and Vietnam, but Vietnam's domination of all of Indochina has now brought it into direct confrontation with Thailand to the latter's serious military disadvantage. While reasonably well equipped, mostly with American weapons, Thailand's relatively modest military establishment has little major combat experience. The Vietnamese, on the other hand, have over a million battle-hardened men under arms and possess vast quantities of American military hardware captured with the fall of Saigon.

The major foreign policy concern of the Bangkok government for the past several years has been, and for the foreseeable future will continue to be, the serious threat to its security along its border with Kampuchea. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have crossed into Thailand to escape the genocide of the Khmer Rouge, and border camps remain crowded, despite the continuing resettlement program in third countries. With U.S., U.N. and other guarantees of assistance, Thailand has continued to receive the masses of refugees; but, in addition to the problem of caring for them, the flow has engendered bitter charges from the Kampuchean and Vietnamese leaders that many of the refugees are Khmer Rouge soldiers seeking to use Thai territory to resupply and regroup and then cross back across the border.

While the Thais have given a good account of themselves in repulsing border incursions, it is clear that they do not relish an all-out war given the present formidable odds. They look to the United States for both economic and military support, but understand that it would be unrealistic to expect the dispatch of American troops. The best U.S. policy would appear to be continued economic and military support of Thailand and continued backing of the solidity of ASEAN in support of its front-line state.

Like the other ASEAN states, Thailand has a sizeable Chinese minority though they are reasonably well integrated. The Thai Communist Party, tied to Beijing, has been a source of trouble for the Bangkok government for years, operating in some strength in the northern provinces. The current bitter dispute between China and Vietnam has brought Beijing around to the position of supporting Thailand against their common enemy, as a result of which China has agreed to Bangkok's urging that it cease supporting the Thai Communist Party. The Chinese have given the same assurances to the other ASEAN countries on this score, and there is some evidence, such as the closing down of a Thai-language radio broadcasting operation in Southern China, that they are sincere. Thailand and the others, however, are waiting to see the degree of that sincerity in regard to what has been a long-standing problem and bone of contention with China for all of them.

Thailand has other problems on the domestic front, including continuing low productivity in the agricultural sector, inflation running about 18% in 1980, a trade deficit expected to reach $2.5 billion this year, a declining economic growth rate, and the common burden of increasing costs for imported oil. While serious, none of the above problems appear insurmountable, and the country continues to enjoy a reasonably good and improving standard of living. The present Prime Minister, Prem Tinsulanon, a former army general like his predecessor, took over in February 1980, in a squeeze play that caused little if any major disruptions in the country's foreign or domestic policies. Subsequently, a coup attempt against him in March 1981, was put down in a 48-hour period that almost saw it succeed. No blood was shed; and even if this coup had succeeded, the nation's business would probably have experienced only gradual change.

Thailand's strength lies in its centuries of independence as a unified nation with a common language, a common religion, and devotion to a genuinely popular monarchy. In addition, the most recent bright spot is the discovery of natural gas deposits in the Gulf of Siam estimated at being capable of supplying 30% of the country's energy needs for the next 25 years.

An area of friction for Thailand within the ASEAN framework is centered in five provinces in the southern part of the peninsula bordering Malaysia, where most of the population is made up of Malay-speaking Muslims. The remote region has a lower standard of living than the rest of Thailand, and this, coupled with the language and religious differences, has led to a long simmering insurgency movement against the Bangkok government. When the dispute heated up, there were charges that the Malaysians were supporting the insurgents in their move to secede and join Malaysia, as well as counter charges that the Thais were mistreating their ethnic Malay Muslim nationals. While the problem has not gone away, ASEAN meetings have provided a forum for informal discussion by the protagonists, leading to greater cooperation between them and considerable lessening of tension in the area.

MALAYSIA

Stemming in large measure from the fact that it is geographically the most centrally located, Malaysia has, over the past decade, found itself in serious

disputes with each of the other ASEAN states. The rival claims of Malaysia and the Philippines to Sabah in northern Borneo generated friction for years until the Philippines, under pressure from the other members, dropped its claim as one of the most singular achievements of the ASEAN summit meeting in Kuala Lumpur. The concern over possible irredentism of the Malay Muslims in southern Thailand was mentioned above. The confrontation with Indonesia in the mid 1960's developed into military hostilities, and there is still lingering animosity over Singapore's 1965 decision to break away as an independent city-state.

Being, next to Singapore, the smallest and the richest of the ASEAN states, as measured in per capita national income, Malaysia could long afford to take a more relaxed view of the need for progress in the area. From the fall of Saigon in 1975 until late 1978, the Malaysian government viewed Hanoi as benevolently preoccupied with the long task of its own reconstruction. The conclusion of a Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty in November 1978, and the invasion of Kampuchea a month later, drastically altered Kuala Lumpur's outlook and sparked increased interest in closer cooperation with the other ASEAN members, especially in taking steps to resolve the problem of the increasing flows of Indochinese refugees.

An artificial outgrowth of the British colonial experience, Malaysia became an independent nation in 1957. In somewhat of an understatement, the late Prime Minister Tun Razak described it as "a multiracial nation imperfectly united." The Malays make up roughly half the population and wield the political power, whereas the Chinese, with about 35% of the population, dominate the economy. Indians and other racial groups make up the remaining 15%. The Chinese were brought into the Crown Colony of Malaya by the British in the 19th and early 20th centuries to work the tin mines and rubber plantations, and over the years rose to economic dominance as have the "Hua Chia" (overseas Chinese) in much of the rest of Southeast Asia. As the indigenes, the Malays dominate the political arena not only because of their numbers, but because they control the military and the police. In an effort to redress the economic imbalance, the constitution now gives clear preference to native Malays in civil service jobs and in qualifying for various business licenses. This, in addition to religious strife, keeps the country in an uneasy racial balance.

The Malays are Muslims, the Chinese Buddhist, and the Indians mostly Hindu. For devout Muslims, there is no separation of church and state, and religion pervades daily life as it did for the early and medieval Christians. Life in Malaysia revolves around Muslim custom requiring begrudging adaptation by non-Malays. There are the five compulsory daily prayers; the pilgrimages to Mecca are government subsidized; the Red Cross has been renamed the Malaysian Red Crescent; and the Ramadam fasting month has tended to diminish productivity. The more militant Islamic party urges Malays to reject materialism and decadent Western ways, advocates public floggings for those who go against the Koran, and a return to the veil for women. There have been recent cases of desecration of Hindu temples by fanatical Muslim groups; the bloody Malay-Chinese riots of 1969 are still vividly recalled; and no domestic or foreign policy can be devised or

implemented without giving very careful consideration to the racial and religious aspects of it.

It was Malaysia that initiated the proposal adopted at an ASEAN meeting in 1971 to make Southeast Asia a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (referred to by the unfortunate acronym "ZOPFAN"). A committee of senior officials was set up to study means of implementing the concept, but because of differences among the five governments on the desirability, feasibility and priority to be given the plan, as well as the hostility to the idea expressed by Vietnam, it has yet to be formally implemented. Acceptance of the idea in principle, however, was a boost to the domestic and international prestige of Malaysia, which could claim as one of the newest states, to be in the vanguard, leading Southeast Asia away from the Cold War and big power domination.

SINGAPORE

It has been said that Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's tough, pragmatic and capable Prime Minister for the past 20 years, runs the small city-state as if it were listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Formerly a unit of the British Crown Colony known as the Straits Settlement, the 224 square mile area became an independent island republic in 1965, after a brief 23-month period as an integral part of Malaysia. Forsaking its past dependence on entropot trade and British military presence, resource-poor Singapore has, by virtue of carefully planned industrialization and the fostering of a financial, professional and communications base, achieved the highest standard of living in Southeast Asia.

Survival has been the overriding concern of the strategically placed nation since independence. In its drive to develop export oriented manufacturing industries based on foreign capital and imported raw material, Singapore at first welcomed any and all industrial propositions that would provide jobs. The success of what might be called the free but centrally guided economy has been such that only low polluting and high technology propositions are entertained today. Lee's ruling Peoples Action Party (PAP), while strongly anti-communist, has always operated under a policy of not allowing political ideology to interfere with trade, which is the country's life blood. The pragmatic approach is exemplified in a statement by Foreign Minister Rajaratnam at a dinner in honor of the visiting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany when he said: "Singapore's policy is one of keeping an open door for other countries to participate in its economic development. We do not expect them to come here to do charity. We are invariably distrustful of countries which profess disinterested aid. We are more at home with countries with a declared self-interest in helping us. Then we know where we are with them."(3) When multinational corporations were being roundly condemned in Southeast Asia and the other less developed countries of the world, maverick Singapore continued to make mutually beneficial arrangements with the big American, European and Japanese enterprises that are well represented and profitably operating there today.

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While certainly not without domestic problems, the Singaporeans' belief that probably no one can solve them any better is best illustrated by the fact that Lee Kuan Yew and his PAP have won every election since 1963 -- and by wide margins. Elections in Singapore are fair in that there is no stuffing of the ballot boxes, and the electorate is generally satisfied with its lot. But means are employed to ensure that the press is not overly critical of the administration. The Singapore courts, for example, found for the plaintiff in no less than five slander suits brought by Lee Kuan Yew stemming out of the last by election, and the damage awards were considerable. Less subtle is the government's employment of the Internal Security Act to "detain" political opponents judged to be engaged in activities not in the best interests of the state, as defined by the government.

With three-fourths of the population of Chinese extraction, Singapore takes pains to avoid being seen as a "third China," and is one of the two ASEAN states that does not as yet recognize China -- Indonesia being the other. A polyglot society with large Malay and Indian minorities, even most of the Chinese speak dialects other than Mandarin, which the government is trying to make the standard.

Ironically, Singapore's success bodes problems for ASEAN in that being the least in need, she stands to benefit most from the various trade plans being discussed among them. Singapore's economy is more closely tied to the developed world, and she has always been in the forefront of those advocating free trade, whereas the others with lower productivity and mechanization would like to work out a preferential treatment system of tariff and non-tariff barriers within an ASEAN trading bloc. Thus, while it remains politically expedient for Singapore to remain in ASEAN, it presents a dilemma in efforts to work out needed economic complementarity. A second element of irony is that Singapore is required to engage in some clever maneuvering to have the International Monetary Fund (IMF) continue to recognize her officially as a "developing nation," a designation that is necessary in order to obtain soft loans from the World Bank and access to the Generalized System of Preferences to enhance the marketability and competitiveness of her manufactured products. The IMF has so far accepted Singapore's argument that calculations should give weight to the fact that 20% of her per capita GNP accrued to foreigners.

THE PHILIPPINES

An unnamed American official once remarked: "Dr. Spock should be the Ambassador in Manila. The U.S. has a father image in the Philippines, and like most fathers, we do not understand the problem."(4) Reference is made constantly to the "special relationship" with the Philippines. While the United States has "special relationships" with countries ranging from Israel to Korea, the Philippines is the locus of our only major post-colonial presence.

Two hundred years of Spanish rule ended abruptly when Commodore Dewey destroyed the Spanish navy in the battle of Manila Bay in 1898 and the United States took over as the colonial overlord, a role exercised uncomfortably for the next 50 years. History shows the wisdom of the decision to grant independence, though it should be noted that this was neither a gracious gift to the Philippine people nor a yielding to revolutionary pressure. It was U.S. self-interest that

motivated the divestiture decision at a time of world depression and with a world war on the horizon. World War II forced postponement until 1946, but the decision to sever the colonial relationship was made before local Filipino leaders really wanted full independence.

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Ferdinand Marcos exercises his own brand of democracy in the Philippines today, as he has since coming to power in 1965. In 1972, 15 months before his second and final term in office was due to expire, he declared martial law with the official explanation that the country was "in urgent danger of violent overthrow, insurrection and rebellion." With the support of the military, he instituted mass arrests, curbed the opposition media, and then amended the constitution to vastly expand his powers. In January 1981, he lifted the martial law decree, but many of its stringent laws, such as suspension of habeas corpus and the prohibition of strikes in vital industries, remain in effect. Foreign observers were cautiously optimistic that the move could provide an opportunity for a new testing of personal and political freedoms, but local political opponents claim it changes little and is intended merely to improve the image of the Philippines abroad and blunt some of the criticism of the regime's human rights record.

The human rights question became a seriously disruptive issue in U.S.-Philippine relations during the Carter Administration. Amnesty International estimated that in the late 1970's, there were some 5,000 political prisoners in the Philippines. Other estimates were considerably lower, and the debate over what constitutes a political prisoner continues. The American press, which has always had free access to travel in and report from the Philippines, played the human rights story heavily and probably deserves the criticism that it allowed itself to be used by the opposition politicians.[5]

A major U.S. objective in the Philippines today is maintenance of the huge U.S. Navy Base at Subic Bay and Clark Air Force Base north of Manila. While ostensibly in our mutual interest, the Filipinos regard the bases as clearly more in the U.S. interest than theirs, since they see no potential outside threat. Consequently, they have exacted a price for their maintenance in a recently concluded agreement on their future status. Military planners have a talent for devising new rationales for maintaining U.S. overseas bases when the earlier ones become invalid, and the current emphasis on projecting U.S. power into the Indian Ocean is now seen as giving Subic and Clark new and possibly even expanded roles.

Many Filipinos voice strong resentment over the bases as an infringement on sovereignty and a holdover from the colonial past, even though they now have nominal Filipino base commanders. While an irritant, they are also big business with 40,000 Filipino employees and base-related expenditures, including liberty spending by servicemen, pouring $200 million annually into the local economy and providing an estimated 5% of the country's GNP. While the strategic need for these huge military outposts could be debated, they do provide a symbol of U.S. determination to remain a Pacific power.

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The communist insurgency known as the New People's Army has an estimated strength of 2,000 to 4,000, but is no match for the organized military and is stymied by the conservative and omnipresent Catholic Church. The Muslim insurgency in the southern island of Mindanao is a long festering and more serious problem and one that puts a strain on the ASEAN ranks in that Malaysia is still suspected of providing military training and supplies to her Philippine Muslim brothers. There have been fewer military battles there recently, and the government policy of granting a modicum of autonomy plus enticing the rebels back into the fold with offers of amnesty and job training seems to be keeping the situation under control.

Some draw parallels between martial law conditions under Marcos today and the fall of the Shah of Iran, Somoza of Nicaragua, and the asssassination of President Park in Korea. A closer look at the situation, however, shows that Marcos is an astute politician much more in touch with the people and with reality than was the Shah, not nearly as repressive as was Somoza, and not nearly as heavy handed and unyielding as was Park. Though he could hardly be called a generally popular leader, Marcos does have the support of a considerable segment of the population simply because they fear any successor would be at least equally and possibly more corrupt and autocratic. The economy is troubled with a slow growth rate, 20% inflation, and a 3% annual population increase that negates much of what economic progress is made. The political opposition is disorganized and lacks any credible plan for improving life in the barrios any faster than is being done now.

Personal and family loyalties have always dominated politics in the Philippines. Other Southeast Asian nations have succeeded generally in institutionalizing the regimes in power, but in Manila all power resides in the hands of Ferdinand Marcos and his extended family, and to only a slightly less degree, in the hands of his glamorous and ambitious ex-beauty queen wife Imelda, who hopes to succeed him, and her extended family. By refusing to groom or institutionalize a successor regime, Marcos lends credence to the charges of the more militant opposition groups that violence is the only alternative.

INDONESIA

The world's fifth most populous country, made up of 13,000 islands spread out over an archipelago 3,000 miles in length, Indonesia is the acknowledged primus inter pares of ASEAN. The establishment of the organization's permanent secretariat in Jakarta in 1974 lent further credence to the more or less generally accepted older brother-younger brother relationship of Indonesia to the other four member states, with all of whom Jakarta maintains good relations.

Indonesia was a driving force behind the establishment of ASEAN and this reflects the continuing perspective its Indonesian leaders have held of the region -- that Indonesia, because of its size and its revolutionary experience, should by right play a preeminent role in Southeast Asia. For example, an editorial on Indonesia's persistent efforts to mediate differences between Malaysia and the Philippines reads: "It would be well for Indonesia not to adopt a wait-and-see

attitude but to lead its younger Malaysian and Philippine brothers to take the best possible road, to steer clear of physical clashes and preserve Southeast Asia's security. For how long can they keep up their childish ways, resorting to intimidation when there is some misunderstanding which gives the impression of 'manliness' for the child but not for the grownup."

In the immediate postwar period, the United States regarded Indonesia as the territory of a beleaguered European ally and helped supply the Dutch against the revolutionaries; but as the struggle dragged on, American sympathies shifted to the Indonesians, and American mediation helped achieve a settlement in 1951. U.S.-Indonesian relations went through strained periods as the charismatic Sukarno led his nation on an increasingly radical course, relying on the growing Indonesia Communist Party (PKI) as his power balance against the army. Archetype of the aging revolutionary, Sukarno resorted to foreign policy adventurism, mainly aimed at the West, in order to retain control. In 1962, he launched a campaign of armed confrontation against his northern neighbor, the newly formed Federation of Malaysia, asserting that it was a tool of imperialism. In 1964, his annoyance at U.S. economic assistance policy brought him world headlines when he told the United States to "go to hell with your aid," and the following year he took Indonesia out of the United Nations.

Sukarno's genuine popularity with the people overshadowed the fact that he was leading the country into economic chaos. An attempted coup d'etat in late 1965 by the PKI, in which six army generals were tortured and murdered, led to the army crushing the coup and retaliating by massacring several hundred thousand PKI members and their families and known or suspected communist sympathizers and jailing others, the last of which were only released in early 1981. The PKI was banned and the army forced Sukarno out and brought an end to his "guided democracy."

General Suharto has held power since 1966 and has proved a much more capable leader than anticipated by observers who lamented the military takeover. The generals worked with civilian technocrats and solicited the assistance of foreign economic experts and succeeded in getting the country's economy back on the tracks. Despite management problems, waste, and a legendary degree of corruption, the Indonesian economy is growing at a 7% annual rate and shows no sign of slowing. Poverty is widespread and income disparity is glaring, yet most analysts agree that the average person's lot has improved noticeably and that there is no reason to expect mass protests for economic reasons anytime soon. Of course, much of Indonesia's fortune stems from OPEC price increases that have inflated its revenues from oil exports, and present planning is to prepare for the day when the oil runs out or, more precisely, when growing domestic needs seriously reduce exports.

The most pressing problem is the land and people squeeze. The most densely settled area of comparable size in the world, the island of Java represents only 7% of the country's land area, but contains 64% of the population. The government has vast plans for resettling almost three million persons in some 250 of the outer

islands before 1983, but resettlement costs of more than (U.S.) $2,000 per family create fiscal problems. A recent census indicates that the population growth rate remains above 2.3%, significantly more than a previous World Bank estimate of 1.8%. This means 1.5 million new jobs must be created annually just to keep even in a nation where unemployment has been estimated at 20% in the cities and 30% in the countryside.

There is continuing unhappiness among the poitically minded Muslims in this largely Islamic nation. The Muslims resent the tight military control and would like to see a more strongly Muslim-oriented government, but Islam in Southeast Asia lacks some of the fanaticism that characterizes the Middle East variety. No one foresees a Tehran-like explosion taking place in Jakarta, though the potential for trouble does exist. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 1982, to be followed by a presidential election in 1983. As of this writing, indications are that Suharto could win a fourth consecutive five-year term in a reasonably open and fair election if he wished to remain in power.

LOOKING AHEAD

Regional cooperation among the states of Southeast Asia is only in its beginning stages, and does not as yet play what could be called any major role in the ability of governments to manage their internal problems or resist external pressures. Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew aptly described the situation recently when he said: "The first unhappy admission we must make is that for at least ten years there is no combination of military forces in ASEAN that can stop or check the Vietnamese army in any open conflict." (7)

Having competing rather than complementary economies in many areas has presented its share of special interest roadblocks to greater ASEAN economic cooperation, and progress has been slow, but progress is being made. The ASEAN Banking Council has set June 1981, as the date by which the ASEAN Finance Corporation (AFC) should be in operation to provide venture capital plus management and technical advice to promising business projects in the region. To be based in Singapore, AFC is to have initial paid up capital of (U.S.) $48 million and will, in turn, become a shareholder in a proposed Japan-ASEAN Finance Corporation which would serve as a conduit for funneling Japanese investment toward ASEAN. Its backers intend for AFC, over the long haul, to help close the gap between the huge multinational corporations operating in the ASEAN countries and the small indigenous entrepreneurs. It will aid both new and existing businesses, especially those operating or proposing to operate across borders in several ASEAN countries. ASEAN is not yet an EEC, but action has been taken in identifying trade barriers that could be removed and there has been agreement on guidelines on products that could be mutually designated for preferential treatment. Being considered, but much further from implementation are plans for a free trade zone, the stockpiling of primary commodities, a price stabilization scheme, and a timetable for a possible common market.

Japan is playing a major role in ASEAN's future plans and thereby helping erase the still all-too-vivid memories among the Southeast Asia countries of its Greater Southeast Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere of the 1930's and 1940's. The ASEAN

states make up the only region outside of the Middle East to enjoy a trade surplus with Japan -- largely because of Indonesian oil, now Japan's second largest source after Saudi Arabia. The Fukuda Doctrine of 1977 committed Japan to economic assistance to the ASEAN states, and successive Japanese administrations have continued that support. The size of American investment in the area was mentioned earlier. The pace of its continued growth will hinge strongly on perceptions of the area's future stability.

Objectivity requires closing on a note other than one of unfettered optimism and reemphasizing that the regional approach to solving the myriad problems of Southeast Asia is still frought with problems. All of the ASEAN states still fall into the less developed category -- albeit Singapore barely does so. Some 60% of the area's quarter billion people are illiterate. Communications are still limited. All of the states have more or less active insurgency movements or at least strong communist parties with messages that appeal to the impoverished. Government, police and military corruption is widespread; and per capita national income, while rising, continues to be unevenly distributed. Population growth is a drag on development, and the cities are overcrowded, while the rural areas are impoverished because agriculture is inefficient. Added to this are the differences in ethnic composition, often strikingly noticeable within one country, and differences in language, culture, and religion, as well as in the approach to life and the setting of priorities.

Among the more intangible impediments to regionalism is the fact that international organizations are composed of nation states -- a western concept to a certain extent alien to Southeast Asia, where loyalties are often stronger to village or tribe or ethnic group than to a nation which, in some cases, may have as yet ill-defined borders. Also, like the slowest ship in an ocean convoy, joint action among states still searching for political identity and economic development will equate with the lowest common denominator. A consideration of the obstacles leads naturally to the conclusion that it is indeed a major achievement for ASEAN to have survived at all -- but it has survived for 14 years, is stronger than ever, and is gaining strength, unity and effectiveness at an increasing pace. Patience is not a notable American virtue, and this, in the context of U.S.-ASEAN relations is a danger. Expecting from the organization too much too soon could foredoom it to failure.

Clark Clifford, Lyndon Johnson's last Secretary of Defense, in an article in the July 1969 issue of Foreign Affairs said: "Only history will be able to tell whether or not our military presence in Southeast Asia was warranted. Certainly the decisions that brought it about were based upon a reasonable reading of the past three decades." One of the Unit Readings for the current Executive Seminar[8] contains a comment on the Clifford comment apropos of the current discussion: "In countries other than the United States, a perspective of only three decades has a primitive, invincibly superficial quality to it. It is probable that for most Asians, few phrases could illuminate more starkly than this one a haunting but rarely diagnosed form of American isolationism with regard to other peoples. What is this isolationism? Divergent senses of the importance of historical time

are its keynote; it is an isolationism that manifests itself in a chronic refusal to take ancient history as seriously as it is taken in China, or Vietnam, or Indonesia, or Burma, or, no doubt, the Middle East, to say nothing of Russia, or France or Ireland. During the late war in Indochina, the penalties which this sort of isolationism exacted were very great and very tangible. For while Clark Clifford and his associates were struggling to make 'reasonable' readings of the past three decades, their Vietnamese adversaries were drawing their inspiration, and even their most precise and most close-textured battle calculations, from readings of the past three, or five, or seven centuries."

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1. *State Department Bulletin*, April 1978, page 17.

2. *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, by George F. Kennan, page 65.

3. *Singapore's Foreign Policy*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, page 79.

4. Quoted in Symington hearings, 1969.

5. In one exceptional case, Arnold Zeitlin of the Associated Press was expelled in 1976 for consistently biased reporting. Based on extensive personal dealings with American and other foreign correspondents, I have sadly concluded that countries that allow free access have their dirty linen aired in the foreign press with a vengeance, whereas those with restrictive visa policies tend to get infinitely less and infinitely more favorable coverage from the few reporters who guard their entre as a means of keeping a leg up on the competition. Indonesia, for example, has a decidedly worse human rights record than does the Philippines, but the amount of space devoted to it in the foreign media is in proportion to the few correspondents who are able to cover it.

6. *Pembina*, September 20, 1968.

7. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 24, 1980.

8. *Premeditated Amnesia -- American Attitudes Toward History*, by Alexander Woodside in "The Nation," December 13, 1975.

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APPENDIX

THE ASEAN DECLARATION

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The Presidium Minister for Political Affairs/Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand:

MINDFUL of the existence of mutual interests and common problems among the countries of South-East Asia and convinced of the need to strengthen further the existing bonds of regional solidarity and cooperation;

DESIRING to establish a firm foundation of common action to promote regional cooperation in South-East Asia in the spirit of equality and partnership and thereby contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity in the region;

CONSCIOUS that in an increasingly interdependent world, the cherished ideals of peace, freedom, social justice and economic well-being are best attained by fostering good understanding, good neighbourliness and meaningful cooperation among the countries of the region already bound together by ties of history and culture;

CONSIDERING that the countries of South-East Asia share a primary responsibility for strengthening the economic and social stability of the region and ensuring their peaceful and progressive national development, and that they are determined to ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form or manifestation in order to preserve their national identities in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their peoples;

AFFIRMING that all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of states in the area or prejudice the orderly processes of their national development;

DO HEREBY DECLARE:

FIRST, the establishment of an Association for Regional Cooperation among the countries of South-East Asia to be known as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

SECOND, that the aims and purposes of the Association shall be:

1. To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South-East Asian nations;

2. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter;

3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;

4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;

5. To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transportation and communication facilities and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;

6. To promote South-East Asian studies;

7. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.

THIRD, that, to carry out these aims and purposes, the following machinery shall be established:

(a) Annual Meeting of Foreign Ministers, which shall be by rotation and referred to as ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. Special Meetings of Foreign Ministers may be convened as required;

(b) A Standing Committee, under the chairmanship of the Foreign Minister of the host country or his representative and having as its members the accredited Ambassadors of the other member countries, to carry on the work of the Association in between Meetings of Foreign Ministers;

(c) Ad Hoc Committees and Permanent Committees of specialists and officials on specific subjects;

(d) A National Secretariat in each member country to carry out the work of the Association on behalf of that country and to service the Annual or Special Meetings of Foreign Ministers, the Standing Committee and such other committees as may hereafter be established.

FOURTH, that the Association is open for participation to all States in the South-East Asian Region subscribing to the aforementioned aims, principles and purposes.

FIFTH, that the Association represents the collective will of the nations of South-East Asia to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their people and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity;

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DONE in Bangkok on the Eighth Day of August in the Year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Sixty-Seven.

FOR INDONESIA:

(SIGNED) ADAM MALIK
Presidium Minister for Political Affairs
Minister for Foreign Affairs

FOR MALAYSIA:

(SIGNED) TUN ABDUL RAZAK
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Defence and Minister of National Development

FOR THE PHILIPPINES:

(SIGNED) NARCISO RAMOS
Secretary for Foreign Affairs

FOR SINGAPORE:

(SIGNED) S. RAJARATNAM
Minister for Foreign Affairs

FOR THAILAND:

(SIGNED) THANAT KHOMAN
Minister of Foreign Affairs

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