

P-449/11/D2-1/70



INFORMATION SECTION • EMBASSY OF INDONESIA • 2020 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W., WASHINGTON, D. C. 20036 • 293-1745

Special Issue

January 19, 1970

INDONESIAN NEWS & VIEWS

"SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE 1970'S : THE NEW MULTI-POLARITY"

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SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICE
THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

JANUARY 19, 1970

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During the past year, the leaders of the world's two super powers, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., each issued important policy statements in direct reference to Asia.

Last June, Soviet Communist Party Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, addressing the International Conference of Communist Parties, rather cryptically announced that "in view of the development of affairs, the establishment of a collective security system is in order in Asia." Two months later, President Nixon, on the eve of his tour through Asia, proclaimed the so-called Guam doctrine that is to govern U.S. policy towards the same geographical area.

While at this juncture both pronouncements, and especially the Soviet's, should well be taken as statements of intent rather than well-defined policy, they do underscore the growing awareness in the world of the tremendous importance of developments in this vital continent, and more specifically in the countries forming its western Pacific rim. For despite the turmoil and uncertainties that have marked political developments in this area during the past decade, it is clear that the re-adjustments and changes that can be expected are bound to affect the balance of power in Asia in the decade to come.

The causes that will set this process in motion cannot be ascribed to a single factor or a single development. The prospective reduction of the American military presence, after a resolution of the Vietnam war, will be of decisive importance, but will not be the only factor. Nor will planned British withdrawal east of Suez do more than add to the temporary imbalance of power through which this region must go before a new constellation of sufficient permanency emerges. And, certainly, a more basic cause can be seen to be the attainment of nuclear parity between the two super-powers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which even now is generating shifts in the general power structure in the world. Given the considerable time that it will take before a degree of consolidation is achieved, it is impossible to foretell with any accuracy the shape of the new international order that may, or may not, be dawning. Yet, already at this stage, certain focuses are becoming visible, and a tentative evaluation of their significance might help sharpen our view on the future.

By far the most crucial relationship that will continue to dominate the power constellation of the world for the decade of the '70's is the uneasy triangle between the United States, the Soviet Union and China. On the one hand, the attainment of strategic parity between the U.S. and the Soviet Union as well as domestic pressures in both countries for a shift of resource allocation away from excessive military expenditures will slowly impel both super powers towards a global understanding. On the other hand, the fear both have of seeing the other succeeding in enticing China to its side introduces an element of considerable uncertainty and instability into this triangular relationship. And considering the uncertainties relating to China's own domestic balance of forces and their implications on her foreign policies, one can assume that this instability will last for quite some time. Moreover, we don't have to look very far ahead to see the emergence of Japan and Germany as the next major powers, who by virtue of their phenomenal rise in economic and industrial strength are soon bound to have a co-determining influence of considerable magnitude. The manner of interaction, the degree of stability or instability in the inter relationship of these five major powers will have an inevitable bearing on international relations in the rest of the world. Taking into account that with the exception of Germany all these major powers, in territory as well as in basic interest, converge upon the region of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific, their direct impact on the political realities of this region can be readily seen.

The conclusion that forces itself upon us, then, is that for an indefinite time to come the whole complex of interacting influences of the major powers on the area will determine the setting within which Southeast Asian developments will have to take their course. This, of course, does not imply that therefore the destiny of Southeast Asia will be solely determined by the big powers. Within this setting, the aspirations of the Southeast Asian nations themselves, their capacity to translate them into reality, the direction in which they want to develop, the manner in which they perceive their problems as well as the conditions for solution they think are required, will be of utmost importance. Depending on how effectively the Southeast Asian nations will be able to mould these impulses into viable concepts and to inject them into the general thrust of developments of the area as a whole, they will in turn affect the formulation and implementation of the policies of the big powers.

A striking feature in the overall picture of southeast Asia in the Seventies thus appears to be the multi-polarity of forces, the profound interaction and inter-play of the various influences, as they all move towards a new balance of accommodation. A realistic appraisal of the probable configuration of Southeast Asia in the coming decade, therefore, shall have to begin with an attempt at identifying and assessing the various elements, both indigenous and external, that go into making up its new constellation of forces, however speculative this exercise inevitably must be at this point.

One pervasive element that invariably colors any discussion of Southeast Asia today is our common pre-occupation with the outcome of the Vietnam conflict. I think it is important for the purposes of our discussion to keep the consideration of present and potential ramifications of Vietnam within the proper proportions. It is obvious, that the manner in which this conflict is resolved and the timing of its final solution will have important effects on the future policy orientations of all parties directly involved and the general prospects of stability in the area. On the other hand, however, to assume that, the future of the Southeast Asian region will be determined solely by the outcome of that war is to distort both the geography as well as the socio-political realities of today's Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia as a whole is saddled with a number of intractable problems. Partly they are rooted in historical antagonisms of dynastic or ethnic origin. Partly they result from the arbitrariness with which colonial boundaries were drawn. And partly they derive from the deep tensions, frustrations and anxieties caused by continuing economic stagnation as well as by the changes resulting from modernization and development. It is the manner in which these problems will be resolved or reshaped, through the process of nation-building, that will determine the role and the impact of the S.E. Asian nations, irrespective of whatever ideological label is attributed to or used by the governments in power.

Whatever Mr. Brezhnev really meant by an Asian collective security system, it is safe to assume that the Soviet Union's involvement in Southeast Asia will continue, and most probably increase, even after the Vietnam conflict is concluded. More than anything else, the Vietnam war has helped to solidify the Soviet Union's direct interest in the region. Aside from that, Russia's evident desire to assume the status of a full-fledged global power, will further impel her to establish her presence beyond traditional areas of interest such as the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and to increase her diplomatic and commercial relations with the countries of this region, irrespective of ideological considerations. The prospect of a reduced American military presence in the Western Pacific, coupled with British withdrawal, will give her added impetus to move in, lest the vacuum be filled by a power inimical to her interests.

Thus, while Soviet motives for an expanded role around the Asian crescent can be surmised, the direction and depth of her involvement, on the other hand, will depend on a number of developments still open-ended at this point.

In the first place they will be determined by the question whether the world is moving towards an East-West detente or towards an intensification of the armament race. Much will depend also on the outcome of the Sino-Soviet conflict and the Soviet ability to strike a balance between her interests and responsibilities as the other super-power, and her need to retain the ideological leadership of the international communist movement in the face of Chinese competition. Thirdly, Russia's involvement will have to conform to her own scale of internal priorities which, as in the U.S., seem to be in a process of re-ordering. Finally, they will be influenced by the manner in which both the U.S. and China will react to her presence in the area.

Despite prolonged pre-occupation with internal problems ever since the start of the Cultural Revolution, China's concerns and interests in the Asian/Pacific region remain of vital importance.

The crucial question that she will soon have to resolve is whether she should persist in an almost complete and hostile isolation from her neighbours, or break out of it and revert to the more pragmatic peaceful co-existence policy of the 1950's, even though couched in a new rethoric. Here again, the course China takes will be determined not only by how the readjustment of her domestic balance of forces eventually works out, but also by the interacting influences from her external environment. Her present vulnerability on the Soviet border; apprehensions about the possibility of a tacit understanding between the U.S. and Russia on a "cordon sinistre" directed against her; and the anticipated uncertainties relating to the power constellation in the Western Pacific after Vietnam, all seem to argue for the adoption of the flexible course. Since her basic strategic interest will continue to require the prevention of continental Southeast Asia becoming, in her eyes, a solid ring of hostile encirclement, it is clear that U.S. approached toward a relaxation in the relationship with China is bound to figure large in China's assessment of her situation and in determining her course of action.

Because of her tremendous industrial growth, her extensive investments in resource development, her dependence on raw materials from the S.E. Asian area and her substantial contribution to Southeast Asia's development, Japan is already deeply involved in the affairs of the region. All indications point to an even more important role in the Seventies.

It was evident for some time, however, that Japan was rapidly approaching a turning point in the evolution of her post-war diplomacy. Her impressive rise to the rank of third world power in terms of GNP, of which she herself has become increasingly conscious, has spurred a resurgence of national pride and self-respect and the need accordingly to re-define her national purposes and the place and role she ought to assume in the world.

As far as her policy options towards the Southeast Asian region were concerned, this process of national re-definition was accelerated by the urgency of the Okinawa problem and its security implications. The recently concluded Japan-U.S. negotiations on this subject have shed more light as to the course Japan will take in the immediate future. On the basis of the Nixon-Sato joint-communique and prime minister Sato's National Press Club address, it seems clear now that Japan will continue to emphasize and enlarge its predominantly economic thrust towards this region, rather than immediately assume an increased political and military role.

The advantages to be derived from this course, for Japan as well as Southeast Asia, are obvious. By not having to carry the full load of expanded defense expenditures, Japan has the opportunity to take the leading part in the economic development of S.E. Asia, thus speeding up the region's drive towards political stability and economic progress, which in turn cannot but enhance Japan's own prosperity and security. Equally important in this respect is the manner in which that aid is to be extended, and the instrumentalities through which it is to be channeled. There is need for Japan to define a philosophy of developmental assistance that would aim beyond the purposes of securing her raw materials requirements; a concept of mutual cooperation building towards harmonious inter-dependence, rather than strategies of short-term expediency. The development of such concepts, however, will require not only an input of Japanese thinking, but a conscious and constructive S.E. Asian effort as well.

On the other hand, it is also apparent that Japan's dependence in security matters on the U.S. cannot be expected to continue indefinitely. Despite the prevalence of wide-spread psychological resistance in Japan against the revival of militarism of any sort, a growing assertiveness can be noted towards a more autonomous role in foreign policy and defense, commensurate with her economic weight.

It is conceivable, therefore, that depending on the security developments in the Indian Ocean and along the Western Pacific after Vietnam, Japan may at one point feel the need to assume a more direct security responsibility. Once embarked on this course, however, the mere existence of China's nuclear capability will make it impossible for Japan not to go nuclear as well. This in turn will compel her to move out from under the American defense system and to adopt a political and defense posture of her own. The profound impact of such a development on the balance of forces in the region hardly needs elaboration.

The new constellation of forces of which we are speaking will further be influenced by Australia's decisions regarding her future defense strategy and the character and scope of her relationship to Southeast Asia.

Ever since World War II, Australia's traditional alliances, first exclusively with Britain and subsequently with the United States as well, have brought her into increasing involvement in Southeast Asian affairs. But the changes in the roles of both the U.S. and Great Britain in this area, as well as her changing trade patterns, are forcing Australia to rethink and define anew her links to the countries of S.E. Asia and the Pacific Basin -- now in terms of her own direct interests.

For some time now, a national debate has engaged informed public opinion in Australia as to whether a new defense strategy should retain or modify the present concept of "forward defense", or whether Australia should withdraw into a posture of "armed neutrality." Although the matter seems as yet unresolved, present indications are that the proponents of a more conscious and active Australian participation in the promotion of peace and stability in Southeast Asia still seem to be having the edge. Decisions taken in mid-1969 will commit Australia, together with New Zealand, to a continued, albeit limited, security support to Malaysia and Singapore, independent of Britain and America.

The question that arises here, however, is whether security concepts of such a traditional nature as the stationing of a token military presence will have any relevance to the nature of the security problems that will be encountered in the area. In the interest of Australia's long-term relationship with her neighbours in Southeast Asia, a concept of involvement and cooperation that would help strengthen all requirements for stability in the region going beyond the purely

military, would I think have much greater meaning. And if indeed Australia positions herself into such a regional role, there is no doubt that, with her industrial and technological potentials, her contribution to the stability of the area will be of considerable significance.

It is within this multi-polarity of forces, that a projection of United States' policies towards the Asian/Pacific region assumes particular significance. President Nixon's Guam statement, referred to earlier, provides us with a fairly clear outline of American policy orientations towards the region after a presumed resolution of the Vietnam war. I do not think a detailed elaboration on the "doctrine," if we can really call it such, is necessary here, in view of the many words already written about it. But a brief review of what can be considered its basic guidelines seems pertinent.

First, as a Pacific power, the U.S. will continue her rightful presence in the area and not withdraw into a new isolationism; but, based on past experience, there is acute realization of the need to redefine the forms and extent of U.S. unilateral involvement in the area, and especially in continental Asia. Secondly, the various treaty commitments the U.S. already has with several countries in Asia will continue to be honored; but a critical re-evaluation of existing obligations is fore-shadowed. Thirdly, apart from these treaty commitments, American response to threats to the security of the countries in the area will be severely limited and selective; in fact, beyond the explicit guarantee of a "nuclear umbrella," the U.S. will expect that all threats, be they external conventional aggression or internal subversion, will be increasingly handled, and the responsibility for action assumed, by the Asian nations themselves. Fourthly, in consequence, the military component of U.S. aid to the region will be reduced, while that aid itself will be increasingly geared towards strengthening the economic capabilities of the countries of the area; but here again, the availability and extent of aid will be tied to the degree of self-help efforts by the recipients. Fifthly, the U.S. will expect the countries of the area to develop an increasing capacity to defend their own security, whether individually or through regional security arrangements; to this end, American material support, rather than military participation, will continue to be pledged.

No one can deny that the manner in which the Vietnam War is finally resolved, as well as the time-span over which solution is reached, will have far-reaching effects on the political mood and orientation of the American nation. The depth of the national introspection, and the extent of the re-evaluation of national priorities that are going on in the nation today attest to this. And this current does not seem at all to have run its full course. Will a turning-inward after Vietnam go beyond the necessary pre-occupation with domestic problems into a kind of neo-isolationism and sullen withdrawal? Will the strains on the nation's economy inspire increasingly protectionist sentiments? Or will the increasingly international orientation and world-wide involvement of American corporations, including banking institutions, be strong enough to provide an effective countervailing force? These are but a few questions for which no definite answers are available as yet.

The projection of U.S. policies as reflected in the Guam statement, therefore, should, I believe, be regarded as a tentative set of ideas rather than crystallized policy. But it does reflect America's awareness of the magnitude of the readjustments through which the countries of the Asian/Pacific region must go in the next decade, as well as the pervasive influence of the American element within the inter-play of the diverse forces at work.

It would be unrealistic to close this brief enumeration of the external forces that bear upon the S.E. Asian region without mentioning the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent and the strategic developments in the Indian Ocean.

Throughout her history Southeast Asia has felt the contrary pulls from China as well as from the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. With the growing industrial capability in India and Pakistan and their increasing need for raw materials, trade between S.E. Asia and these two countries will once again become important. But in the immediate future it seems unlikely that developments in the sub-continent will exert a significant strategic influence on S.E. Asia.

The Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean basin, which to a major extent will be the posture the Soviet Union will assume as a global power, will in the coming decade also be influenced by the conflicting views that India and Pakistan hold towards the potential military threat posed by China.

This cursory survey of forces leads us to a few preliminary conclusions:

1. The interaction of policy decisions by the major powers in the area will be of tremendous extent, with ramifications beyond the purely political or military; this whole complex of interacting influences will greatly determine the setting within which the Southeast Asian nations themselves will have to work out their own destiny. Thus, for example, financial decisions of a protectionist nature taken by the U.S. in the context of her balance of payments difficulties, or, preferential tariff accommodations accorded on the basis of regional affinities to Latin America, will inevitably affect the manner in which Japan will position herself in relation to the countries of the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia; economic decisions by Japan to promote new trade and industrial relations with the Asian part of the Soviet Union, or with China, will also have inevitable political and security implications for the rest of the area.
2. There will be scope as well as an urgent need for an indigenous Southeast Asian component to fill the power gaps in the transitional period of imbalance through which the whole region must go. In fact, it will be of utmost importance that the nations of Southeast Asia develop their own national and regional cohesion from which to build up their indigenous political and economic strength. Continued absence or disproportionate weakness of the Southeast Asian indigenous component in the constellation of forces in the region will prevent early stabilization.
3. It will be against the interest of Southeast Asia to see any single element within this constellation assume a position of paramount power. Likewise, continued tension or confrontation between the major powers in the area will add a strong destabilizing effect on the development efforts of the Southeast Asian nations.

This then brings us to the question of how the Southeast Asian nations themselves see their security problem, and of their preparedness to assume responsibility in meeting that problem.

Let us first have a look at the nature of the threat to the security of the Southeast Asian area. Provided that the present stability of mutual nuclear deterrence remains, I think it is realistic to assume that the danger of massive open

military aggression against this region is very small. China's capacity to project its military strength outside its boundaries is going to be quite limited for a long time. While her growing nuclear capability undoubtedly will give her some diplomatic and political leverage, the rationale for a nuclear threat or for nuclear blackmail against any of the Southeast Asian countries seems rather distant, if not absent. The threat to the security of Southeast Asia, therefore, lies not in China's military capacity, but rather in the fact that China constitutes a political and ideological high-pressure area, that is bound to exert an influence on the shape and direction of political discontent within the Southeast Asian countries. The primary threat, therefore, is one of internal subversion and insurgency.

It is not a nation's military capability that will chiefly determine its capacity to overcome these threats to internal security, but rather the cohesion of its political system, the viability and the effectiveness of its government in dealing with the problems of poverty, social inequalities and injustices, in bringing about economic development and in continually expanding its base for popular participation. And here, not only factors of economic growth, but beyond that the elements of will and determination will be decisive, as well as the people's loyalty to the government and faith in its purposes.

In this light, military alliances or a foreign military presence will add little if anything to a nation's capacity to cope with the problems of insurgency. One might even say that at the stage of political formation and consolidation through which Southeast Asian nations are now going, the infusion of external military power runs the risk of becoming a destabilizing factor; it could lead to a false polarization of forces in the country or give its leaders a false sense of security, thus inducing an unwillingness to engage in necessary political and social reforms.

It will be crucially important, therefore, to fully grasp the all-encompassing process of modernization through which all the S.E. Asian nations at present are going. Of very few countries in the area can it be said that their political systems have yet found their final expression. In almost all, the search for a viable system is still on. Continuous political reform will have to take place before their systems will be able to accommodate the cultural and political pluralism of their societies, to absorb the social tensions that inevitable accompany rapid social and cultural change, to integrate racial or religious minorities, and to absorb into their political elites ever wider groups demanding political participation and responsibility. Above all, the political systems in all these countries should, as a first prerequisite, make possible the pursuit of rapid economic development, without which all other problems will remain insoluble.

The depth and magnitude of the total re-orientation process that is implicit in modernization thus leave no doubt that it will be some time before the countries of S.E. Asia will have worked out their own viable political systems. Nor should we be surprised if in this process the integrity and viability of some of these nation-states will undergo serious tests. What will be needed, then, is time and the opportunity for these S.E. Asian nations to work out their problems themselves. It points up the need for the major powers of the area to refrain from imposing their views and structures on this process of development, and to learn to live with the degree of continuing unpredictability and instability of Southeast Asia.

In this context, it is important to see the emergence of regional cooperation schemes such as ASEAN not as the prelude to a possible military alliance but more significantly as an attempt to speed up the economic development and political viability of the region as a whole, as well as that of the individual member

countries. In S.E. Asia itself, it is becoming increasingly recognized that, if regional cooperation is to mean anything, certain basic requirements will have to be met, and certain capabilities developed in the shortest possible time. Of these, I would like to stress :

1. a continuing top-priority commitment to economic development on the part of the political leadership in each of these countries;
2. the development of a mechanism for peaceful conflict resolution which would obviate the need or compulsion to arm against each other and to seek solutions by force of arms;
3. increased intra-regional trade, and joint ventures in developing manufacturing and industrial capabilities; common endeavours towards price stabilization of primary commodities and joint marketing operations in countries outside the region;
4. a gradual development towards plan harmonization, and a corresponding willingness to agree on the most suitable location of certain industries in terms of their overall regional impact;
5. effective population control

But, above all, there is an urgent need for clarity of vision as to the community of destiny in which the future of all the countries of S.E. Asia is bound up, and the historic opportunity that has opened for them to jointly work to secure their common future.

Out of our attempt at identifying and assessing the various elements and forces at work in the region, there appear sufficient grounds to argue the need for a multi-cornered dialogue, conducted multilaterally and bilaterally, through official and unofficial channels, among the big powers in the area and the nations of S.E. Asia. Such a dialogue, in my view, could serve to clarify the basic assumptions that underlie the definition of interests of each of the participants, as well as the common interests that are at stake. With regard to the kind of subjects to which this dialogue might usefully address itself, I would propose an investigation into :

- the manner in which the security interests of the various forces interlock, as well as their potential for conflicts;
- the possibility and desirability of the Southeast Asian nations designing for themselves the joint instrumentalities for funneling increased aid to the region as a whole; in this context, I refer to a recent remark by Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik, in which he raised the possibility of Japan initiating a kind of Marshall plan to aid the economic development of Southeast Asia;
- what extent the implicit concurrence of the big powers could be obtained in order to provide the opportunity for S.E. Asia to nurture its developmental impulses in freedom;
- what extent neutralization of S.E. Asia, guaranteed by the major powers, would add to the security of the region as a whole.

The central theme that emerges out of our discussion then is the urgent need to speed up the economic development of the Southeast Asia region as a basic precondition for stability.

As such it is but part of the greater problem within the global setting that has to deal with international poverty and underdevelopedness. I do not think that it will be necessary here to go into the details of the challenges we will face in what the United Nations has designated as the Second Development Decade. They point to the need to search for new concepts and new modalities that will make possible the massive transfer of knowledge, skills as well as capital to the developing nations. Only in this way can we establish the foundations on which to build a new international order that will enable mankind to go through the last quarter of the 20th century without too great catastrophes.

Southeast Asia then emerges not merely as an arena of instability and strife, to be approached in negative terms of reducing or preventing crises, but also as a laboratory for the application of the new and enlightened concepts by which mankind should strive to attain a new world order, one that is more satisfying morally and more responsive to the new and urgent needs of man.

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