INDOCHINA AS A SECURITY CONCERN OF THE ASEAN STATES, 1975-81

by

Timothy John Huxley

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Research School of Pacific Studies,
Australian National University

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T. J. Hudson
Abstract

From 1975 to 1981 the governments of the ASEAN states claimed that changes in their regional strategic environment, resulting from the seizure of power by communist regimes in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and from Vietnam's subsequent invasion and occupation of Cambodia, seriously threatened the security of their countries.

Objectively, the most serious threat that the ASEAN states faced as a result of the 1975 communist victories in Indochina was the implicit challenge posed to the somewhat fragile political, social, and economic status quo in non-communist Southeast Asia by the emergence of this radical new political order and, potentially an alternative developmental model, in Indochina. But the ASEAN governments did not wish to highlight their own countries' political, social and economic weaknesses, and for this reason did not emphasize this type of threat. They did, however, claim that Vietnam presented a direct military threat to the region, especially after the 1978 invasion of Cambodia. After 1978, the ASEAN governments also expressed concern about the implications for their countries' security of Hanoi's increasingly close military relationship with the Soviet Union. Successive administrations in Bangkok accused the Indochinese communist regimes of supporting revolutionary movements in Thailand, particularly in the northeast. All ASEAN governments claimed that the flow of refugees from Indochina after the 1975 communist victories, and particularly in 1978-79, threatened security, especially in terms of the possible impact on socioeconomic stability in countries granting 'first asylum'.
The ASEAN governments' declarations regarding their security concerns did not always reflect objective threat assessments, often exaggerating and misrepresenting the dangers posed by developments in Indochina. To some extent this may be explained by the distorting influence on policy-makers' perceptions of an array of 'background factors', including the region's internal and external historical international relationships, the foreign policies of the Indochinese states after 1975, the policies of major extra-regional powers, and domestic political and socioeconomic problems in the ASEAN states. But there is also substantial evidence that some of the ASEAN governments -- or at least factions within them -- purposely manipulated various security threats related to Indochina, to fulfil their own domestic and international political objectives.

From 1975 to 1978, the ASEAN governments were broadly successful in containing and managing their security concerns with Indochina, although this success was not due only to their skilful diplomacy. Despite frequently declared hostility towards ASEAN and its members, the communist Indochinese regimes displayed willingness to cooperate with non-communist Southeast Asia in order to facilitate post-war reconstruction. The ASEAN states' 'success' in managing their security concerns with Indochina was reinforced by the willingness of all parties to the intra-communist dispute, which broke out in Indochina in 1977-78, to seek more harmonious relationships with non-communist Southeast Asia. Moreover, it became increasingly clear that Indochinese communism would not, in the foreseeable future, present citizens of the ASEAN states with an attractive alternative political and developmental model.
However, the higher profile which the ASEAN governments adopted in managing their security concerns with Indochina after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia may have been, on balance, counter-productive in terms of their countries' security, both in relation to Indochina and more generally. In particular, the Cambodian stalemate, to which ASEAN's policy contributed, was detrimental to the security of the Association's members in a number of ways, as the involvement of extra-regional powers in Southeast Asia intensified, the division between communist and non-communist Southeast Asia hardened, ASEAN's cohesion was strained, and the ASEAN governments' increased their defence expenditures in contrast with their earlier emphasis on achieving security through economic and social development.
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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the governments of the five member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) perceived and reacted to the implications for their security of political and military developments in Indochina between the fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975 and the convening of the International Conference on Kampuchea in July 1981. The thesis does not aim to analyse comprehensively relations between the Indochinese states, within ASEAN, or between regional states and extra-regional powers, except where these were directly related to the central theme of Indochina as a security concern of the ASEAN states. Moreover, the principal focus is on the attitudes and policies of the ASEAN states' governments rather than on ASEAN as an organization.

This thesis is not, and is not intended to be, an overtly theoretical piece of work. The subject matter is complex, involving interaction between a multiplicity of political actors on three different levels: the five ASEAN states and the three Indochinese states; the major interested extra-regional powers (China, the United States and the Soviet Union); and sub-national elements (particularly factions within the ASEAN states' governments and bureaucracies, and the various Cambodian and Laotian resistance groups). It seems highly unlikely that any one theory of international relations could provide an adequate framework for explaining how this tangled skein of relationships produced the ASEAN states' perceptions of, and reactions
to, security threats from Indochina: in Morgenthau's words, 'the insuperable resistance of the subject matter would probably triumph'.

The basic methodological approach adopted in the thesis has been to treat the subject matter as recent history. As would be expected with almost any historical research dealing with relatively recent events, a major problem with this approach concerns sources. Official documentary evidence -- the raw material of traditional diplomatic history -- is simply not available to the extent that it could provide the basis for research on the ASEAN states' security policies in the 1975-81 period. But given the high security classification that the ASEAN states' authoritarian leaderships have almost certainly assigned to such documentary material (for example, Intelligence estimates and records of diplomatic communications), it seems unlikely that this material will ever be available to foreign scholars. But while other sources can never provide the definitive answers which official documents might, in combination they can go a long way towards elucidating recent history: this thesis has thus relied to a large extent on newspaper and radio news reports, supplemented by freely available official statements. A series of interviews with politicians, government officials, diplomats, journalists and academics conducted in the ASEAN capitals in January-April 1981 also contributed to an understanding of what was happening in the region, but for obvious reasons extreme discretion was necessary in the use

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and citation of these sources. It is quite likely that a longer historical perspective and the availability of fresh evidence will lead future researchers to revise some of the assessments made in this thesis. But such an admission should not invalidate this early attempt to explain the ASEAN states' security concern with Indochina in the 1975-81 period.

Although the methodology employed here is basically historical, 'theorizing is an unavoidable, ubiquitous activity engaged in by all who try to make sense of the world in which they live' and, as in any other academic writing, various theoretical assumptions are implicit in this thesis. In terms of Martin Wight's three categories of political thinking ('Realist', 'Rationalist' and 'Revolutionary'), this is a work in the Realist tradition, though tinged with Rationalism: while the emphasis is on the 'importance of power and interest as guiding principles for foreign policy-makers', there is an implicit ideal of an international environment in which self-interest is 'tempered by an awareness of the interest of others'.

While not, by any means, concentrating exclusively on the influence of domestic factors in the making of foreign policy, the


4 Garnett, p. 35.

5 Ibid., loc. cit.
thesis is essentially 'reductionist' rather than 'systemic' in its approach: there is emphasis on the importance of the role of 'decision-makers, their perceptions, and the organizations to which they belong'. But the thesis certainly does not deny that the structure and organization of international society exerted an important influence on the ASEAN states' perceptions of, and reactions to, the communist Indochinese states: this is evinced by, for example, an acknowledgement of the influence of balance of power considerations on the ASEAN governments' policies.

The ASEAN states' concerns with the security implications of Indochinese events in the 1975-81 period did not arise in a vacuum; rather, they were crucially influenced by an array of background factors. The most important of these factors were the region's internal and external historical international relationships, the foreign policies of the communist Indochinese states after 1975, the major extra-regional powers' policies in relation to Southeast Asia, and certain domestic political and socioeconomic issues in the ASEAN states. The four brief chapters comprising Part One of the thesis attempt to indicate the relevance of each of these four categories of background factors to the ASEAN states' security concerns with Indochina.

Part Two, the core of the thesis, consists of three chapters presenting a detailed assessment of the ASEAN states' perceptions of three important categories of putative threats from Indochina: strategic and direct military threats; the Indochinese states' links

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7 See section on "Responses to the Emerging Conflict in Indochina, 1977-78" in Chapter 9, pp. 415-29 below.
with insurgent communist parties in the ASEAN states, and the flow of Indochinese refugees into the ASEAN region. Central to this assessment is an investigation of the extent to which the ASEAN governments' declaratory evaluations of these 'threats', were influenced by factors other than objective analysis of the Indochinese states' intentions and capabilities and the likely impact of their policies on national and regional security in non-communist Southeast Asia. In other words, did the ASEAN governments exaggerate or manipulate the nature or seriousness of security threats emanating from Indochina?

Part Three investigates the ASEAN states' responses to their security concerns with Indochina. Although one chapter is devoted to an assessment of the role of the 'Indochina factor' in the ASEAN states' defence policies, the non-communist Southeast Asian governments' responses to Indochinese developments were overwhelmingly political rather than military in character. The final two chapters of the thesis, covering the 1975-78 and 1979-81 phases respectively, investigate these political responses, with particular emphasis on the influence on policy-making of the divergence of views within ASEAN concerning the nature and seriousness of security threats from Indochina.

8 In addition, Appendix 1 to the thesis provides a detailed analysis of the debates within the Communist Party of Thailand over strategy and external affiliations in the 1975-81 period.

9 Appendix 2 supports the argument that factors other than Indochinese developments played crucial roles in the expansion of the ASEAN states' armed forces in the late 1970s.
PART ONE

THE INFLUENCE OF BACKGROUND FACTORS ON THE
ASEAN STATES' SECURITY CONCERNS WITH INDOCHINA
A central issue in relation to the ASEAN states' perceptions of Indochina as a security concern after the Vietnam War is the extent to which these perceptions were influenced by historical international relationships within the region and between regional states and external powers. Possible historical influences range from the pre-colonial era through to the Vietnam War itself.

The Pre-Colonial Era

With the recession of colonialism from Southeast Asia, a process arguably not completed until 1975, a re-emergence of pre-colonial patterns of international relations in the region was discernible to a limited extent.

China and the Region

Historically, China's attitude towards Southeast Asia was subtle and complex. The traditional form of interaction between China and most of Southeast Asia took the form of political and commercial tributary relationships. Only Vietnam was ever occupied and ruled directly by China (from 214 BC to 939 AD); Chinese cultural influence did not significantly impinge elsewhere in the region. Only during the Mongol dynasty of Kublai Khan and his successors (from 1280 to 1368 AD) did China try to impose its will on Southeast Asia (apart
from Vietnam) by military force. The most ambitious of the Mongol expeditions was against Java in 1292-93, but this was an utter failure.¹

China's historical relationship with Southeast Asia undoubtedly influenced the perceptions of policy-makers concerned with security in some of the ASEAN states. According to a highly influential Indonesian analyst and commentator, fear of China 'continues to grip the Southeast Asian nations because history has shown that the Chinese always consider Southeast Asia as their geographic sphere of influence'.² But assertions such as this verged on hyperbole, and failed to acknowledge that the policy of military adventurism that China pursued in relation to Southeast Asia almost six hundred years previously was both extraordinary and unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the ASEAN governments did have other, more significant reasons for regarding China as a threat.³

Thai-Vietnamese Relations

For geographical reasons, interaction between the political units of the Southeast Asian mainland was considerably more important than


3 See section "The ASEAN States and Communist China" in Chapter 3, pp. 74-91 below.
that between the region's mainland and maritime spheres in pre-colonial times. For hundreds of years before the European colonial impact, mainland Southeast Asia was the cockpit for numerous and complex power struggles between Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Cham, Khmer and Burmese states.

For two centuries before the French subjugation of Indochina in the late nineteenth century, the Vietnamese and Thais competed for influence in the intervening Khmer state. But Vietnam and Thailand did not play parallel roles in relation to the progressively weaker Cambodia. Cultural commonality between the Thais and Khmers produced similar opinions on the nature of borders: state territory was deemed to end where the population was no longer clearly Thai or Khmer, and uncertain, porous frontiers were acceptable. The Thais saw Cambodia as essentially a buffer zone and there were periods of remarkable harmony in Thai-Khmer relations, with Thailand often intervening militarily to protect Cambodia from the Vietnam.

In contrast, the Confucian outlook engendered by a thousand years of Chinese occupation led the Vietnamese to stress the importance of clearly-defined inter-state boundaries and, in consequence, to play a more aggressive role than the Thais in Cambodia. By the 1830s, the Vietnamese occupied much of lowland Cambodia and were making efforts to eradicate Khmer culture with the aim of absorbing the country. This encroachment stimulated both Khmer resistance and Thai intervention. Ultimately the Vietnamese were forced to compromise and dual suzerainty with the Thais over the Khmers was formalized in 1845
under a tripartite agreement, thus confirming Cambodia's buffer status.4

Unlike Cambodia, Laos as such did not exist as a unitary state before the imposition of French colonial rule on what was, in the mid-nineteenth century, a mosaic of small, weak states. But Thailand and Vietnam did both exercise varying degrees of influence over the Lao states: Vietnam controlled what is now northeastern Laos, large areas of central Laos were under Thai administration, and Bangkok provided advisers to governments in the north and south. So although Thai-Vietnamese rivalry was not manifested so directly as in Cambodia, the two powers nevertheless each maintained a sphere of influence or control in Laos.5

Although this early historical rivalry provided a precedent for later Thai-Vietnamese competition in Cambodia and Laos, the degree to which it actually influenced the course of relations between Thailand and Indochina after 1975 is by no means clear. There were certainly interesting parallels between pre-colonial and post-colonial Thai and Vietnamese behaviour in the intervening states, but it would be misleading to ascribe this mainly to some inexorable, historically-

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5 Tate, pp. 483-91.
determined pattern of conflict in mainland Southeast Asia. In the pre-colonial era, the Thais' conflict with the Vietnamese was matched by their struggle with the Burmese. Indeed, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the seriousness of the Burmese threat encouraged the Thais to compromise in their rivalry with the Vietnamese in order to avoid war on two fronts. But Thai-Burmese conflict did not revive on a significant level in the post-colonial period. Moreover, there were phases of cooperation (or at least compromise) as well as conflict in Thai-Vietnamese relations both before and after the colonial interval. That Thai and Vietnamese interests were not bound to clash was demonstrated by the 1845 tripartite agreement on Cambodia, and a century later by the aid given by Bangkok to assist the Viet Minh in their struggle against the French.  

The Colonial Impact

The impact of colonialism in Southeast Asia had several important implications for subsequent relations between the ASEAN states and Indochina.

The Ethnic Chinese Factor

Colonialism transformed Southeast Asia by bringing the region into the world economy. The results of these changes were negative

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for much of the region's population, engendering deep resentment not only of colonial rule but also of those classes who did benefit from the new economic system. In particular, the benefits accruing to Chinese immigrants and their descendants who fulfilled the role of economic middlemen gave rise to enduring bitterness on the part of indigenous people throughout the region. This strong popular undercurrent of anti-Chinese sentiment, when combined with the fears generated by communist China's links with local revolutionary movements, provided the basis for certain Southeast Asian governments' concerns with a 'Chinese threat'. In turn, such views of China played important roles as factors conditioning the ASEAN governments' security concerns with Indochina after 1975, particularly in the Indonesian and Malaysian cases.

Nationalism and Communism

Colonial rule in Southeast Asia often faced bitter resistance from local people, but until the early twentieth century this resistance was almost always solely concerned with implementing a return to the pre-colonial status quo. But from the 1920s, with the increasing integration of the region into the world economic and political system and the Western education of growing numbers of Southeast Asians, there emerged a new type of anti-colonialism stressing nationalism -- the creation of new states based on the existing colonies, rather than a mere reversion to pre-colonial political systems.

From their inception, Southeast Asian nationalist movements
subsumed a broad spectrum of ideological viewpoints, including communism. But only in Vietnam was the major anti-colonial nationalist movement led by communists: communism failed to gain sufficient support to ensure its legitimacy as the ideology of post-colonial governments elsewhere in the region.

Although the dominant strain of Vietnamese nationalism was ideologically at odds with its counterparts elsewhere in Southeast Asia, there was from the beginning a significant current of opinion in Indonesia identifying the independence struggles in the two former colonies. Essentially, the Indonesian perception was that Indonesia and Vietnam were the only two Southeast Asian countries which had to fight wars in order to gain independence, and that the Vietnamese people fought for a nationalist cause like the Indonesians, although the Vietnamese nationalist leadership was dominated by communists. In this view, Ho Chi Minh was a legitimate leader comparable with Indonesia's Sukarno and Hatta, while the Emperor Bao Dai was reviled as a French stooge comparable with the pro-Dutch rulers who headed the 'federal states' established by the Dutch in their attempt to limit the Indonesian Republic to Java. Some Indonesian nationalists also saw a parallel between Ho's ambition to create an 'Indochinese federation' from the territories of former French Indochina and Jakarta's claim to the former Dutch East Indies as the geographical basis of Indonesia.  

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7 See, for example, Lie Tek Tjeng, 'Vietnamese Nationalism: An Indonesian Perspective' (Paper presented at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Round Table Conference on 'Crisis Region Indochina -- Causes and Effects', Jakarta, 2-4 March 1981, pp. 1-3.)
Regional Conflicts and Extra-regional Powers' Involvement, 1945-75

The most significant historical developments in relation to the ASEAN states' perceptions of Indochina after 1975 were those which occurred from the onset of decolonization at the end of the Second World War.

The First Indochina War

The civilian Thai governments dominated by Pridi Phanomyong in 1945-47 opposed the return of French rule to Indochina for reasons of both ideology and national interest. Hence Pridi's governments cooperated with both the Viet Minh and the Lao Issara (the Laotian nationalist movement). Official Thai sympathy for these communist-led Indochinese nationalists continued even after a military coup in Bangkok in November 1947, but the Chinese communists' victory in 1949 -- which brought direct Chinese military aid to the Viet Minh -- influenced the Thai regime led by Phibun Songkhram to see the Indochinese struggle from an ideological rather than a nationalist perspective and to decide in favour of cooperation with the French. Thus began Bangkok's association with the anti-communist side in the pre-1975 struggle for power in Indochina.

Thailand's anti-communist stance soon involved an alliance with the United States. Not only did American policy concur with Bangkok's concern over the intentions of communist China and North Vietnam but

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8 Corrine Phuangkasem, Thailand and SEATO (Bangkok: Thai Watana Parich, 1973), p. 6 and Poole, pp. 38-44.
the Phibun regime also saw Washington as neutral if not sympathetic in its attitude towards Thailand's conservative domestic political system. In return for US military and economic assistance, Bangkok supported the American action in Korea, sending four thousand Thai troops to fight there.

While Indonesian attitudes towards the First Indochina War were conditioned by the identification of many Indonesian nationalists with the Viet Minh's struggle, foreign policy was not a priority for Indonesian governments in the early 1950s, due to a preoccupation with internal problems. But the strongly nationalist Sastroamidjojo government (in power from July 1953 to August 1955) pursued a more vigorous foreign policy, and was involved in the April 1954 meeting of the 'Colombo powers' which was successful to a limited extent in influencing the outcome of the Geneva Conference on the Indochina Question.

Although a sovereign state since 1946, the Philippines remained highly dependent on the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While Manila showed a vague interest in Asian events and occasionally adopted an 'anti-imperialist' stance in international forums, close links with Washington meant that its attitudes and policies were often out of step with those of other independent Asian countries such as Indonesia. After the Geneva settlement the

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9 The other participants were India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon.

Philippines associated itself with American efforts to bolster South Vietnam.¹¹

SEATO and Indochina

When, a month before the fall of Dien Bien Phu, President Eisenhower claimed that 'the loss of Indochina will cause the fall of Southeast Asia like a set of dominoes',¹² he was airing a view that was not only to underly American policy in the region for the next twenty years, but was also to exert a profound influence on attitudes in what later became the ASEAN countries.

Thailand and the Philippines were both signatories of the Manila Pact, which the United States established in 1954 to bolster the region's non-communist states following the concessions forced upon the West with the crumbling of the French position in Indochina. In the middle and late 1950s, Bangkok and Manila pursued policies towards Indochina that reflected their adherence to the West and fear of Chinese and North Vietnamese communism. The informal nexus between the Manila Pact signatories and the Indochinese 'protocol states'¹³


¹³ Under the Protocol to the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty (usually referred to as 'the Manila Pact'), aggression against Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam was to be responded to in the same manner as aggression against signatories to the Treaty. The non-communist Indochinese countries also became eligible for economic assistance under the Treaty. Manila Pact and Pacific Charter (Bangkok: SEATO, 1968).
facilitated a broad range of official and quasi-official contacts between Thailand and the Philippines on one hand and the anti-communist regimes in South Vietnam and Laos on the other hand.\(^{14}\)

In contrast to the active anti-communism of Thailand and the Philippines, Indonesia denounced the Manila Pact as an attempt to bring the Cold War into Southeast Asia and to perpetuate colonialism. Indonesia's attitude towards Vietnam after the Geneva Conference was reflected in its establishment of an embassy in Hanoi while relations with Saigon were never elevated to this level. Nevertheless, a minority of staunch anti-communists in the Indonesian establishment remained suspicious of North Vietnam's ideological and cultural closeness with China.\(^{15}\) But the failure of the Afro-Asian conference at Bandung in 1955 to reach a consensus with regard to pacts with the West such as SEATO highlighted the divergence between the pro-Western, anti-communist outlook of Thailand and the Philippines, and Indonesia's non-aligned stance.\(^{16}\)

14 Vellut, pp. 211-12, 251; George Modelski, International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question (Canberra: Australian National University, Department of International Relations, Working Paper no. 2, 1962), p. 115; Man Mohini Kaul, The Philippines and Southeast Asia (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1978), p. 141. Unlike the other two non-communist Indochinese states, Cambodia under Sihanouk's leadership was not amenable to association with SEATO and repudiated the 'protection' granted it under the Manila Pact.

15 Agung, pp. 187-88; Lie, p. 4.

16 Agung, p. 238. While the fifth principle acknowledged the right of states to defend themselves 'singly or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations' (thus apparently acknowledging the right of Thailand and the Philippines to belong to SEATO), the sixth principle called for 'abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interest of any of the big powers' -- a clear condemnation of SEATO amongst other pacts.
Although the outlook of the Malay nationalists who took power on independence was fundamentally anti-communist, they were also determined that Malaya would be non-aligned. But while this precluded membership of SEATO, the Malays accepted the need for a defence arrangement with Britain pending the end of the communist-inspired 'Emergency'. Although the resultant Anglo-Malayan Defence Arrangement continued to operate for many years, the Malayan government was consistent in maintaining a basically non-aligned foreign policy and was vehement that British bases in Malaya were not to be used for SEATO purposes. 17

Indonesia's Relations with China

Despite the antipathy felt towards the local ethnic Chinese minority, there was some admiration amongst early Indonesian nationalists for both the Kuomintang and Mao Ze Dong's communists. From the early 1950s, Indonesia's relations with Beijing became increasingly cordial, particularly after Zhou En-lai's reassuring conduct at the 1955 Bandung Conference, and China's support for Jakarta

17 David Hawkins, The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: from AMDA to ANZUK (London: Royal United Services Institute, 1972), pp. 13-5. Nevertheless, until the formation of Malaysia in 1963, Britain was still able to use bases in its colony of Singapore for SEATO purposes. Thus British forces based in Malaysia under AMDA could easily have been redeployed in a SEATO role: some have seen this as a de facto association of Malaya with SEATO. See Chin Kin Wah, The Five Power Defence Arrangements and AMDA (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Occasional Paper No. 23, 1974). p. 9.
at the time of the American-supported regional rebellions in 1958 and again during the West Irian dispute.\(^\text{18}\)

As Sukarno led Indonesia's foreign policy towards an unequivocally anti-Western stance in the early 1960s, Jakarta came to rely ever more heavily on China's diplomatic backing. Domestically, the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party, which was receiving progressively greater financial support from China) benefited as Sukarno manipulated loyalties within the armed forces to serve his own ends.\(^\text{19}\)

Although there was no substantive proof of Beijing's involvement in the enigmatic, abortive coup of September 1965, the outcome had a traumatic impact on Sino-Indonesian relations. The Indonesian army and right-wing paramilitary groups used circumstantial evidence of Chinese involvement in the attempted coup to justify the ruthless suppression of not only the PKI's members and affiliates but also the ethnic Chinese population. By April 1966, Beijing and Jakarta were exchanging 'sharp and critical' notes and diplomatic relations were suspended in late 1967.

Beijing's alleged role in the events of September 1965 ensured that the Suharto regime portrayed China as a serious security threat, above all in terms of the subversive potential of Indonesia's ethnic


Chinese population and the danger of a PKI revival. As unrealistic as this threat assessment might seem, it was to have a crucial impact on Indonesian policy towards Indochina after 1975.

The Second Indochina War

The intense political and military conflict in Indochina from the early 1960s ultimately involved all the ASEAN states in one or another context, and the repercussions of their roles in what became known as the Vietnam War were decisive influences on their perceptions of Indochina after 1975.

Thailand

In the early 1960s Thailand sought to involve the United States more directly in Southeast Asia: this was exemplified by Bangkok's efforts to secure Washington's support for the right-wing faction during the Laotian crisis of 1959-62 and also by the Rusk-Thanat communique. But the escalating American involvement in Vietnam did not receive unconditional Thai support. Although Bangkok was very seriously concerned about the "threat" from China and North Vietnam, the Thais were more interested in the diversion of Hanoi's attention from Laos than with supporting South Vietnam per se. Bangkok's

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20 The Rusk-Thanat communique of early 1962 affirmed that Washington's SEATO obligations did not depend on the agreement of the other parties to the Manila Treaty but were "individual as well as collective" in nature. U.S. Department of State Bulletin, 26 March 1962, p. 498.
policy throughout the war was to attempt to minimize direct Thai involvement in order to lessen the possibility of provoking communist action against Thailand, while extracting a high price in terms of American aid and commitments for the support that was given.\textsuperscript{21}

President Johnson's announcement in March 1968 that America would seek a negotiated peace in Vietnam came at a thoroughly inopportune time from Bangkok's viewpoint as Thai involvement in the war was then at a peak, in terms of both the deployment of Thai troops in South Vietnam and the US Air Force's use of bases in Thailand for bombing Indochina. It was clear that Thailand might be left in a perilous position if peace negotiations gave the Vietnamese communists a dominant position in South Vietnam and Laos. President Nixon's July 1969 'Guam doctrine'\textsuperscript{22} gave an added impetus to successive Thai governments to restore some of the country's traditional flexibility in foreign policy. Thanat Khoman, Bangkok's Foreign Minister, tried to preserve the core of the Thai-American alliance (continuing military assistance and deterrence against direct communist attack) while attempting to assuage American fears of a 'new Vietnam' in Thailand by negotiating an initial withdrawal of US forces from Thai territory and by lauding the Nixon doctrine.


But although the Thai government began in 1970 to scale down its military commitment in South Vietnam, and refused to be drawn by Washington into the Cambodian conflict, Thailand became increasingly militarily involved in Laos. Bangkok perceived a communist advance through Laos towards Thailand: a particular fear was that the Chinese road-building programme there might facilitate increased external assistance to Thai communist insurgents.23

The reduction of Thai involvement in the Indochina conflict (except in Laos) was paralleled by efforts to expand Thailand's contacts with the communist powers. Although this process contributed to the ouster of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman following the November 1971 military coup, the overall movement away from dependence on Washington continued. While using a continuing US military presence in Thailand as a lever to extract substantial US military assistance, Bangkok hoped that the American bases might be bargained away in exchanged for North Vietnamese and Chinese promises to respect Laotian and Cambodian sovereignty and cease supporting the Thai insurgency.

Until the end of the 1960s, the Thai authorities perceived China and North Vietnam as two aspects of a single communist threat, with China the greater menace. But by 1969-70 they divined differences in the attitudes of Beijing and Hanoi towards Thailand. The dominant attitude in Bangkok, which Thanat carried into policy, was that China should be cultivated in order to contain and isolate Hanoi. There

was, however, also an undercurrent of opinion which saw a common Thai and North Vietnamese interest in containing China. This was an early indication of a controversy which was to come to the fore in Thailand and other ASEAN countries after the eruption of open Sino-Vietnamese conflict at the end of the 1970s.

In the early 1970s this nascent debate was resolved easily as China adopted an increasingly amicable attitude (as part of its new strategy of counteracting 'Soviet hegemonism') culminating in the normalization of relations with Thailand in July 1975. Hanoi, on the other hand, saw any detente as linked to the removal of US bases from Thailand. The deadlock was unbroken until March 1975 when the apparent inevitability of the collapse of non-communist forces in Indochina increased the likely value for Bangkok of improved relations with the North Vietnamese and inspired the Kukrit administration to announce that it would attempt to secure the withdrawal of US forces by the end of the year. But Thailand's previous deep involvement in the US war effort and the continuing American military presence had already prejudiced the communist Indochinese regimes to see the Bangkok government in a hostile light.

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24 Morrison and Suhrke, p. 136. Puey Ungphakorn, former governor of the Bank of Thailand and later an important adviser to the Kukrit government, was a leading proponent of the latter perspective.

The Philippines

Like Thailand, the Philippines was an ally of the United States in the Vietnam War. But although President Marcos claimed in early 1966 that 'if the Reds win in Vietnam, that victory will signal the re-activation of communist insurgency all over Southeast Asia, including the Philippines', he did not pursue such sentiments to their logical conclusion -- a large scale commitment of forces in South Vietnam and unrestricted American use of bases in the Philippines. Manila's contribution to the war effort was limited in comparison with Thailand's. No more than two thousand Philippine troops were deployed in South Vietnam at any one time, and they were restricted to non-combat roles. Important logistic support was provided by the US bases in the Philippines, but (unlike the Thai government) Manila did not allow their use for the bombing of Indochina. Domestic political pressure stemming from discontent over the 'special relationship' with Washington led to the withdrawal of Philippine troops from South Vietnam in 1970.26

Although the Philippines was an active ally of the United States during the Vietnam War, the relatively limited nature of Manila's direct involvement, together with the country's isolation from mainland Southeast Asia, was to be paralleled after 1975 by a continuing detachment from events in Indochina, compared to the roles assumed by the other ASEAN states.

26 Larsen and Collins, pp. 52-87; Morrison and Suhrke, pp. 241-2.
Malaysia

Malaysian policy towards the Vietnam War may be divided into two main phases. Before 1968 Malaysia broadly supported the war against the Vietnamese communists. From 1964 Malaysia trained almost three thousand South Vietnamese security personnel in counterinsurgency techniques. Military relief and medical supplies were provided to Saigon. Although Malaysia avoided any direct involvement in the war, the support given to Saigon was well-received by Washington at a time when Malaysia needed support in its own Confrontation with Indonesia.27

With the end of Confrontation, the realization that there was probably going to be a communist victory in Vietnam, the withdrawal of British forces from the region, the advent of the Nixon doctrine, and the retirement of the country's pro-Western first Prime Minister (Tunku Abdul Rahman), Malaysia began a re-orientation of its foreign policy towards a more non-aligned stance. In 1970 Tun Razak, the new Prime Minister, elucidated his ideas on regional neutralization, which came to dominate -- at least at the declaratory level -- Kuala Lumpur's policies towards regional security in the early 1970s.

An important aim of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) proposal was to bolster the Razak government's domestic, regional and international credibility, particularly in the aftermath

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27 See President Johnson's reaffirmation of America's commitment to Malaysia's security in the Joint Communique of President Johnson and Tunku Abdul Rahman, 23 July 1964, quoted in Peter Boyce, Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy: Documents and Commentaries (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), p. 163.
of the May 1969 riots. But the proposal was also an extrapolation of a widely-held view in the Malay elite that Malaysia should adjust its foreign policy fundamentally in response to the region's changing strategic environment. Unlike some of their Thai counterparts, Malaysian leaders did not in the early 1970s perceive any serious or immediate security threats if Indochina 'fell' to communism. But like the Suharto regime, the Razak government was seriously concerned about the Chinese threat to the region, particularly in terms of Beijing's links with communist insurgents and ethnic Chinese residents. The inability of Malaysia and its ASEAN partners to fill the regional military vacuum left by the departing British and American forces made the construction of a balance of power with China based on indigenous capabilities impossible. As an alternative, the Razak government hoped to manage the 'Chinese threat' by using the ZOPFAN proposal to integrate China into the regional order.

From Razak's viewpoint, the achievement of ZOPFAN would be infeasible without the participation of the Indochinese states. But it was clear from the beginning that Hanoi was basically hostile to the neutralization idea, seeing ZOPFAN -- like ASEAN -- as an American-backed attempt to freeze the regional status quo. Before the


29 Whether or not the ZOPFAN proposal assisted Malaysia and its ASEAN partners in establishing working relationships with China is debatable. In view of its concern to compete with Soviet influence in the Asian periphery, it seems highly likely that Beijing would have wished for better relations with the ASEAN states even in the absence of the neutralization proposal.
fall of Saigon, Hanoi's fear seems to have been that the implementation of ZOPFAN would legitimize American interference in the region, bolstering anti-communist South Vietnam and Cambodia and the coalition regime in Laos. Nevertheless, ZOPFAN's emphasis on the need for intra-regional cooperation and detente with the communist powers provided a framework for the new direction in Malaysian foreign policy, including the opening of diplomatic relations with Hanoi in 1973, and thus encouraged a fairly optimistic Malaysian attitude towards post-war communist Indochina.

Singapore

For the first year or so after separation from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore adopted a neutral position on the Indochina conflict, as part of its policy of using 'Afro-Asian stances' to soothe Third World suspicion of its British military bases and Western and Overseas Chinese business and capital.

Although Singapore already indirectly assisted the anti-communist cause in minor ways, it was not until after the British decision in

30 At the time that the Paris peace talks began in late 1972, a North Vietnamese spokesman supported establishment of "a zone of neutrality", involving the withdrawal of US forces from the region, but this did not indicate real support for ZOPFAN. In contrast to Hanoi and Saigon (which like its northern adversary had a vital stake in maintaining its alignment to a superpower), the Laotian and Cambodian governments were both broadly in favour of ZOPFAN. See Wilson, pp. 91-98.


32 By providing "rest and recreation" facilities for US troops and by increasing its exports of petroleum products to South Vietnam, for example.
1966 to withdraw from their Singaporean bases that there was any substantial change of policy. In October 1967 Lee Kuan Yew declared his unequivocal support of the American role in Indochina, thereby demolishing Singapore's 'neutral' position. In Lee's view, not only would a continuing US military presence be vital to regional security following the incipient British withdrawal, but America also seemed the best source for the rapid increase in trade and investment necessary to buffer the economic consequences of the withdrawal.\footnote{Wilairat, pp. 42-3.}

Singapore's significant diplomatic support for the anti-communist struggle in Indochina, and consistent efforts to keep the United States politically, militarily and economically engaged in the region from the late 1960s onwards were an important reason for the mutual antipathy between the city state and Indochina's communist regimes (especially Hanoi) after April 1975.

Indonesia

Unlike the other ASEAN states, Indonesia maintained diplomatic relations with Hanoi throughout the war; the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government was also represented in Jakarta whereas relations with the anti-communist South Vietnamese regime were broken in 1964. Although there was a shift away from clear-cut support of the Vietnamese communists towards more ambiguous policies after the fall of Sukarno in 1966, criticism of the American role remained a cornerstone of Jakarta's attitude.\footnote{Weinstein, pp. 130-50.} The Indonesian regime was
confident that a communist victory in Vietnam would pose little or no threat to Indonesia's security. Indeed, there was a widespread feeling that a united communist Vietnam would constitute a more effective barrier than a divided, war-torn Vietnam against China -- which recent experience had shown to be the main source of external threat in the eyes of the Indonesian military leadership.  

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Indonesian policy towards Indochina tended increasingly to support the status quo, particularly because of Washington's role as Jakarta's major aid donor coupled with Indonesian concern over the implications for the regional balance of power of the British military withdrawal and the Nixon doctrine. Jakarta adopted the stance of potential mediator, but the government did not act on army proposals (in 1968 and 1970 respectively) for an Indonesian role in US-sponsored 'peacekeeping forces' in South Vietnam and Cambodia.  

The Jakarta government rejected army suggestions of an Indonesian military role in Cambodia to check outside military intervention in what the military perceived as part of Indonesia's 'outer defence perimeter', but in April 1970 Vice-President Malik instead took the lead in arranging an international conference to discuss the Cambodian crisis. However, the May 1970 Jakarta Conference 'assumed the image of an anti-communist gathering', with its communiqué clearly favouring the survival of Lon Nol's rightist regime.

35 Leifer, p. 130.
36 Weinstein, pp. 135-6; Leifer, p. 133.
37 Leifer, p. 132.
But despite the criticism which Indonesia's leading role in the Jakarta Conference and later Indonesian participation in the International Commission for Control and Supervision in South Vietnam brought from the Indochinese communists, Indonesia was undoubtedly the best prepared of the ASEAN states for the defeat of non-communists Indochina in 1975. Jakarta had given little credence to American-inspired 'domino' concepts, there had been little sympathy for American war aims, and relations with Hanoi and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, though strained, had been maintained. Indonesian perceptions of nationalism as the strongest ideology led to a disbelief in monolithic communism, and to a vision of a united Vietnam as a buffer against a supposed long-term threat from China.

Conclusion

It would be erroneous to suggest that other than recent historical relationships played a major part as influences on the attitudes and policies of the ASEAN states towards communist Indochina from 1975 to 1981. But it is clear that significant aspects of regional relationships in this period were not without precedent in Southeast Asia's pre-colonial history. Neither China's quest for influence to its south nor competition between Vietnam and Thailand in the intervening states were new aspects of the region's international politics.

More recent history has, however, greater relevance to the ASEAN states' security concerns after 1975. During the colonial period, the
immigration of ethnic Chinese provided the basis for one important aspect of Southeast Asian governments' later suspicion of the People's Republic of China. The simultaneous growth of revolutionary nationalism in Indonesia and Vietnam laid the foundations for Jakarta's relatively benign view of the Vietnamese communists in later years.

In the aftermath of the First Indochina War, Bangkok and Manila committed themselves to the anti-communist side in the Cold War by signing the Manila Pact. By way of contrast, Indonesia's 'independent and active' foreign policy encouraged Jakarta's alignment with China. But the alleged Chinese involvement in the 1965 attempted coup thoroughly alienated the Indonesian leadership under Suharto from Beijing.

Most importantly, the attitudes and policies of what became 'the ASEAN states' towards the Second Indochina war had diverged widely, ranging from Thailand's more or less consistent (although often hesitant) identification with the anti-communist cause to Indonesia's rhetorical support for the Vietnamese communists. Moreover, although ASEAN had existed for eight years, the organization had not yet been used to synthesize any sort of consensus concerning the policies of the non-communist regional states towards communist Indochina. Within a short time, ASEAN was nevertheless to prove a highly important mechanism in coordinating the policies of the ASEAN states in response to the far from static situation in Indochina. However, while a degree of consensus was to be reached on how best to deal with Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the individual national interests of the five non-communist states were to remain paramount, and it was clear
that many of the factors that influenced their policies during the Second Indochina War and in earlier eras continued to retain their dominance through the brief peace and into what was soon to be termed 'the Third Indochina War'.
CHAPTER 2

THE INFLUENCE OF THE INDOCHINESE STATES' ATTITUDES AND POLICIES ON THE ASEAN STATES' SECURITY CONCERNS WITH INDOCHINA

Following their triumphs in 1975, the Indochinese communists faced massive domestic political, social and economic problems. The damage caused by the years of war necessitated reconstruction on a huge scale. The achievement of national unity was also a prime goal, especially in Vietnam where traditional differences between the north and south had been accentuated by their development for two decades as separate political entities with opposing socioeconomic and political systems. Before 1978 the dominant political priority for the Indochinese communists was to consolidate their hold on power through the rehabilitation of their countries and by coercion (ranging from relatively gentle 're-education' in Vietnam and Laos to the wholesale extermination of politically suspect elements in Cambodia). Nevertheless, the international political dimension was vitally important from the beginning, in the senses both of ensuring security from external threat and of securing external sources of assistance for reconstruction.

Vietnamese Policies Towards the ASEAN States

Vietnam's principal foreign policy concerns in the aftermath of the 1975 communist victory were relations with the two superpowers and China. Next in importance for Hanoi were relations with the two
smaller Indochinese states. But despite the relatively low priority
given to relations with non-communist Southeast Asia, Hanoi did begin
to pursue a more active policy towards the ASEAN states in 1975.

Hanoi's view of the ASEAN states after the fall of Saigon was
complex and paradoxical. In part this may have reflected differing
opinions within the Vietnamese leadership.\footnote{Although one analyst concluded in 1978 that 'the present leadership of the SRV appears remarkably stable, cohesive and in basic agreement over future objectives' (Carlyle A. Thayer, 'Viet Nam's External Relations: An Overview', Pacific Community, Vol. 9, No. 2 [January 1978], p. 213), the defection of former Politburo member Hoang Van Hoan to China in July 1979 indicated the existence of dissension on certain issues at the highest policy-making levels.} But more importantly, the
leadership probably recognized that certain of its foreign policy
goals in relation to non-communist Southeast Asia were contradictory.
Several important factors militated against rapprochement with the
ASEAN states: in particular, the Vietnamese communists' revolutionary
ideology suggested that Hanoi should support the struggles of local
communist parties against the ASEAN states' governments.\footnote{From 1970, the Vietnamese communist leadership claimed that the direction of world politics was determined by the interplay of 'three revolutionary currents': the strength of the 'socialist camp', the upsurge of the 'national liberation movement' in the Third World, and the workers' struggle in the capitalist
countries. Repeated Vietnamese statements stressed the necessity
of building a 'united front', based on these three currents, against 'American imperialism'. See Carlyle A. Thayer, 'Three Revolutionary Currents: Vietnamese Perspectives on International Security' (Paper presented to the Conference on 'Asian Perspectives on International Security', Australian National University, Canberra, 11-14 April 1983), pp. 18-9.} Moreover,
from the viewpoint of Vietnam's security, Hanoi regarded the region's
non-communist governments with suspicion because of their record of
support for the Americans and their anti-communist Indochinese allies in the Vietnam War, their continuing military links with the United States and other Western powers, their membership of ASEAN (which the Vietnamese claimed to see as a thinly-disguised successor to SEATO) and their backing for Malaysia's ZOPFAN proposal (in Hanoi's view an attempt to isolate Vietnam from its Soviet ally).

After its victory in 1975 Hanoi continued to criticize ASEAN members in very strong terms whenever it appeared that their policies were running counter to Vietnam's security interests or seriously undermining the strength of revolutionary forces in the region. Thus the attempt by Bangkok and Hanoi to improve their relations in 1975-76 was undermined by Bangkok's security links with Washington as manifested in the continuing presence of US military facilities in Thailand, the American removal of aircraft flown to Thailand by fleeing South Vietnamese pilots and claimed by the Vietnamese communists, and US-Thai naval exercises. In the aftermath of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor at the end of 1975, Hanoi condemned Jakarta as the 'regional policeman of the US'. The Thai right-wing's seizure of power in October 1976 clearly concerned the Vietnamese, and prompted Hanoi to condemn Bangkok's military cooperation with Malaysia against the Communist Party of Malaya in southern Thailand.3

3 K. Das, FEER, 4 February 1977, p. 10. According to the Vietnamese Communist Party newspaper, Nhan Dan, certain ASEAN countries' bilateral military cooperation would 'turn ASEAN into a de facto military alliance in opposition to the Southeast Asian peoples' aspirations'. Nhan Dan commentary, 4 August 1977, broadcast on Hanoi international service in Thai, 0500 gmt, 4 August 1977 (United States Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-APA-77-151, 5 August 1977).
The Vietnamese made it clear that Vietnam's socialist economy and economic orientation towards other communist countries made it impossible even to consider joining the capitalist Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Indeed, just before the first summit meeting of ASEAN heads of state in February 1976, Hanoi attacked the association as an organization intended 'to rally all pro-American reactionary forces to oppose the revolutionary movements' in Southeast Asia.

But Hanoi's version of proletarian internationalism and its concern over the security implications of the continuation of close politico-military relationships between Washington and certain ASEAN states (especially Thailand and the Philippines) did not dominate Vietnamese policy towards non-communist Southeast Asia from 1975. The Vietnamese leadership's ideological outlook on the ASEAN states was balanced by an essentially nationalist concern with establishing Vietnam as an international actor autonomous of the major powers by increasing its credibility as a leading non-aligned nation. Hanoi evidently saw the ASEAN region as a sphere where it would be both

See, for example, interview with Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien, FEER, 24 June 1977, p. 19.


possible and valuable to increase Vietnam's standing by establishing diplomatic relationships. Another aspect of Hanoi's nationalism was manifested in a desire to achieve international recognition of Vietnam's land and sea boundaries: the establishment of working relationships with the ASEAN countries held the key to the eventual resolution of Hanoi's disputes with Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia over maritime boundaries. Economic issues dominated Hanoi's policy-making in the aftermath of victory, and these provided another reason for better relations with the non-communist Southeast Asian states, which the Vietnamese saw as possible sources of reconstruction aid as well as trading partners.

Hanoi displayed a progressively greater willingness, through the 1976-78 period, to subordinate its ideological opposition to ASEAN and its members' governments, and its suspicion of their security links with the West, to short-term instrumental political and economic interests. Little progress was made in improving relations with the ASEAN states in 1975, but 1976 witnessed a major effort by Hanoi to expand its regional links. One reason for a change in Vietnam's attitude was that although the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and the Declaration of ASEAN Concord produced by ASEAN's first summit meeting in February 1976 both included references to security cooperation, such mutual assistance was to be on a very limited, bilateral basis. Hanoi may have reassessed ASEAN's potential as a threatening military bloc taking account of this factor. The

Vietnamese maintained their propaganda offensive against ASEAN's military overtones, particularly at the Colombo non-aligned summit in August 1976, but in July 1976 Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh announced a new four-point policy on relations with foreign countries which represented the most significant indication thus far that Hanoi was willing to cooperate with ASEAN members on a bilateral basis to further national and regional development.8

Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien’s visits to all the ASEAN capitals except Bangkok in July 1976 confirmed that Hanoi was genuinely interested in expanding links with non-communist Southeast Asia. Hien not only discussed the expansion of trade and economic cooperation, but also opened diplomatic relations with Manila, despite earlier Vietnamese demands for the closure of US bases in the Philippines as a pre-condition for normalization. Hanoi’s willingness to pursue a more conciliatory line also helped enable a renewal of negotiations with Bangkok in mid-1976 after an almost year-long hiatus.

Hanoi’s bridge-building diplomacy towards the ASEAN states was ratified by the announcement at the Fourth National Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in December 1976 of a second five-year plan, which involved laying the economic foundations for Vietnam to become a modern industrial state within twenty years, a process requiring massive injections of foreign capital and technology. Links with the ASEAN states were potentially useful both directly and

8 VNA in English, 0700 gmt, 5 July 1976 (FBIS-APA-76-132, 8 July 1976).
indirectly. For example, after sending a delegation to Vietnam in April 1977, the Singaporean Chamber of Commerce called for the extension of medium-term credits to Hanoi. In May 1977 Malaysia agreed to exchange specialists in the rubber and palm oil industries with Vietnam, and offered assistance with telecommunications and road transport. But the Vietnamese leadership hoped that the United States would be the most important source of assistance. By demonstrating an ability to behave as a responsible and peaceful good neighbour to American's regional allies and associates, an improvement of Vietnam's relations with the ASEAN states might help persuade Washington to grant diplomatic recognition and economic assistance to Hanoi.

The intensification of Vietnam's conflicts with China and Cambodia provided an additional reason for Hanoi to attempt to move closer to the ASEAN states from late 1977. In brief, Hanoi decided that it needed to pre-empt what it perceived as the danger of diplomatic encirclement by China's burgeoning rapprochement with the ASEAN states: particularly worrying for the Vietnamese were Beijing's efforts to improve Thai-Cambodian relations by playing the role of 'honest broker'. In December 1977 and January 1978 Foreign Minister Trinh visited Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Bangkok to present Hanoi's view of its conflicts with Beijing and Phnom Penh.

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10 See K. Das and Peter Weintraub, FEER, 27 October 1978, p. 9.
12 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 30 December 1977, p. 6.
As Hanoi intensified its efforts to improve relations with the ASEAN states in 1976-78, the Vietnamese adopted progressively more accommodating attitudes towards ASEAN itself, ZOPFAN, the non-communist states' security links with the West, and Vietnam's relationships with local communist parties. By August 1977, Hanoi's view of ASEAN was that it served US interests 'willy-nilly' rather than by design. In January 1978, Hanoi's Vice Foreign Minister Vo Dong Giang stressed that ASEAN's past was no longer an obstacle to better relations between Vietnam and the Association's members. When Prime Minister Pham Van Dong visited Kuala Lumpur and Singapore in October 1978 he emphasized Hanoi's new view of ASEAN as an economic grouping and not as a potential military alliance. The Vietnamese also made efforts to narrow the difference between their own PIN (Peace, Independence and Neutrality) idea and ZOPFAN: by January 1978 Foreign Minister Trinh was talking of promoting 'peace, independence, freedom and neutrality' in the region. The fact that the Philippines and Thailand still maintained close security links with the United States, as did Malaysia and Singapore with Australia and

13 Hanoi international service in English, 1000 gmt, 9 August 1977 (FBIS-APA-77-154, 10 August 1977).

14 Straits Times, 7 January 1978.


New Zealand (and indirectly the US), did not prevent Hanoi from wooing them diplomatically. In order to convince the ASEAN states of Vietnam's goodwill -- particularly in view of Chinese and Cambodian allegations that Hanoi was aiming for 'regional hegemony' -- Pham Van Dong declared that Vietnam would no longer assist the Thai or Malayan communists in any way. But despite this attempt to upstage Beijing -- which still gave at least moral backing to communist insurgents in the ASEAN states -- Hanoi was unable to gain ASEAN's support in its disputes with China and Cambodia.

The Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia, and the installation there of a pro-Vietnamese regime at the beginning of 1979, effectively nullified Hanoi's efforts to conciliate ASEAN's members. Hanoi's priority was to remove what it saw as a serious threat to Vietnam's security from China's client, the Democratic Kampuchea regime. But at the same time, it became vital for the Vietnamese to attempt to persuade non-communist Southeast Asian governments that their interests were not best served by joining China and the West in opposing the Vietnamese-imposed status quo in Cambodia.

In essence, Hanoi adopted a two-fold strategy towards the ASEAN states over the Cambodian issue. Firstly, the Vietnamese exerted


18 See section on 'Responses to the Emerging Conflict in Indochina 1977-78' in Chapter 9, pp. 415-29 below.
diplomatic and military pressure on Thailand, in an effort to dissuade Bangkok from continuing its support for the Cambodian resistance. Despite Bangkok's protests that Thailand was not a party to the Cambodian conflict, Hanoi insisted that the problem could be ameliorated by negotiations between the Vietnamese client regime in Phnom Penh and the Thai government, and proposed a demilitarized and refugee-free zone along both sides of the Thai-Cambodian border.¹⁹

The second aspect to Vietnam's strategy was an attempt to maintain a dialogue with all ASEAN's members, particularly by playing on the apprehension with which many ASEAN politicians and officials, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, regarded ASEAN's cooperation with Beijing over the Cambodian issue. Hanoi alleged that it was China rather than Vietnam which threatened not only the security of Thailand but also 'peace and stability' in Southeast Asia as a whole. The Vietnamese equated the Khmer Rouge resistance in Cambodia with 'anti-government armed rebel Maoist groups' in the ASEAN countries; China allegedly posed a 'direct and long-term threat' to the region. According to the Vietnamese, Beijing had lured Thailand into a 'dangerous trap' and had undermined 'the trend to a dialogue between the ASEAN countries and Viet Nam'.²⁰

As alternatives to continuing confrontation between the Indochinese and ASEAN states, in July 1980 Hanoi suggested the signing


²⁰ Ibid., pp. 1-5. See also Harish Chandola's interview with Vietnamese premier Pham Van Dong, Asiaweek, 30 May 1980, p. 39.
of non-aggression treaties between the Indochinese and ASEAN states and discussions on the establishment of a regional zone of 'peace and stability'. Later in 1980, Hanoi suggested talks with ASEAN based on the July 1980 proposals, the March 1980 Indonesian and Malaysian 'Kuantan declaration' and ZOPFAN.

Other Vietnamese policies were apparently intended more specifically to cultivate a special relationship with Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. Thus, when Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach visited Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta in mid-1980 he hinted that Indonesian and Malaysian observers might be allowed to monitor the Thai-Cambodian border situation or perhaps witness the forthcoming Cambodian elections. Hanoi's continuing efforts to control the exodus of 'boat people' were partly a response to Malaysian protests. While a dispute between Indonesia and Vietnam over maritime boundaries remained unresolved, Hanoi showed flexibility by renouncing its claim to the island of Natuna. Moreover, Hanoi declared that Vietnam and Indonesia were 'playing a leading role' in Southeast Asia, implicitly flattering Jakarta by acknowledging its pre-eminence in ASEAN.


22 See section on 'Indonesian and Malaysian Policy on Cambodia' in Chapter 10, pp. 448-49 below.

23 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 3 October 1980, p. 16.


Despite Indonesian and Malaysian dissatisfaction with ASEAN's Cambodian policy, their interest in maintaining the Association's cohesion prevented them from braking ranks with their partners. Nevertheless, Vietnam's diplomatic initiatives helped to maintain Indonesian and Malaysian interest in a continuing dialogue with Hanoi and put pressure on ASEAN to take initiatives itself on Cambodia in order to maintain ASEAN's unity (as well as international backing for Democratic Kampuchea).26

But ASEAN's major initiative, the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) served to highlight rather than narrow the fundamental differences between the Vietnamese and ASEAN outlooks on the Cambodian issue. The Vietnamese insisted that the Cambodian issue was a 'regional problem', and in January 1981 the Indochinese foreign ministers had proposed a regional conference to discuss 'problems of peace and security' in Southeast Asia.27 Hanoi's idea seems to have been that such a regional conference might be used to neutralize ASEAN's support for the Cambodian resistance, to gain ASEAN recognition of the pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin regime, and to lay the foundations for a Southeast Asian 'united front' including both the Indochinese and the ASEAN states against China, in exchange for a partial Vietnamese military withdrawal from Cambodia and discussions on ZOPFAN. Contrastingly, ASEAN's proposed ICK was clearly aimed at

26 See Chapter 10, pp. 442-50 and 457-64 below.
breaking the Heng Samrin regime's monopoly of power in Phnom Penh and securing a total Vietnamese military withdrawal.

Although Hanoi boycotted the ICK in July 1981,\(^28\) the Vietnamese took a close interest in its proceedings. But while Hanoi acknowledged the difference between the ASEAN and Chinese positions and ASEAN's efforts to take into account Vietnam's security concerns, the Vietnamese saw the ICK's resolutions as further evidence that ASEAN was colluding with China and the United States to interfere in Indochina.\(^29\)

Neither the ICK nor the institution of a Cambodian resistance coalition (including Prince Sihanouk's and Son Sann's forces as well as the Khmer Rouge) quelled doubts within ASEAN over the Association's Cambodian policies. This was an important incentive for Hanoi to continue stressing its own alternatives to the prolongation of the Cambodian stalemate. As long as Hanoi's principal foreign policy objectives remained survival in the face of the 'Chinese threat' and the consolidation of Indochina into an alliance structure,\(^30\) and there remained important elements in ASEAN's governments which were chary of strategic cooperation with China, it remained unlikely that Hanoi

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30 Thayer, 'Three Revolutionary Currents...', p. 29.
would abandon its policy of seeking a rapprochement, on its own terms, with non-communist Southeast Asia. 

Laotian Policies Towards the ASEAN States

For the communist regimes in Vientiane and Phnom Penh, like their anti-communist predecessors, relations with Thailand were from the beginning necessarily an important foreign policy priority. Laos and Cambodia both shared long land borders and common cultural characteristics with Thailand, so although their principal external concerns were with their main socialist allies and adversaries (China, Vietnam and the USSR) their relationships with Bangkok were also of substantial importance.

Vientiane's main foreign policy priority was to obtain reconstruction assistance from other socialist states, but for several important reasons it could not ignore its relations with Thailand. Although the upland tribal peoples of Laos (such as the Hmong) were ethnically distinct from Thais, the lowland Lao were culturally and linguistically very closely related to the population of northeast Thailand. During the twentieth century, this ethnic closeness

31 Thus Hanoi continued to stress the possible benefits for the ASEAN states of greater cooperation with Indochina. See, for example, 'Principles governing the relations of peaceful coexistence between the two groups of Indochina and Asian (sic) countries for a Southern Asia of peace, stability, friendship and cooperation' (Document made public by the Delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Laos at the 36th session of the General Assembly of the United nations, on behalf of the three Indochinese countries, 28 September 1981), Vietnam News Bulletin, No. 08/81 (16 October 1981).
produced both Thai irredentism in relation to Laos and Laotian irredentism aimed at northeast Thailand. Historically, Laos had been dependent on Thailand for its access to the sea: even in 1975, virtually all Laotian trade was through Thai ports. With the communist takeover in 1975, mutual suspicion between Thailand and Laos, and Laotian economic dependence on Thailand were overlaid by the additional factor of ideological confrontation.

During the Second Indochina War, Thailand had acted as a base for not only most of the United States' massive air attacks on Laos but also for large-scale intervention in Laos by anti-communist Laotian forces and Thai 'volunteers'. In the aftermath of their takeover in Vientiane, the Pathet Lao were not surprisingly extremely sensitive to the possibility that Thailand might still pose a security threat. Although the Pathet Lao leadership recognized that there were important differences between the military dictatorship which ruled Thailand before October 1973 and the democratic government in power in 1975, it still had grounds for suspicion even without the realization of its greatest fear with regard to Thailand -- the restoration of right-wing military rule in Bangkok. From Vientiane's viewpoint,


Laos was threatened by the continuing (though diminishing) American military presence in Thailand, by Thai use of the Mekong river (which formed a large part of the border between the two countries) for military activities, by Thailand's provision of refuge for many Laotian rightist leaders and by Thai provincial military commanders' collusion with these anti-Pathet Lao exiles to promote resistance across the Mekong.34

The Thai authorities (particularly at the local level in the northeast) had their own fears, especially in terms of the possible impact on the Thai communists' insurgency of the rapid shift to the Left in Vientiane.35 But Thai behaviour did little to reduce tension or assuage the Pathet Lao's paranoia. By July 1975 Vientiane had forced the Thais to close their three consulates in Laos (which the Pathet Lao believed were being used for espionage and gun-running) and in August two Thai military attaches were arrested on espionage charges.36 As the Pathet Lao tightened its hold on power in Vientiane, the Thais became increasingly nervous: exchanges of fire across the Mekong began in July, and in November Bangkok closed the border after a particularly serious incident.37 Thailand's economic blockade of Laos not only heightened Vientiane's dependence on Vietnam

35 See section on "Vietnam, Laos and the Communist Party of Thailand, 1975-78" in Chapter 6, pp. 194-211 below.
37 Denzil Peiris, FEER, 28 November 1975, p. 17.
and the USSR, but may also have hastened the final stage in the consolidation of the Pathet Lao takeover in December 1975.\textsuperscript{38}

Bangkok reopened two border crossings in January 1976 and the final US military withdrawal from Thailand, coupled with the determination of the Thai government led by Seni Pramoj to ease tensions with Indochina, made a limited Thai-Laotian detente possible by August 1976.\textsuperscript{39} But the October 1976 coup, after which the Thai military installed the extreme right-wing Thanin regime in power, realized the Pathet Lao's worst fears. The new Thai government's attempts to revive Thailand's alliance with the United States, to bolster ASEAN solidarity against the Indochinese states and to escalate support for the Laotian right-wing resistance made any further rapprochement infeasible from Vientiane's viewpoint. The Pathet Lao intensified their denunciations, not only of Thai-American collusion with Laotian 'reactionaries' but also of ASEAN as a threatening, anti-socialist military bloc aimed at Indochina. Indeed, presumably because of its proximity to Thailand, Vientiane's condemnation of ASEAN -- 'the adopted child of SEATO' -- was even tougher than Hanoi's.\textsuperscript{40}

Because of Thai support for Lao insurgents, Vientiane saw

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  \item \textsuperscript{39} John Everingham, \textit{FEER}, 13 August 1976, pp. 20-1; Harvey Stockwin, \textit{FEER}, 20 August 1976, p. 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Nayan Chanda, \textit{FEER}, 15 April 1977, pp. 15-8.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Thailand as the main external security threat all through 1977. But by early 1978, a combination of factors had led Vientiane to align Laos with Vietnam against China and Cambodia, with the result that the Pathet Lao's outlook on Thailand and ASEAN changed radically. Like Hanoi, Vientiane came to see non-communist Southeast Asia as an important strategic counterweight to China. Vientiane was slower than Hanoi to alter its view of ASEAN, but by late 1978 the Laotians were echoing the Vietnamese line that ASEAN had changed and genuinely wanted to institute a regional zone of peace.

General Kriangsak's ouster of the Thanin regime in October 1977 had opened the way for a revival of Bangkok's efforts at detente with Indochina and thus facilitated a new rapprochement between Thailand and Laos. In March 1978 Lao Foreign Minister Phoune Sipraseuth visited Bangkok, and as Vietnamese troops rolled across Cambodia in January 1979, Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak was in Vientiane promising to help turn the Mekong into a 'river of peace and friendship'. The fact that both Laos and Thailand had much to gain if this amelioration of relations continued was emphasized when the visit of Laotian Prime Minister Kaysone to Bangkok in April 1979 resulted in a joint communique announcing that both sides would cooperate to prevent the

41 Stuart-Fox, pp. 234-35.
43 Asia Yearbook 1979, p. 229.
44 Joint communique signed by Kriangsak and Laotian premier Kaysone Phomvihan, Hanoi KPL in English, 0900 gmt, 8 January 1978 (FBIS-APA-79-005, 8 January 1979).
activities of insurgents using border areas as their sanctuary.45 In other words, the withdrawal of Laotian support for the guerilla war in the Thai northeast (which had however diminished greatly following Vientiane's breach with Beijing) would be reciprocated by the withholding of Thai assistance for the Laotian right-wingers exiled in Thailand (including the turning back of refugees trying to flee to Thailand). Until the ouster of Kriangsak in March 1980, Bangkok and Vientiane were able to maintain a working relationship, including mutually beneficial economic ties, despite the tension between Vietnam and Thailand.

The replacement of Kriangsak by the less flexible Prem resulted in a much tougher Thai attitude towards not only the Cambodian issue, but also relations with Laos. By mid-1980, there was evidence that Sino-Thai collusion to support resistance against the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia had been extended to include coordinated backing for anti-Pathet Lao groups operating from southern China and northern and northeast Thailand.46 From Vientiane's viewpoint, a series of incidents on the Mekong leading to the Thai closure of the border in July 1980 proved that Laos was threatened by a growing alliance between China and Thailand against Indochina. After attempts at negotiation failed, Vientiane threatened that if Thailand did not behave as a good neighbour, then Laos would be forced to reactivate

45 Bangkok domestic service in Thai, 1300 gmt, 4 April 1979 (FBIS-APA-79-067, 5 April 1979).

its support for Thai anti-government groups: in early August Vientiane radio broadcast a statement by the 'Democratic Alliance of Thailand' (apparently a pro-Hanoi splinter of the Communist Party of Thailand) attacking the Thai regime.\textsuperscript{47}

Although elements of compromise were still discernible in the Thai-Laotian relationship in early 1981,\textsuperscript{48} it was clear that Thai pressure on Laos through sporadic economic blockade and support for the anti-Pathet Lao resistance was forcing Laos into ever greater dependence on Vietnam and the USSR. As long as Bangkok remained closely aligned with China, there seemed little possibility that Vientiane would downgrade its perceptions of Thailand as a serious security threat.

Long shared borders and Laotian economic dependency ensured an intense, if ultimately disharmonious, relationship between Vientiane and Bangkok. But landlocked Laos had little reason to be concerned about its relationships with the other ASEAN capitals. Although Vientiane maintained diplomatic contacts with all the ASEAN states and occasionally appeared to be taking the initiative in maintaining an Indochina-ASEAN dialogue,\textsuperscript{49} the substance of Laotian foreign policy in

\textsuperscript{47} Vientiane domestic service in Lao, 0000 gmt, 5 August 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-152, 5 August 1980.

\textsuperscript{48} For example, after Bangkok had closed the border again in January 1981 the Thai Deputy Foreign Minister claimed that he and the Laotian ambassador had agreed that the border tension was a reflection of the 'uneasy situation in the region' (that is, rather than of fundamental differences between Laos and Thailand). Vientiane emphasized that Beijing was to blame for Thai-Laotian tension. John McBeth, \textit{FEER}, 13 February 1981, p. 6.

this sphere was in reality strictly subordinated to Hanoi's priorities.

Cambodian Policies Towards the ASEAN States

Foreign relations, particularly with non-communist countries, were a less important concern for autarkic Democratic Kampuchea than they were for Vietnam and Laos. But although the Khmer Rouge's priority after the fall of Phnom Penh was the consolidation of a radically new social and economic order, foreign policy was not neglected. The Khmer Rouge's principal foreign policy aim, even in 1975, was to protect Democratic Kampuchea's independence from Vietnamese encroachment. To this end, the Cambodian communists strove not only for good relations with China, but also for a harmonious working relationship with Bangkok. 50 Thailand was also a proximate source of raw materials needed by even Democratic Kampuchea. But although Thai-Cambodian relations were normalized and cross-border trade re-established by November 1975, armed clashes between Khmer Rouge and Thai forces continued.

The nature of Thai-Cambodian relations at the end of 1975 and during 1976 may be explained by several factors. Although the Cambodians had an interest in maintaining reasonably amicable relations with Bangkok, the formal reconciliation between the two countries owed much to Chinese encouragement as part of Beijing's attempts to cement its links with both Cambodia and the ASEAN

countries. Despite their overt willingness to pursue better relations, deep mutual suspicions remained between Bangkok and Phnom Penh. Apart from the Khmer Rouge's memories of Thailand's role in supporting the anti-communist war effort in Cambodia during the Second Indochina War, groups of Cambodian exiles continued to operate into Cambodia from Thailand, apparently with the complicity of the Thai army. The border clashes might also have been due to the independent activities of local military commanders on both sides. In some areas, disagreement over the precise location of the border complicated the situation.

Nevertheless, during 1976 Phnom Penh continued to support the fragile working arrangement which it had evolved with Bangkok. But the accession of Thanin in October 1976 exacerbated the Khmer Rouge's sensitivity regarding border issues. Phnom Penh, unlike Hanoi and Vientiane, did not denounce the new Thai regime, indicating a wish to maintain some stability in the relationship if possible. But clashes on the Thai-Cambodian border became frequent and intense in 1977, as the Khmer Rouge attempted to seal the border to prevent internal dissidents from linking up with Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) resistance groups based in Thailand.

The escalation of Cambodia's conflict with Vietnam in 1977 inspired the Khmer Rouge to attempt to win the support, or at least neutrality, of the non-communist regional states in this intra-
communist struggle. Although it seemed unlikely that Cambodia would be able to improve its relationship with Thailand while Thanin remained in power, the other ASEAN countries appeared to offer opportunities for Cambodian diplomacy. The Khmer Rouge had established diplomatic relations with Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore in 1976, and unlike the Vietnamese and Laotians had refrained from criticizing ZOPFAN at the August 1976 non-aligned summit in Colombo. Now Cambodia moved to break out of its relative diplomatic isolation: in March 1977 Foreign Minister Ieng Sary visited Malaysia and Singapore. Sary propounded Democratic Kampuchea's policies of 'non-interference' and 'total independence': this was an assurance that Cambodia had no interest in joining an Indochinese bloc dominated by Hanoi.\(^53\)

The only significant Cambodian dispute with an ASEAN state other than Thailand in the 1975-77 period had been with Indonesia over the invasion of East Timor.\(^54\) The Khmer Rouge's attitude to the Timor question was doubtless influenced to a large extent by ideological sympathy with the FRETILIN revolutionary movement, but perhaps also by an antipathy towards the Suharto regime engendered by both Jakarta's close relationship with the Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh before the Cambodia communists' victory and the estrangement between Indonesia and China, Cambodia's ally. Nevertheless, Phnom Penh's


newly positive attitude towards the ASEAN region allowed the normalization of relations with Jakarta in August 1978.

Kriangsak’s removal of the Thanin regime in October 1977 facilitated a renewed Thai-Cambodian dialogue, again encouraged by China: in 1978 Thai Foreign Minister Upadit Pachariangkul and Ieng Sary exchanged visits.55 Perhaps partly as a result of Sary’s visit in July, the frequency and severity of attacks from across the border into Thailand declined in late 1978.56

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the installation of the Heng Samrin regime transformed the relationship between the ASEAN states and Phnom Penh. Whereas the Thais and the Khmer Rouge had demonstrated (except during Thanin’s year in office) a notable ability to maintain correct, if not amicable, relations despite more or less constant problems on their mutual border, Bangkok’s implacably hostile attitude towards the usurper regime in Phnom Penh precluded a continuing working relationship between the two countries. Essentially, the Thais saw the Heng Samrin administration as an illegally installed Vietnamese puppet, recognition of which would legitimize Hanoi’s aggression against a neighbour which had historically provided a buffer against Vietnamese influence. Bangkok, like the other ASEAN capitals, continued to recognize only the ousted Democratic Kampuchea regime. Of more immediate concern to the new Cambodian government was ASEAN’s connivance with Beijing in supporting

56 John McBeth, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 20.
the Khmer Rouge. Thailand became a haven for the Khmer Rouge: not only were they allowed to receive Chinese logistical support and to launch military operations into Cambodia from Thai soil, but they were also permitted to maintain their control over a large proportion of the Cambodian refugees who had agglomerated on the border.

After the Khmer Rouge were ousted by the Vietnamese invasion at the end of 1978, a central objective of the Heng Samrin regime's foreign policy was to engage Bangkok in negotiations, in the hope of securing not only Thai agreement to desist from aiding the Khmer Rouge but also, by the very fact of such contacts taking place, de facto recognition of the PRK by the key ASEAN member. But Bangkok was well aware of the implications of direct talks with Phnom Penh and refused to cooperate, adhering to ASEAN's line of supporting UN General Assembly Resolution 34/22 which called for an international conference on the problem as a prelude to a Vietnamese withdrawal and free elections in Cambodia. Although ASEAN, in keeping with its growing emphasis on pursuing a political solution to the problem, made an attempt to bring Phnom Penh (through the ruling People's Revolutionary Party) into the July 1981 International Conference on Kampuchea, Chinese pressure ensured that the regime was not invited. In the view of the Heng Samrin regime, ASEAN was still acting in collusion with Beijing and Washington in their attempts to reverse an 'irreversible' situation in Cambodia.

Implications for the ASEAN States

The Indochinese states' policies towards non-communist Southeast
Asia influenced the ASEAN states' security perceptions in several important senses. Most importantly, Hanoi's frequent declarations of hostility towards ASEAN and its members in the 1975-77 period, deriving from both its ideology and its experience of the ASEAN governments' support for the recent US war effort in Indochina, reinforced fears in non-communist Southeast Asia that a victorious, united, communist Vietnam would pose a security threat to the region, particularly by lending its support to local communist insurgents. The close relationship between Hanoi and Vientiane, coupled with evidence of Laotian support for the Thai communist insurgents, accentuated this concern and encouraged elements in the Thai military and government to continue supporting anti-Pathet Lao activity by right-wing Laotian exile groups. In contrast, Democratic Kampuchea's antipathy towards Vietnam facilitated the establishment of a working relationship between Phnom Penh and Bangkok, despite continuing mutual suspicion and border clashes.

Hanoi's wish to establish Vietnam as an autonomous international actor, coupled with an emphasis on the primacy of economic objectives,

57 See section on "Vietnam: A Revolutionary Mainspring?" in Chapter 6, pp. 191-94 below.

engendered an increasingly positive Vietnamese attitude towards the ASEAN states in 1976-77. With the outbreak of conflict with Cambodia and China in 1978, Hanoi and Vientiane had an additional reason for seeking a rapprochement with Thailand and the rest of ASEAN. But these developments were not altogether reassuring for non-communist Southeast Asia. While the establishment of a diplomatic and economic *modus vivendi* with Hanoi was welcome in the short-term, the prospect of an economically strong (as well as militarily powerful) Vietnam was worrying to some observers in the ASEAN region, particularly as it might be seen by dissatisfied elements in non-communist Southeast Asia as a vindication of a socioeconomic model diametrically opposed to that preferred by the ASEAN governments. Moreover, normalized relations between Hanoi and Washington might imply a shift in America's regional economic interests away from non-communist Southeast Asia. Although the new willingness in 1978 of the Vietnamese and Laotians to cooperate with the ASEAN states yielded tangible benefits for Thailand (in the form of the Laotian agreement to cease supporting the Thai communists), the non-communist countries of the region generally remained suspicious of the motives behind this conciliatory posture.

It is conceivable that if Vietnam had not ultimately invaded and occupied Cambodia, the ASEAN governments might have been sufficiently reassured by Hanoi's conciliatory gestures in the 1977-78 period, including acceptance of ASEAN as an economic grouping (rather than a hostile military bloc), gradual accommodation of the ZOPFAN proposal, 59 See Chapter 4, pp. 122-28 below.
and abandonment of 'fraternal' links with local revolutionary movements, to reassess fundamentally their security concerns in relation to Indochina. These Vietnamese concessions may have reinforced Indonesian and, to a lesser extent, Malaysian prejudices in favour of rapprochement with Hanoi, but the invasion of Cambodia evinced such little concern for ASEAN (and particularly Thai) sensitivities that Jakarta had Kuala Lumpur had little hesitation in joining their ASEAN partners in confronting Vietnam over the issue.

Hanoi's priority was to remove that it saw as the threat from China's client, the Democratic Kampuchea regime, but in breaking out of one ring of perceived strategic encirclement the Vietnamese alienated the ASEAN governments (as well as aggravating already poor relations with Beijing and Washington) to the extent of effectively constructing another, broader, although perhaps less immediately threatening, ring. But although the Vietnamese were unable to divide ASEAN over the Cambodian issue, Hanoi's continuing policy of fostering special relationships with Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur indirectly contributed to pressure within ASEAN to search for possible compromise solutions.

If the relationship between Bangkok and the Khmer Rouge had been as hostile as that between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea in the 1977-78 phase, it is possible that the Thais would have been less willing to lend their support to Pol Pot's resistance forces after the Vietnamese invasion. Although the Khmer Rouge' strategy of minimizing the possibility of a war on two fronts (by cultivating a working relationship with Bangkok) ultimately failed to prevent the Vietnamese from overrunning Cambodia, it almost certainly facilitated Bangkok's decision to back the Cambodian resistance from early 1979.
Southeast Asia was not, in the 1975-81 period, as important a priority for the major powers, and particularly the two superpowers, as it had been in the previous decade. Nevertheless, the United States (with its allies Japan and Australia), China and the Soviet Union retained important military, political and economic interests in the region after the end of the Second Indochina War in 1975. Moreover, the outbreak of the Third Indochina War, and especially the conflict over Cambodia, once again boosted the importance of Southeast Asia for these powers as they coupled the local conflict to their overall strategic perspective.¹ So involvement by the major extra-regional powers provided a constant backdrop to the ASEAN states' perceptions of Indochina as a security concern.

The ASEAN States and the United States

The 'Nixon doctrine', which was first enunciated in 1969 and signalled the beginning of American withdrawal from military involvement in Indochina, provided the framework for US policy in Southeast Asia in the 1970s. Although American strategic and economic

interests in Southeast Asia remained substantial, the 'Nixon doctrine' placed the United States' policy towards the region in a more balanced perspective after the excesses of America's Indochinese involvement: Washington's real interest was not in Southeast Asia for its own sake, but in the region's place in the wider Asian and global balances of power. Washington remained committed to avert the domination of Southeast Asia by China or the Soviet Union, but regional countries would have to rely principally on their own resources for their security.  

The 'Nixon doctrine', coupled with Washington's detente with Moscow and more particularly with Beijing, had a profound impact on the ASEAN states' foreign policies. But although the ASEAN governments increasingly questioned Washington's reliability as an ally (especially after the January 1973 Paris peace agreement which finalized the withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam, the Congressional War Powers Act of the same year, and the 1975 communist victories) and simultaneously moved towards improved relations with the Indochinese and extra-regional communist powers, they wished to retain close political, economic and (more hesitantly) security

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2 See supplement to Bangkok Post, 26 July 1968.

3 The War Powers Act was 'an attempt, via legislation, to control the ability of the President unilaterally to introduce American armed forces into situations of imminent or actual hostilities, into the territory, air space or waters of a foreign nation while equipped for combat, or in numbers which "substantially enlarge" American forces located in a foreign state and equipped for combat in the absence of a declaration of war or specific congressional authorization'. Richard Haass, Congressional Power: Implications for American Security Policy (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 153, 1979), p. 19.
relationships with Washington. Thailand and the Philippines remained formal allies of the United States, even after the dissolution of SEATO in June 1977, through the Manila Pact and bilateral agreements. A substantial American military presence remained in the Philippines. Malaysia and Singapore were linked to the Western alliance system through the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) with Australia, New Zealand and Britain. Indonesia, like Thailand and the Philippines, received US military assistance and all the ASEAN countries were important customers for US Foreign Military Sales (FMS).4

ASEAN's long-term goal for regional security ostensibly remained ZOPFAN. But in the absence of any significant support for this idealistic concept either within or outside the region, the ASEAN governments generally supported the idea of a 'balanced great power presence' (rather than regional domination by one major power).5 But in the mid-1970s, China continued to possess a considerable potential for influence in the region through local communist parties and ethnic Chinese communities, Soviet influence in the region had increased with the Indochinese communist victories, and Japan's considerable economic role in the region was growing apace. Despite a declaratory emphasis, particularly in 1975-76, on building national and regional


5 Even President Marcos of the Philippines (which continued to host American military bases) and the extreme anti-communist Thai premier, Thanin Kraivichien, agreed in a joint communiqué that such a 'balanced' presence was desirable. Bangkok Post, 22 December 1976.
'resilience' and increasing contacts with the communist world, the prevailing trend of opinion in the ASEAN governments was that continued US interest in Southeast Asia remained essential to maintain a stable balance of external influences. In particular the residual US military presence in the Philippines was reassuring to the ASEAN governments.

Moreover, the ASEAN governments' relationships with Washington were of central importance in their efforts to secure their hold on domestic political power. The communist victories in Indochina posed an implicit ideological challenge to the political and socio-economic status quo in the ASEAN states, some of which were already facing serious political, social and economic problems. In these circumstances, close relations with Washington were important for several reasons. US investment, trade and aid were essential for continuing economic growth. A sympathetic American attitude towards the ASEAN states' domestic political situations, particularly in terms of the effective rejection of political pluralism by some ASEAN regimes, was vital to these governments in their struggle to maintain domestic legitimacy. In particular, US military aid and equipment sales were of great assistance not only in counter-insurgency (especially in the Philippines and Thailand) but also as a means of ensuring military support for the regime in power.

Although all the ASEAN states had important reasons for wanting close political, economic and, to a lesser extent, security relations with Washington in the 1975-78 period, there was considerable scepticism in the region over the reliability of American security commitments. These doubts became particularly pronounced after the
Carter administration took office. The ASEAN governments were concerned by Washington's moves in the direction of normalizing relations with Vietnam, a reduction in US military force levels in the Asia-Pacific region (including the possibility of the withdrawal of US forces from the Philippines), and the linkage of arms transfers to political conditions and human rights issues. There were fears that Washington's economic, political and military support for non-communist Southeast Asia might decline to the extent that the ASEAN states would be threatened economically as well as militarily by Vietnam, and would be at the mercy of an American policy of delegating responsibility for regional security to China and Japan.

From early 1978 Washington was concerned over the implications for its allies and associates in Southeast Asia of increasing tension between the China-Cambodia axis and Vietnam, Hanoi's ever closer relationship with Moscow (epitomized by Vietnam's membership of COMECON from June 1978), and the Indochinese refugee crisis. These regional factors coincided with more overt superpower competition in the Third World as a result of the failure of US-Soviet detente to

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6 A secret report by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers to ASEAN's second summit meeting in August 1977 allegedly stressed that the US would no longer be involved physically in any 'local conflict' in Southeast Asia and that the extent of even the American political and economic commitment was unclear. Michael Richardson, FEER, 30 December 1977, p. 8.

7 On the ASEAN states' fears concerning the possible diversion of US development aid to Indochina, see David Jenkins, FEER, 24 June 1977, pp. 15-6.

reach fruition, and transformed the Carter administration's equivocal attitude towards Southeast Asia. The administration forcefully reiterated its interest in the ASEAN states' security several times in 1978, and shelved plans for reducing US military strength in Asia and the Pacific.

Washington saw the new Indochina conflict, and particularly the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978, as effecting a sea-change in the security environment of its ASEAN associates. Vietnamese troops faced those of Thailand (a Manila Pact ally), and from the time of the Sino-Vietnamese border war in early 1979 the Soviets used Vietnamese air and naval facilities, enhancing Moscow's capability for power projection in the region. These developments not only coincided with a strengthening Soviet military posture elsewhere in the East Asia-Pacific sphere, but were soon compounded by US concern over developments in the Indian Ocean region, particularly after the Iranian revolution in early 1979, the seizure of American hostages in Teheran in November 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the following month, and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war.

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9 See Vice-President Mondale's comments during his visits to Bangkok, Manila and Jakarta in April and May 1978, and Assistant Secretary of State Holbrooke's speech to the Boston World Affairs Council in November 1978. 'Mondale sows the seeds', FEER, 19 May 1978, pp. 11-12 and United States Information Service bulletin, 20 November 1978.

10 Stephen Barber, FEER, 5 May 1978, pp. 11-12. Moreover, in August 1978 the US ambassador to Manila announced that America would strengthen its forces in Asia over the next five years with advanced nuclear and other weapons systems. 'The Week', FEER, 25 August 1978, p. 7.

11 For example, in the Kuriles (north of Japan) and in terms of expanding naval deployments in the Pacific.
in 1980. These developments influenced the Carter administration to increase its political, economic and military support for ASEAN and its members, in order not only to bolster the Southeast Asian and wider Asian balances of power, but also to maintain ready access to the Indian Ocean by way of the US bases in the Philippines and Indonesia's strategic straits.

The revitalization of Washington's policies towards Southeast Asia in 1978 was heartening to the ASEAN governments. Clear evidence of the Carter administration's new commitment to Southeast Asian security came in December 1978 - January 1979. The conclusion of a new agreement between Washington and Manila allowing a continued US military presence in the Philippines was soon followed by a reassuring US response to the invasion of Cambodia. As well as providing staunch support for ASEAN's efforts, particularly at the United Nations, to deny international legitimacy to the Vietnamese-installed regime in Phnom Penh and to secure a Vietnamese military withdrawal from Cambodia, Washington helped to ameliorate the impact of the Indochinese refugee flow on ASEAN's members, and increased arms transfers aimed at improving the capability of their armed forces to meet conventional threats. Thailand, in particular, benefited from

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12 According to Holbrooke, 'US policies and actions seek to maintain the current equilibrium and not allow any single power to achieve a prponderance of influence or military superiority in the region'. Richard Holbrooke, 'America's New Role in Asia', Asiaweek, 7 July 1978, p. 23.

Washington's new attitude: apart from supportive rhetoric, the Carter administration provided Bangkok with substantially increased military and economic assistance, and worked to secure greater assistance for Thailand from the World Bank and International Development Agency.\(^{14}\) Bangkok was also permitted to increase its purchases under the FMS scheme; the US Seventh Fleet increased the frequency of its port calls to Thailand; and there were reports that former US air bases in Thailand were being reactivated for emergency use by USAF B-52 heavy bombers, as a deterrent to a major Vietnamese cross-border attack.\(^{15}\)

As Vietnam's conflicts with China and Cambodia intensified in 1978, and more especially after the invasion of Cambodia, the other ASEAN states as well as Thailand made it clear that they saw America's revived strategic interest in the region as beneficial to their own security. Pressure from the other ASEAN governments probably influenced the Marcos regime to accept a continuing US military presence on terms that were less than entirely satisfactory.\(^{16}\) Marcos himself later claimed:

... it appears now that there has been a dramatic change in American perceptions of its [sic] defense commitments and its role in global affairs. In the latest acts of the United States government we find a firm and believable resolve to express concern for its allies in more concrete terms.\(^{17}\)

\(^{14}\) Helen Chauncey, 'Thailand plays the great power game', Southeast Asia Chronicle, No. 69 (January-February 1980), p. 4.


\(^{17}\) President Ferdinand E. Marcos, 'The Pillar of our Nation's Strength and Security' (Speech to Philippine Military Academy graduates, Baguio, 18 February 1980), p. 7.
There were indications that in certain circumstances Malaysia might be willing to cooperate militarily with Washington, and from early 1981 Kuala Lumpur allowed the Australian air force to station maritime reconnaissance aircraft (which indirectly provided Washington with intelligence on Soviet naval activity in the Indian Ocean) at a Malaysian base. Although the Indonesian regime remained opposed to any notion of itself providing military bases or facilities for any extra-regional power, even Jakarta gave a conditional welcome to Washington's more assertive regional role from 1979, particularly in terms of the expanded US naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Although other concerns, such as Poland and El Salvador, quickly assumed greater priority in the new administration's foreign policy, under President Reagan Washington consolidated the greater concern for Southeast Asia demonstrated in the second half of the Carter presidency. As a 'front-line state' Thailand benefitted from Washington's sympathetic approach towards America's allies and associates facing what the Reagan administration saw as the growing

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18 For example, in January 1980 the Malaysian government announced that it would construct a massive new air base at Gong Kedak in Kelantan. The projected size of the base (apparently far beyond the foreseeable requirements of the Royal Malaysian Air Force) suggested that it might have been intended as a forward base for US air operations in time of crisis. See K. Das, FEER, 18 January 1980, p. 30.


20 According to Secretary of State Haig, Washington considered Southeast Asia as being 'at the heart and soul of international peace'. Bangkok Post, 5 March 1981.
danger of Soviet expansionism, which included Moscow's alleged use of proxies such as Vietnam. Under Reagan, Washington's responses to Bangkok's requests for assistance were not moderated to the same extent as under Carter by a wish to keep open the possibility of improved US-Vietnamese relations.21

The Indonesian and Malaysian governments were not so enthusiastic as their ASEAN partners about the Reagan administration's policy towards Southeast Asia. Whereas US policy towards the Cambodian problem generally coincided with China's, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur feared the growing polarization in Southeast Asia between a Soviet-influenced Indochinese bloc and an ASEAN manipulated by China. Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur displayed considerable independence in their efforts to find a compromise solution which would recognize Vietnamese as well as Thai security interests.22 Jakarta's attitude towards America's revived regional role was tinged with ambivalence23 and the replacement of Hussein Onn by Mahathir Mohamed as Malaysian premier in

21 For example, in October 1979 Assistant Secretary to State Holbrooke's attempts to secure a Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia (which would hopefully also lessen Vietnamese dependence on the USSR) in exchange for an improvement in US-Vietnamese relations brought him into conflict with Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak. See Derek Davies' interview with Holbrooke, FEER, 16 November 1979, pp. 14-6. Holbrooke subsequently emphasized that Washington had no intention of betraying ASEAN interests in attempting to disengage Hanoi from its relationship with Moscow. See 'The Indochina Situation: A Continuing Threat to Peace', Holbrooke's address to the Council on Foreign Relations, 2 April 1980.

22 See section on 'Indonesian and Malaysian Policy on Cambodia' in Chapter 10, pp. 442-50 below.

23 In the words of one observer, 'the Indonesian Government would prefer the least objectionable superpower to be on tap and not on
July 1981 appeared to presage policies more independent of Washington.  

Overall, the ASEAN states' strategic alignment with the United States, especially after the invasion of Cambodia, exercised a crucial influence on their views of Indochina as a security concern. In particular, the ASEAN governments' political, economic and military links with Washington reinforced their adversary relationship with Vietnam from 1978. In return for falling in line with US strategic priorities in the region, the ASEAN states received a good deal more from Washington than just firmer guarantees in the unlikely event of large-scale Vietnamese or Soviet aggression.

Close relations with Washington also provided the ASEAN governments with an alternative to reliance on China in the face of what they perceived as a Soviet-backed threat. But as importantly, they secured a wide range of benefits not related to their security concerns with Indochina. From 1978, Washington not only increased substantially the economic and military assistance, so vital to the Thai, Philippines and Indonesian governments for the undermining and

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24 For example, the Malaysian government's deferral of plans to build the Gong Kedak air base in 1982 may have been due as much to a desire to distance Malaysia from Washington's military involvement in the region as to a wish to contain increases in defence expenditure.

25 But at times it appeared, to the consternation of Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur in particular, that Washington was intent on
suppression of domestic communist insurgency, but it also largely freed this assistance from human rights and other political conditions. The beleaguered Marcos regime particularly welcomed this development. US political support was also extended to Thailand's Prem regime when it was challenged by the abortive 'Young Turks' coup in April 1981.

Singaporean encouragement of the United States' role in Southeast Asian security was doubtless largely due to nervousness that the regional balance of power might be drastically altered by the consolidation of communist rule and Soviet influence in Indochina after 1975. Singapore's extreme dependence on external trade and investment meant that it was critically important for its government to demonstrate a concern with maintaining regional stability. But Singapore's enthusiastic relationship with Washington may also be partly explained by the government's enduring concern that the miniscule city state with its largely ethnic Chinese population was delegating its role in Southeast Asian security to Beijing. For example, the United States failed to support ASEAN in its differences with China at the July 1981 International Conference on Kampuchea. See Nayan Chanda, FEER, 24 July 1981, pp. 13-15. The possibility of US arms sales to China also caused concern in ASEAN capitals. Barry Wain, Asian Wall Street Journal (cited hereafter as AWSJ), 23 June 1981.

26 In the words of one official Philippine analysis: 'It can be expected that the governments of South Korea and the Philippines will face less resistance in taking a stronger hand to their domestic opponents'. '1980: An Assessment of the Year', From the Center (published by the President's Center for Special Studies), Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1981), p. 13.


28 See section on 'Singapore's Globalist Outlook' in Chapter 9, pp. 407-11 below.
uncomfortably sandwiched between two considerably more populous neighbours (Indonesia and Malaysia) both with largely Muslim Malay populations. The fear was that racial or religious instability in either of these neighbours (including the possibility of radical Islamic regimes) might threaten Singapore with invasion or internal strife. The Singaporean leadership saw the development of a close relationship with Washington as an important insurance against such developments. 29

The security perceptions of some of the ASEAN governments in relation to Indochina were influenced not only by the benefits of strategic alignment with the United States, but also more directly by intense, institutionalized contact between local politicians, officials and military officers on one hand, and US diplomats and officers on the other hand. This type of influence was most pronounced in Thailand and the Philippines -- America's two formal allies in the region. Not only were there very large US diplomatic missions in Bangkok and Manila, but also sizeable contingents of US military advisers in daily contact with the military elites of both countries. One study of the influence of US diplomats in Thailand concluded that:

... American diplomatic officials in Thailand are involved in varying degrees in shaping certain aspects of the processes and institutions of the Thai political system... These functions do not indicate that the US embassy directly controls any political institution,

29 Although this issue was never broached officially in public, numerous personal interviews with diplomats, journalists and academics in the ASEAN capitals in January-April 1981 confirmed its significance.
official or organization in Thailand. However, it does reveal that the Embassy indirectly influences a large number of political institutions, officials and organizations in the kingdom.

The ASEAN States and Communist China

China's proximity and historical links with Southeast Asia meant that in some senses the People's Republic could hardly be regarded as an 'extra-regional' power. China and the Southeast Asian states were necessarily permanent factors in each other's foreign policy calculations.

By the late 1970s, China's overriding foreign policy interest in relation to the ASEAN states was to restrain Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. Other Chinese interests in the region -- the promotion of communist revolution, the enhancement of Beijing's political and economic stake, and the lessening of American and other 'imperialist' influence -- were secondary to this strategy of attempting to deny Moscow the advantages which Washington's diminished regional interest and the increasingly close Soviet-Vietnamese relationship might confer. Beijing feared that Moscow might use its foothold in a reunified Vietnam as part of an attempt to encircle China: the 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty and Brezhnev's Asian collective security proposal already provided evidence for the Chinese of such a Soviet strategy.

These potentially dangerous developments in China's strategic environment to the south, coupled with a more pragmatic attitude towards foreign policy after the removal of the 'Gang of Four' in 1976, significantly altered Beijing's attitude towards ASEAN and its members. In the early 1970s, Beijing had supported certain of the ASEAN states' policies, such as ZOPFAN and the Indonesian-Malaysian declaration that the Straits of Malacca were not international waters, where these might potentially help to exclude Soviet and American influence from the region. But it was not until 1975, following the communist victory in South Vietnam, that China ceased to castigate ASEAN as an American-sponsored military alliance. Thereafter, Beijing adopted a positive attitude towards not only ASEAN but also the US military presence in Southeast Asia: the 'three World theory' was clearly no longer the major determinant of China's foreign policy in Southeast Asia or elsewhere. A desire to develop economic links with non-communist Southeast Asia as a channel for trade and


32 The fall of Saigon not only raised the spectre of Soviet influence in a powerful, reunified Vietnam, but also released Beijing from its obligation to oppose ASEAN because of some of its members' support for the anti-communist side in the Second Indochina War. By August 1975, Beijing was claiming that ASEAN 'has achieved positive results in recent years'. New China News Agency (cited hereafter as NCNA) in English, 1700 gmt, 26 August 1975 British Broadcasting Corporation Summary of World Broadcasts (cited hereafter as SWB) FE/4992/A3/1, 28 August 1975.

33 For this reason, the US military presence in the Philippines was no obstacle to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Manila.

34. According to the 'three worlds' theory, enunciated by Deng Xiaoping in 1974, it was necessary for the 'third world' (China and
investment for the 'four modernizations', reinforced Beijing's strategic rationale for better relations with the ASEAN governments.

Beijing's new attitude towards the ASEAN countries was paralleled, to a greater or lesser degree, by these states' efforts in the mid 1970s to improve their relations with China. Several factors motivated these efforts. Most important was a widespread recognition that with the advent of the Nixon doctrine and Sino-American detente, it was both unnecessary and unrealistic to persist with policies which assumed China to be an immediate security threat. Although as recently as 1967 a shared fear of China had been a major factor inspiring the formation of ASEAN, by the mid-1970s there were apparently grounds for hoping that the normalization of relations with China might induce Beijing, which was already displaying moderation in its foreign policy, to take action to reduce the threat which the ASEAN governments had perceived in its links with local communist parties and ethnic Chinese communities. Some of the ASEAN governments

the other developing nations) to join with the 'second world' (the European and other non-superpower developed countries) to form a united front against the dominant and oppressive 'first world' (the two superpowers). But although Beijing confirmed this theory in 1977 and 1978, from 1977 the Chinese emphasized that the USSR was considerably more aggressive than the United States, and was therefore the principal adversary to be countered. China's recognition that the United States was a useful associate in the confrontation with Moscow deprived the 'three worlds' theory of much of its credibility.

In January 1975, Premier Zhou En-Lai recommitted China to the goal of the 'four modernizations' (which he had first advanced in 1964), with the aim of thoroughly reconditioning the agricultural, industrial, defence, and science and technology spheres by the year 2000. In the late 1970s, Chairman Hua Guo-Feng and Vice-Premier Deng Xiao-Ping made the 'four modernizations' their principal political goals.
also anticipated economic benefits as a result of normalization with China. Bangkok also hoped that better relations with China would help counteract possible threats from a united communist Vietnam and from a Beijing-oriented Democratic Kampuchea. Specific local political conditions helped to make normalization more feasible in the mid-1970s than previously.³⁶

Although Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines had established diplomatic relations with China by 1975 and Lee Kuan Yew said, during his visit to Beijing in May 1976, that Singapore would follow suit once Indonesia did the same, there remained much distrust of China in the region. The ASEAN governments' concern that China still threatened their security had several aspects. To some regional observers, China's historical attempts to impose its influence over the region appeared to have a contemporary counterpart in Beijing's maritime claims in the South China Sea, which though muted since the late 1960s potentially placed the People's Republic at odds with the Philippines and Malaysia.³⁷

A more serious concern expressed by the ASEAN governments concerned Beijing's links with local communist parties and ethnic Chinese communities. But although Maoist military theory was the


³⁷ For example, an assessment in 1977 by ASEAN's Foreign Ministers of recent regional developments expressed 'uneasiness' over China's maritime claims. Michael Richardson, FEER, 30 December 1977, p.8.
inspiration for communist insurgent tactics in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, and these countries' Parties remained oriented towards Beijing rather than Moscow or Hanoi, whether or not China continued to extend its support was largely irrelevant to their ultimate success or failure. Chinese support played an essentially subsidiary role in insurgency in the ASEAN region both before and after the normalization of relations with Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. China's backing for insurgency outside Indochina and Burma had always emphasized political support and propaganda (rather than material assistance), involving broadcasting facilities, asylum for exiled Party leaders and training for cadres and guerillas, and the insurgents generally used weapons and equipment captured from government forces or manufactured by themselves. Nevertheless, while communist insurgency arose very largely from local needs and was maintained overwhelmingly from local resources, to a greater or lesser degree all the ASEAN governments (or at least factions within them) found it both reassuring and politically expedient to portray the internal communist threat to their rule as probably inspired and manipulated from outside rather than as a phenomenon rooted in domestic economic, social and political inequities.

Nevertheless, China's refusal to terminate its relations with communist parties in the ASEAN countries provided ammunition for those in the region who claimed that the People's Republic still represented a security threat. Although Beijing wished to reassure the ASEAN governments that this was not the case, the Chinese communist leadership would not terminate its support for communist parties in the ASEAN countries for several reasons. The maintenance of 'party-
to-party' as well as 'government-to-government' relations in the ASEAN region provided Beijing with a potential means of exerting pressure if an ASEAN government adopted policies inimical to China's interests. But, perhaps more importantly, a total withdrawal of support might have lessened China's status in the divided world communist movement (where the Southeast Asian communist parties had been amongst Beijing's firmest supporters), undermined Chinese claims to lead the Third World, and opened the way for Moscow and Hanoi to step into the breach with assistance for the Southeast Asian Parties.  

Beijing was also reluctant to truncate its links with the ASEAN countries' large ethnic Chinese communities. Since Zhou En-Lai's announcement of a 'good neighbour policy' in 1955, communist China had encouraged ethnic Chinese living in Southeast Asia to integrate themselves with the societies in which they lived, in order to assuage Southeast Asian governments' doubts concerning the loyalties of the 'Overseas Chinese' and hence remove, or at least reduce, an important obstacle to improve relations with these governments. But Beijing reserved the right to protect the interests of those Chinese retaining PRC nationality. Moreover the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1960s precipitated violent pro-Beijing demonstrations by ethnic Chinese in some Southeast Asian countries (including Indonesia in

38 Both Deng Xiao-Ping and Zhao Ziyang, when they visited the region in 1978 and 1981 respectively, stressed the danger that communist movements in the ASEAN countries might fall under Soviet and Vietnamese influence if all Chinese support was terminated. Henry Kamn, New York Times, 10 November 1978; Bangkok Post, 14 August 1981.

39 In 1981, ethnic Chinese were estimated to comprise the following proportions of total population in the ASEAN countries: Singapore (76.9%); Malaysia (33.1%); Thailand (13%); Indonesia (2.8%); Philippines (1.5%). See Leo Suryadinata, China and the ASEAN States: The Ethnic Chinese Dimension (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), p. 6.
1967), and the post-Cultural Revolution power struggle in China after 1969 produced ambiguous policies towards the Overseas Chinese. After the fall of the 'Gang of Four' in late 1976, Beijing's interest in the Overseas Chinese increased: the Deng group saw them as an important source of capital and skills for the 'four modernizations'. In January 1978, while still encouraging Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia to adopt local citizenship, Beijing claimed that Chinese abroad 'constitute part of the Chinese people and are important links in helping to develop the friendship between the Chinese people and the people of various countries'.

Some ASEAN members -- especially Indonesia and Malaysia but to a lesser extent Singapore as well -- expressed concern that China's revived interest in Southeast Asia's Overseas Chinese was a potential security threat, especially after the plight of Vietnam's Chinese community became a central issue in the Sino-Vietnamese dispute in 1978. These concerns were probably without foundation. In the first place, it was highly unlikely that Beijing would be able to mobilize Southeast Asian Chinese to work for its own goals on a large scale. Moreover, Beijing demonstrated in relation to both Indonesia


41 Suryadinata, pp. 122-26; Straits Times, 5 July 1978.

42 This was largely due to the acculturation and assimilation of Southeast Asian Chinese, particularly in political terms. Indeed, it has been argued that the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia are not so much useful instruments of Chinese foreign policy as hostages for the good behaviour of the People's Republic in the hands of the host countries. See Harold C. Hinton, China's Turbulent Quest: An Analysis of China's Foreign Relations Since 1949 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 199.
and Democratic Kampuchea in the mid and late 1970s that China was willing to limit severely its commitment to defend the interests of ethnic Chinese residents if this was necessary to cultivate (or preserve from further damage) an important 'government-to-government' relationship. The example of China's intervention on behalf of Vietnam's ethnic Chinese was probably exceptional, with Beijing viewing the problem as closely linked to the Sino-Soviet dispute and therefore the more immediate security of China. But even the promulgation in 1980 of the PRC's first nationality law, which ended Beijing's recognition of dual nationality and may have been motivated by a desire to assuage concerns in the ASEAN region as Beijing endeavoured to maintain ASEAN support for its stance on the Cambodian issue, failed to reassure the Indonesian and Malaysian governments.

The ASEAN governments did not have a uniform attitude towards Beijing's ambivalent policy of attempting to improve 'government-to-government' relations while still maintaining links with Communist Parties and ethnic Chinese communities in the ASEAN region. Successive Thai governments were more accommodating than their ASEAN partners of China's policies. Although China continued to provide broadcasting facilities for the Thai communists' 'Voice of the People of Thailand' (VOPT) until 1979, Beijing reduced markedly its links

43 Suryadinata, pp. 34-58.
45 For example, when he visited Beijing in July 1975 to establish diplomatic relations, Thai Premier Kukrit apparently accepted Beijing's distinction between two sets of relationships. Straits Times, 7 July 1975.
with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the late 1970s. By 1977 it was evident that, despite the deterioration in relations between Bangkok and Beijing which had occurred under the Thanin regime, 'no serious Thais see China as a threat'. The eruption of the Third Indochina War, culminating in the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978, brought further reductions in Beijing's support for the CPT as China strove to forge a united front including the Thai government in opposition to Hanoi's domination of Indochina. In July 1979 the VOPT announced its own 'temporary' closure, and in September 1980 it was reported that the CPT was no longer receiving any direct material support from China. General Prem Tinsulanond, who became Prime Minister in March 1980, was more suspicious than his predecessor Kriangsak of China's continuing links with the CPT, but Beijing had apparently allayed Prem's concern by the time that Chinese


48 Limited financial assistance continued, however, according to an interview with 'Comrade Paitoon' (a member of the CPT's North-eastern region committee), FEER, 19 September 1980, p. 47. According to Thai officials concerned with internal security interviewed in March 1981, China had continued to send material aid to the CPT by way of the Burmese Communist Party. Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General of Thailand's National Security Council claimed that the level of Chinese support for the CPT was 'very low'. Personal interview, March 1981.

49 Prem's attitude was probably coloured by his long experience fighting the CPT in Thailand's northeast. 'Intelligence', FEER, 24 October 1980, p. 9.
Premier Zhao visited Bangkok early in 1981.  

The Thai authorities' relatively credulous response to Beijing's assertions that it did not wish to export revolution was the result not only of the demonstrable decline in the CPT's fortunes after 1978 and Bangkok's common interest with China in countering Vietnam's domination of Cambodia, but also the fact that Thailand's ethnic Chinese community had to a large degree been assimilated into the mainstream of Thai society by the 1970s. The Thai military-bureaucratic elite no longer saw the ethnic Chinese community as a serious security threat; although a large part of the CPT's Central Committee was still ethnic Chinese, there was otherwise little correlation between communist activism and Chinese ethnicity, except in Southern Thailand.

Chinese support for the Communist Party of the Philippines and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA) was never significant compared to that given to mainland Southeast Asian communists, but in

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50 The issue of China's relations with the CPT was not high on the agenda for discussion by Prem and Zhao, reportedly having been 'settled to Thailand's satisfaction' when Prem visited Beijing in 1980. Straits Times, 31 January 1981.

51 According to Zhao, 'we don't believe that revolution can be exported'. Straits Times, 3 February 1981.

52 This decline was due principally to rifts within the Party, the loss of sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia, and to Thai Army successes, rather than directly because of the decline in Chinese support. Nevertheless, if the CPT's insurgency had continued to pose as serious a threat as it had in the early and mid-1970s, Bangkok might have had far greater doubts about the wisdom of entering into closer relations with Beijing.
the late 1970s even this limited assistance declined. Coupled with the facts that the local ethnic Chinese community was increasingly assimilated into Philippine society and that the NPA had anyway never drawn particularly on the Chinese community for its membership, this made for a relaxed assessment in Manila of China as a security concern. Officials emphasized that there had been no evidence of Chinese interference in the Philippines since the normalization of relations and that Beijing's preoccupation with the 'four modernizations' would probably prevent the People's Republic from being a threat for the rest of the century.

The Malaysian government often displayed much greater anxiety than its Thai and Philippine counterparts over China's continuing links with the local communist movement. While the Malaysian Prime Minister was still in Beijing in 1974 after signing an official communique establishing Sino-Malaysian diplomatic relations which included a disavowal of subversion the Malayan communists' 'Voice of Malayan Revolution' (VMR) -- broadcasting from southern China -- claimed that 'peaceful coexistence can in no way replace the

53 According to Ambassador Luz Del Mundo, a senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs official interviewed in March 1981, there had been no evidence of Chinese interference in the Philippines since diplomatic relations were established. Other sources confirmed that by 1981 there was certainly no evidence of foreign supplies reaching the NPA. See, for example, 'Intelligence', FEER, 7 August 1981, p. 9.

54 Personal interview with Carlos P. Romulo, Philippine Minister of Foreign Affairs, Manila, 23 March 1981.

revolutionary struggle'. Soon afterwards, another VMR declaration claimed that the communique signed by Razak and Chou was, for the communists, just a tactical measure like Stalin's 1945 Pact with the Kuomintang. But although Kuala Lumpur had grounds for viewing Beijing's continued maintenance of 'party-to-party' as well as 'government-to-government' links as duplicitous, there was no evidence to support the Malaysian government's assertions that there was a direct relationship between Chinese moral support and the escalation in the CPM's military activities in the mid-1970s.

Although there were indications in 1980-81 that Beijing was scaling down its links with the Communist Party of Malaya, probably as part of the Chinese effort to maintain Malaysian backing for ASEAN's policy of opposing Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, the Malay political leadership continued to express dissatisfaction with China's refusal to sever totally its connection with the insurgents. The

58 It is more likely that this revival in terrorism sprang from the three-way splintering of the CPM in 1974, with the two new factions adopting innovatory tactics. See section on "Vietnam and Communism in Malaysia..." in Chapter 6, pp. 222-27 below.
59 It is doubtful that the 'defection' from China to Malaysia of former CPM chairman Musa Ahmad in November 1980 would have been possible without at least the tacit complicity of the Chinese authorities. Moreover, the PRC-based 'Voice of Malayan Revolution' ceased broadcasting at the end of June 1981. Straits Times, 12 January 1981; Sydney Morning Herald, 9 July 1981.
60 See, for example, the comments by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed and Foreign Minister Ghazali Shafie, Straits Times, 9 and 19 August 1981.
CPM did not immediately pose a serious security problem, but the security authorities in Kuala Lumpur viewed China's continuing links with local communists as part of a wider 'Chinese threat'. A widespread view in Malaysian official circles, even after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia heightened Malaysian perceptions of Hanoi as a threat, was that China remained the principal long-term security threat because of Beijing's potential ability to destroy the fabric of Malaysian society by using its links with not only the CPM (which was composed overwhelmingly of ethnic Chinese) but also the wider Malaysian Chinese community to provoke racial conflict.61

Unlike their ASEAN partners, Indonesia and Singapore did not maintain formal diplomatic relations with China in the 1975-81 period. Jakarta suspended its relations in the wake of the abortive 1965 coup in which the new Indonesian military regime attempted to implicate China and the Beijing-oriented PKI (Indonesian Communist Party).62 Although the Indonesian army and Muslim groups had virtually eradicated the PKI in 1965-66, the Jakarta regime remained highly sensitive to China as a security threat. There was no active communist insurgency for China to support, but Beijing harboured exiled PKI leaders and disseminated propaganda in support of the communists.63 Moreover, Jakarta feared China's ability to exploit the

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61 Personal interviews with Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and diplomats, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, March-April 1981.


63 As late as May 1975, in the wake of the Cambodian and Vietnamese communists' victories, the Chinese Communist Party openly (if unrealistically) encouraged the PKI to overthrow the Jakarta regime by armed struggle. NCNA in Indonesian, 0830 gmt, 22 May 1975 (SWB FE/4914/A3/8, 28 May 1975).
subversive potential of Indonesia's large ethnic Chinese community, which included almost a million people who were formally citizens of the People's Republic. 64

Within Jakarta's ruling elite there were marked divergences of opinion over the 'Chinese threat'. The 'generation of '45', who still dominated the Indonesian military leadership, had witnessed increasing Chinese influence in Indonesia culminating in the events of 1965. 65 But genuine concern over a continuing 'Chinese threat' was inextricably confused with the Suharto regime's use of this 'threat' as a device for enhancing the domestic political legitimacy of the 'New Order'. The Department of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, was generally less impressed with the idea of China as the main threat to security, and as early as 1970 Foreign Minister Malik displayed willingness to re-establish diplomatic contact with Beijing. 66 From Malik's viewpoint, a thaw in relations with China would balance Jakarta's close links with Washington and residual relationship with Moscow, lending credibility to a foreign policy which still strove to


65 The Indonesian military's outlook may also have been influenced by the experiences of the Burmese and Sihanoukist Cambodian regimes in the late 1960s, which provided evidence that China had no compunction in continuing to provide staunch backing for local communist movements despite establishing inter-governmental relations. See van der Kroef, pp. 225-26.

be 'independent' and 'active'.

In the 1970s it often seemed possible that Sino-Indonesian relations would shortly be normalized, but the suspicions of Indonesia's army leaders, which were lent some credibility by China's refusal to cut links with the PKI, remained an obstacle even after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia involved ASEAN (the main vehicle for Jakarta's foreign policy) in close cooperation with Beijing to oppose Hanoi's domination of Indochina. The military's position was that normalization should wait until the domestic situation in Indonesia was 'under complete control', but the real point was that a restored diplomatic nexus would undermine the credibility of the 'Chinese threat' as a justification for many of the Suharto regime's authoritarian domestic policies.

Unlike the Suharto regime, the Singaporean government did not view -- or claim to view -- China as the main external security threat. Although Lee Kuan Yew condemned Beijing's refusal to sever its links with the Communist Party of Malaya (whose ambit included Singapore), he saw the USSR as a much more serious threat, particularly after the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the Singaporean

67 But even Malik claimed that although China was not a threat in a military sense, it was still a source of 'ideological and political subversion'. Adam Malik, 'Djakarta Conference and Asia's Political Future', Pacific Community, Vol. 2, No. 1 (October 1970), pp. 73-74.

68 Senior Indonesian army officers quoted by Weinstein, p. 21. See also Leo Suryadinata, AWSJ, 24 January 1980.


70 Straits Times, 4 July 1980 and 12 August 1981.
government still refused to open formal diplomatic relations with China. The government's main concern was that such a link with Beijing was potentially dangerous because of the domestic population's predominantly Chinese ethnic composition. Aware that Singapore's existence as a prosperous independent state was partly dependent on the maintenance of equable relations with Indonesia and Malaysia, the government thought it necessary to avoid giving even the slightest impression of being open to Beijing's influence. Moreover, the Singaporean leadership feared that diplomatic relations with Beijing might generate a renewed enthusiasm for their ancestral homeland amongst some of the local Chinese population, possibly reviving the conflict between English- and Chinese-educated ethnic Chinese which had dominated Singaporean politics in the early 1960s.71

But although the Singaporean government stressed, throughout the 1975-81 period, that it would not open diplomatic relations with Beijing until Indonesia had done so,72 an informal working relationship with China developed apace. Lee Kuan Yew's visit to Beijing in May 1976 brought a reassurance from Chairman Hua that Singapore's treatment of local communists was its own affair and when Deng Xiao-ping visited Singapore in 1978 he reassured Lee that Beijing had no intention of subverting the loyalty of Singaporean Chinese.73

71 Personal interviews with academics, diplomats and journalists, Singapore, January-February 1981. On the first point, see Lee Kuan Yew's comments to Indonesian reporters, Straits Times, 4 July 1980.

72 See, for example, Lee Kuan Yew's comments, Straits Times, 4 July 1980.

73 David Bonavia and K. Das, FEER, 24 November 1978, p. 32.
Economic links also grew between China and Singapore, which throughout the late 1970s was Beijing's most important trading partner in Southeast Asia. By the time of Lee's second visit to Beijing in 1980, Singapore was reaping most of the benefits, but also some of the disadvantages, that would have accrued from formalized diplomatic relations with China.

Suspicion of China had a profound influence on the ASEAN states' security concerns with Indochina in the 1975-81 period. In essence the most important long-term security concern of important elements in the Indonesian and Malaysian governments was with an alleged 'Chinese threat' rather than with Vietnam, even after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. To a more limited extent, some figures in the Thai military held similar views, and on occasion even Singaporean leaders indicated that they took seriously the idea that China threatened the region in the long-term. These perceptions of a Chinese threat muted Indonesian and Malaysian reactions to the reunification of Vietnam under communist rule in 1975. More importantly, they made Indonesia and Malaysia, and to a lesser extent the other ASEAN states, wary of aligning themselves too closely with Beijing's strategy to break

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74 See John Wong, The Political Economy of China's Changing Relations with Southeast Asia (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 93-122. The bulk of Singapore's trade with China, however, resulted from the island's role as an entrepot. Thus, even in the late 1970s, about 60% of Singapore's imports from China were for re-export, mainly to Indonesia and the Middle East.

75 Such as accusations by Hanoi and Moscow that Singapore was acting as China's mouthpiece on the Cambodian issue. See, for example, Nhan Dan commentary broadcast 15 September 1979 by Hanoi home service 1100 gmt, 15 September 1979 (SWB FE/6221/A3/5, 17 September 1979).
Hanoi's hold on Cambodia after the December 1978 invasion. There was a widespread view in the ASEAN states (including Thailand) that although, for various reasons, Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia could not be condoned, it was not in the interests of regional security for Vietnam to be 'bled white' to force its withdrawal from Cambodia as the Chinese intended. But while the preferred (if unrealized) ASEAN solution to the Cambodian problem was a negotiated settlement recognizing Vietnamese as well as Chinese and Thai security interests in Cambodia, there would have been severe drawbacks to a policy which seriously contradicted Chinese interests. In the absence of a massive commitment by another extra-regional power (as undertaken by the United States in the 1960s), accommodation of China remained a vital, if usually unacknowledged, element of the ASEAN states' (and especially Thailand's) foreign policies.

The ASEAN States and the Soviet Union

From Moscow's viewpoint the ASEAN region was of only limited intrinsic interest. The ASEAN countries were of little economic importance to the Soviet Union and the local revolutionary movements.

76 See section on 'Was there an alternative?' in Chapter 10, pp. 487-88 below.

77 Although the USSR obtained almost all its natural rubber from the ASEAN region, this resource could be bought from alternative sources if necessary. See Thomas L. Wilborn, The Soviet Union and ASEAN (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: US Army War College, Strategic Issues Research Memorandum, 1980), p. 8.
were, with minor exceptions, in communion with Beijing rather than Moscow.

Moscow did, however, have strategic interests in the ASEAN region which were essentially independent of its limited political and economic involvement in non-communist Southeast Asia. From the early 1960s, the principal Soviet objectives in Southeast Asia were to contain Chinese and American influence. As well as competing with China for influence in Hanoi during the Vietnam War, Moscow had attempted to involve non-communist Southeast Asia in the containment of China through Brezhnev's 1969 proposal for an Asian collective security system. The USSR's adversary relationship with the United States also had repercussions in Southeast Asia. Apart from supporting Hanoi in its struggle against the American-backed South during the Vietnam War, this competition with the United States for influence was also evident in Indonesia in the early 1960s. A perceived need to counter possible US ballistic missile submarine deployments in the Indian Ocean probably provided the main initial impetus for an expanding Soviet naval presence there from the late 1960s. The deployment of the Soviet navy to the Indian Ocean increased the importance of Southeast Asian waters to Moscow, as its

78 Despite later Soviet attempts to link their proposals with ASEAN's ZOPFAN concept, there was little enthusiasm for the Brezhnev plan in the ASEAN region. See Geoffrey Jukes, 'The Soviet Union and Southeast Asia', Australian Outlook, Vol. 31, No. 1 (April 1979), p. 13.

ships needed to pass through the region on their way to and from naval bases near Vladivostok: the extent of this interest was reflected in Moscow's willingness to join with the United States in opposing the Indonesian and Malaysian declaration in 1971 that the Straits of Malacca and Singapore were not international waters.

But despite Moscow's strategic interest in non-communist Southeast Asia as a result of the USSR's adversary relationships with China and the United States, its relationships with the ASEAN governments remained tenuous until the mid-1970s. Moscow had long-standing diplomatic links with Bangkok and Jakarta, and opened diplomatic relations with Malaysia and Singapore in 1967 and 1968 respectively. 80 Although there were indications that some ASEAN politicians saw Soviet interest in Southeast Asia as a useful counterweight to the perceived threat of regional domination by China, 81 the Soviet Union's communist ideology and rivalry with the United States prejudiced the ASEAN governments against cultivating very much closer relations with Moscow. Although the USSR maintained virtually no links with local communist parties in the ASEAN countries, 82 Moscow's ideological differences with the ASEAN

80 Diplomatic relations with the Philippines were not opened until 1976. Asiaweek, 25 June 1976, p. 7.
82 Except for the PKP in the Philippines, which opted (with Moscow's approval) to lend its support to President Marcos's 'New Society' in 1974. Sheilah Ocampo, FEER, 24 August 1979, p. 34.
governments were reflected in early Soviet condemnation of ASEAN as an American-sponsored, anti-communist grouping like SEATO.  

Nevertheless, as a result of superpower detente, coupled with Soviet anxiety that better Sino-American relations and the end of the Vietnam War might open the way for closer Chinese links with non-communist Southeast Asia, Moscow's view of ASEAN and its members mellowed by the mid-1970s. At the same time, the ASEAN governments wished to expand their international links as they emerged from what had in effect been a regional extension of the Cold War. There was a general tendency in the ASEAN countries at this time to view the USSR as the major extra-regional power least able and least likely to exert influence in Southeast Asia. Certainly Moscow was widely seen as less of a threat than Beijing. The scene was thus set for a limited, but noticeable and general improvement in relations between the USSR and the ASEAN governments. Setbacks such as the extreme anti-communist policies of the Thanin regime in Bangkok in 1976-77, and the arrest of prominent Malay politicians on charges of spying for Moscow in 1976 were outweighed by factors such as Thailand's more balanced foreign policy after the ouster of Thanin in October 1977, increasingly close trading links with Indonesia and Singapore and the opening of diplomatic relations with Manila.

The intensifying conflicts between Vietnam, an ever closer associate of Moscow, and the China-Democratic Kampuchea axis, combined

83 See, for example, V. Pavlovsky, 'Problems of Regionalism in Asia', International Affairs (Moscow), No. 4/1969 (April), pp. 46, 50.
with fears of a new anti-Soviet alignment between Washington, Tokyo and Beijing, increased the importance of ASEAN and its members to Moscow in 1978-79. The key Soviet aims were to persuade the ASEAN states to cease their opposition to Vietnam's role in Cambodia and to side with Vietnam against China, or at least to adopt a more truly neutral position in this latter conflict. Moscow raised its diplomatic profile in the ASEAN countries, with Deputy Foreign Minister Firyubin visiting Manila, Bangkok and Jakarta in November 1978. But although Soviet commentaries lauded ASEAN, particularly on the grounds that it had proved that it would not be turned into military alliance, and commended what Moscow depicted as the ASEAN states' resistance to 'imperialist' (American) and 'hegemonist' (Chinese) pressures, it was soon clear that Moscow was unlikely to succeed in its attempt to gain ASEAN's diplomatic support for the USSR's allies in Hanoi and (after December 1978) Phnom Penh.

The main effect of Soviet policy in Southeast Asia on the ASEAN governments after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia was to heighten concern over the security implications of Indochinese developments. But although the ASEAN governments all agreed that the close alliance between Moscow and Hanoi which resulted from the new Indochina conflict was detrimental to regional security, there was little consensus on how best to minimize the threat posed by the USSR's new

86 For a typical Soviet commentary, see Vladimir Melnikov, 'ASEAN Dilemmas', New Times (Moscow), No. 35, 1981 (August) pp. 18-20.
87 See section on 'A Soviet Threat?' in Chapter 5, pp. 175-80 below.
interest and increasing military presence in the region. Singapore, Bangkok and, to a lesser extent, Manila argued that Vietnam's strategic relationship with the USSR and role in Cambodia were part of a Soviet policy of global expansionism, which could most effectively be countered by joining forces with China and the West to support the Cambodian resistance. On the other hand, while Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur recognized the dangers implicit in the Soviet Union's increasing influence in Hanoi, their enduring security concern with China made them uneasy about joining forces with Beijing to force Vietnam to relinquish its role in Cambodia and its alliance with Moscow. In essence, the Indonesian and Malaysian view was that a compromise solution to the Cambodian problem, recognizing Vietnamese security interests, would reduce Hanoi's dependence on Moscow and hence Soviet influence over Vietnam, while not weakening Indochina's role as a buffer against China. But although pressure from Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur kept alive ASEAN's search for a negotiated settlement of the Cambodian problem, in practice ASEAN policy on Cambodia continued to defer to Thailand's perceived security interests, involving close cooperation with Beijing and the Cambodian resistance in opposition to Hanoi.88

Conclusion

The interests of the three major extra-regional powers in relation to non-communist Southeast Asia underwent fundamental changes

88 For a fuller analysis of the ASEAN states' policies in relation to the Cambodian issue, see Chapter 10, pp. 433-91 below.
n the 1975-81 period, largely as a result of the polarization and ultimate conflict between Soviet- and Chinese-supported elements in Indochina. Broadly speaking, the ASEAN states were not disturbed by the new pattern of extra-regional forces in the aftermath of the 1975 communist victories in Indochina. A lessened US interest and military presence in the region was tolerable at a time of ever more relaxed relations between Washington and Beijing, and while superpower detente remained alive. In these circumstances, the ASEAN states felt able themselves to pursue closer relations with China and the Soviet Union. Suspicion over Chinese intentions remained, particularly in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, but the Soviet Union was not taken seriously as a security threat in the 1975-77 phase.

Although the eruption of the Sino-Vietnamese and Cambodian-Vietnamese disputes in 1977-78 caused the ASEAN states to welcome a resurgence in US interest in the region as a balance to the roles taken by Beijing and Moscow in the new Indochina conflict, non-communist Southeast Asia was able to maintain a rough balance in its relations with the Moscow-Hanoi and Beijing-Phnom Penh axes until the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978. But while this development caused ASEAN to align with China, continuing concern over Beijing's long-term intentions towards the region moderated, to a greater or lesser degree, the ASEAN states' determination to revise

9 For example, in a secret report to their heads of government in August 1977, ASEAN's foreign ministers commented that the commencement in June 1977 of negotiations between the United States and the USSR on limited naval deployments in the Indian Ocean 'adds a new element in the effort to keep a balance in Southeast Asia'. Michael Richardson, FEER, 30 December 1977, p. 8.
the Vietnamese-imposed status quo in Cambodia. Nevertheless, concern over increasing Soviet interest in the region, the benefits of revived strategic alignment with Washington, and the potential hazards involved in contradicting Chinese interests, amongst other factors, helped to consolidate ASEAN's opposition to the Vietnamese occupation.90

90 See Chapter 10, pp. 481-89 below.
CHAPTER 4

THE INFLUENCE OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS ON THE ASEAN STATES' SECURITY CONCERNS WITH INDOCHINA

As was true of most governments, the major underlying preoccupations of the upper echelons of the ASEAN states' leaderships during the 1975-81 period, as at other times, concerned domestic political, social and economic issues rather than foreign policy. But, as was often the case in the Third World, these domestic concerns exerted a profound influence on the ASEAN governments' foreign policies, including their perceptions of, and reactions to, developments in Indochina.

Problems of Regime Legitimacy

Since the end of the colonial period, the priority for the upper echelons of the ASEAN states' political leadership had been the promotion of their own security in power. This is not to suggest, necessarily, that they wished to tighten their hold on power for selfish ends, but rather that, like most Third World leaders, they faced severe difficulties in maintaining the continuity of authority necessary to govern their countries effectively. In order to secure and enhance their political legitimacy, non-communist Southeast Asian leaders had focused their attention on promoting economic development and on fostering national unity. Although the ASEAN states were superficially 'successful' in terms both of their economic well-being relative to the rest of the Third World, and the longevity of their
ruling regimes (suggesting a high degree of political stability), at
the time of the 1975 communist victories in Indochina it was clear
that the ASEAN governments (with the possible exception of Singapore)
still faced serious problems in resolving what one writer has termed
the three 'dilemmas of nation-building': between economic growth and
equity; between political stability and participation; and between
national integration and ethnic pluralism.1

Growth and Development Issues

The economies of all the ASEAN states grew rapidly during the
1970s. Although they did not match the phenomenal annual growth rates
of South Korea or Brazil (in the 9-11% range), their 6-9% average
annual growth rate in the 1970-78 period was substantially higher than
that achieved by either the developed industrial West or most other
Third World states.2 But this rapid growth in the ASEAN economies was
not always matched by a similar success in improving the welfare of
the mass of ordinary, impoverished people: in common with many other
Third World countries, the ASEAN governments (with the exception of
Singapore) found that 'all this expansion and modernization... apparently failed to eliminate many of the worst aspects of poverty...

1 Kusuma Snitwongse, 'Internal Problems of the ASEAN States: The
Dilemmas of Nation-Building' (Paper presented to the Conference
on International Security in the Southeast Asian and Southwest
Pacific Region, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian
National University, Canberra, 12-15 July 1982), ii.

2 Statistical Office, Department of International Economic and
Social Affairs, United Nations, Statistical Yearbook 1979/80 (New
or significantly to improve living standards among the bottom 20% or 40% of citizens.\textsuperscript{3} Table 1 illustrates the extent of income inequalities in the four largest ASEAN countries in the 1970s.

Government policies to promote economic growth through industrialization in the ASEAN countries often accentuated existing socioeconomic inequities by channelling scarce capital resources to the manufacturing sector and to imports of goods for urban consumers (thus starving the peasant sector of much-needed capital funds) and the concentration in urban centres of government spending on public infrastructure. Furthermore, the relatively high wages paid to the small minority employed in the urban industrial sector encouraged large-scale rural-urban migration. But because the industrial sector offered decidedly limited employment opportunities, this migration tended to result in the growth of urban unemployment, slums and shanty towns.\textsuperscript{4}

Migration to the cities also resulted from worsening conditions for large numbers of rural people. The huge problem of rural unemployment and underemployment, generated primarily by rapid population growth, was exacerbated by government policies encouraging drastic changes in agricultural modes of production without due regard to their social consequences. Thus the 'green revolution' (involving the use of high-yielding rice varieties together with chemical


TABLE 1
Percentage Share of Household Income,
by Percentile Groups of Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lowest 20%</th>
<th>Second quintile</th>
<th>Third quintile</th>
<th>Fourth quintile</th>
<th>Highest 20%</th>
<th>Highest 20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Figures for Singapore not available)

fertilizers and pesticides) helped to increase productivity, but by sharply raising the cash outlay required for efficient farming tended to benefit mainly better-off farmers, who were able to buy out small farmers and evict tenants.  

In very broad terms, by 1975 it appeared that the prevalent 'trickle down' approach to development in the ASEAN region was either failing or not working fast enough to ensure that economic expansion did not entail the growth of socioeconomic inequity, which one analyst characterized as 'probably the most critical economic problem' in the ASEAN region. Growing inequalities certainly fuelled widespread domestic political opposition to the four larger ASEAN governments in the mid- and late 1970s. That the governments concerned were aware of the problem was demonstrated by the declared objectives of various programmes which they implemented with the aim of reducing poverty. In Malaysia, the Third Malaysia Plan published


6 Puey Ungphakorn, former Governor of the Bank of Thailand, and Rector of Thammasat University at the time of the 6 October 1976 coup, claimed that "we have used this method for 20-30 years now without success". See his Thailand: Glancing Back, Looking Forward (Melbourne: Sixth of October Thais' United Front for Democracy, 1977), p. 24.


in 1976 proclaimed Kuala Lumpur's intention to take decisive action to "bring about a marked reduction in the incidence of poverty." A land reform programme was "presented and generally recognized as the most critical component of the New Society blueprint" following the declaration of martial law in the Philippines by President Marcos in 1972. Under the Indonesian New Order's second Five Year Plan, Jakarta's declared objective "shifted to some degree from pushing economic growth to improving distribution". After the fall of Thailand's military-dominated government in 1973, legislation to implement land reform was undertaken and an Agricultural Land Reform Office was set up in 1975. Leading Establishment figures in the ASEAN countries often declared their concern over the implications for political and social stability of unjust income distribution. But it was clear that this increased governmental concern with promoting social justice was insufficient to ameliorate significantly the phenomenon of widening disparities in income within the four larger ASEAN countries.

While these general observations on the failure of government policies to promote socioeconomic equity as well as growth were valid

10 Hainsworth, p. 22.
11 Ibid., p. 31.
12 Girling, p. 71.
13 See, for example, Jusuf Wanandi, "Political and Social Stability in Southeast Asia" (Outline of presentation given at conference on "Indochina and Problems of Security and Stability in Southeast Asia" Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 18-21 June 1980) and interview with Thai Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond, Asiaweek, 2 August 1980, p. 21.
14 Hainsworth, pp. 34-41.
in varying degrees when applied to the four largest and most populous ASEAN members, Singapore by no means suffered from such severe problems: economic growth there in the 1960s and 1970s was even more rapid than in the three larger ASEAN states, and this growth was more successfully translated into a higher standard of living for the population as a whole. The success of Singapore's development programme in comparison with its ASEAN partners was largely attributable to the relative ease with which a compact city-state with a relatively small, almost entirely urbanized, market-oriented, well-educated population of considerable ethnic homogeneity could be developed compared to the inherent problems of developing, for example, a huge archipelagic state such as Indonesia with an enormous, fast-growing, poorly educated, ethnically diverse, and essentially rural population of predominantly "pre-capitalist" outlook. Singapore further benefited from its geographical position (favouring entrepot activities) and the availability of much of the requisite economic infrastructure (port, communications, transport and banking facilities) for industrial development. But although these advantages, combined with fortuitous circumstances (especially the international economic boom of the 1960s and the economic benefits accruing to Singapore from the Vietnam War) were crucial ingredients in the city states' successful development, the Singaporean government's outward-looking and liberal economic strategies and

15 Singapore achieved 8.6% annual average GDP growth in the period 1970-71, compared to 6.3% - 7.8% in the other ASEAN states. United Nations, Statistical Yearbook 1979/80, pp. 681-85.
success in ensuring political stability were equally important factors.  

The Politics of National Unity

The ASEAN governments felt the problem of developing and maintaining national unity on two different levels. Firstly, there was the dilemma of "stability versus participation": the issue of which group or groups should wield political power, and how this power should be exercised. Secondly, there was the issue of how to resolve the conflicts caused by ethnic and cultural plurality, involving both indigenous and "alien" (especially ethnic Chinese) minorities.

Political Stability and Popular Participation

By 1975, the ASEAN states had experienced a diverse selection of political systems in the post-colonial period. But although popular participation in the political process had been by no means trivial in some cases, leaders in the region had often found Western-style democracy to be "inadequate in managing the conflicts that accompanied the modernizing process".  

For a succinct analysis of Singapore's economic progress, see Amina Tyabji, "The Economy", in Jon S T Quah, Chan Heng Chee and Seah Chee Meow (eds.), Government and Politics of Singapore (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 25-44.

Kusuma, p. 17.
In the confused situation following the allegedly communist-backed "attempted coup" of 1 October 1965, the Indonesian army led by General Suharto quickly assumed control. Whereas Sukarno had seen the creation of a cohesive national identity from what he defined as the dominant Indonesian political streams (nationalism, religion and communism) as a necessary prerequisite for effective development, Suharto adopted the motto of "development before politics" and worked towards the effective depoliticization of Indonesian society. After the Indonesian Communist Party had been effectively eradicated by physical violence and legislation in 1965-66 and the nationalist PNI and Muslim Parmusi demoralized by government interference in the selection of their leaders, the strongest opposition to the army's aim of establishing a corporate state based on the Golkar ("functional groups") came from Nahdatul Ulama (NU), a conservative, rural-based Islamic party. But despite Golkar's overwhelming victory (with 62.8% of the vote) in the 1971 elections, the regime further emasculated the political parties by forcing their merger into two larger organizations "under leadership largely amenable to the government's wishes". Moreover, the "floating mass" principle disqualified the rural population from political activity between

19 See ibid., pp. 245-72.
21 Crouch, p. 271.
elections. Nevertheless, popular opposition to the Suharto regime remained widespread in 1975, and the military-dominated Golkar did not appear to have the potential to act as a sufficient channel for popular aspirations and discontents to be expected in a modernizing society such as Indonesia.

Thailand was ruled, directly or indirectly, by the military almost continuously after the armed forces overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932. During 1944-47 and 1973-76 there were brief interludes of "democratic" civilian government, but the armed forces demonstrated that they remained the ultimate arbiters of the political process by concluding these interludes with military coups. In brief, Thai politics after 1932 became "a matter of competition between bureaucratic cliques for the benefits of government".\(^{22}\) within this "bureaucratic polity"\(^{23}\) the armed forces (principally the army) were preeminent, owing to their monopoly of armed power. The values of a strongly hierarchical social system, in which patron-client relations played a central role, helped to sustain the bureaucratic polity. Partnership between bureaucrats and business interests (both domestic and foreign), and the legitimizing support of the monarchy and the Buddhist clergy were integral to the system.\(^{24}\) The military leaders


\(^{23}\) This term was first used in relation to Thailand by Fred W Riggs in his Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966).

\(^{24}\) Girling, pp. 11-2, 78, 91.
... cemented their positions of power ... by convincing the people that representative government was a luxury to be granted only under certain ideal conditions. There must be no threat of war, little or no domestic instability, and an expanding, productive economy.25

The events of October 1973, when the regime led by Field Marshals Thanom and Praphat was overthrown by the combined weight of virtually all sections of urban society, with students in the vanguard, represented the culmination of the growing political awareness on the part of the new social forces which modernization had created.26 The ouster of the military regime did not, however, mean that the armed forces and bureaucracy were reduced to political insignificance. After October 1973, pressure for political, social and economic change continued throughout Thailand,27 but was resisted by the bureaucratic and military leadership who correctly saw the growth in importance of autonomous political parties and politicians as seriously threatening their own power and influence. This resistance by the forces of the Establishment culminated in the October 1976 coup which reimposed military rule.

The armed forces also played a vital role in Philippine politics, though in a less overt manner than in Indonesia or Thailand. During President Marcos's first term of office beginning in January 1966, the

26 Girling, pp. 12-13, 120.
Military's "civic action" role helped him to build a reputation as an effective and energetic leader. Although Marcos was re-elected, with an apparently large majority, after a bitter campaign in late 1969, the legitimacy of his unprecedented success in winning a second presidential term did not go unchallenged. Marcos's opponents on both Left and Right bypassed constitutional channels and challenged his authority by violent means, providing him with a pretext for the declaration of martial law in September 1972. While martial law had the immediate effect of stamping out the lawlessness which had become rife, the advent of the "New Society" also involved an attempt by Marcos to depoliticize Philippine society, with the military and police dismantling the free press, civil rights and political parties.

Although Marcos's "New Society" was not guided by any explicit ideology, an emphasis on "development" fulfilled an analogous role. As in Indonesia after 1966, Philippine "developmentalism" was based on the view of American-trained technocrats that it was necessary to further the integration of the country into the world market by encouraging increased flows of foreign investment and loans, and by the rapid expansion of primary exports. Land reform was a highly

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29 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
31 Ibid., p. 374.
important component of the Marcos regime's platform after the declaration of martial law, but by the late 1970s it was clear that the New Society had done little to improve the plight of the rural poor. In effect, the regime's hope was still that the benefits of rapid aggregate growth would "trickle down". But, as elsewhere in the ASEAN region, this hope was not fulfilled. Oligarchs (large and powerful landowners including the President, his wife and their relatives), technocrats and senior military officers made spectacular gains in wealth, but at the same time all the indications were that poverty amongst the population as a whole increased after 1972.\(^32\)

Moreover, the martial law regime effectively deprived the general population of constitutional outlets for their grievances.

While formally a multi-party democracy, Singapore functioned as virtually a one party state after its expulsion from Malaysia in 1965. With the leadership of what was (until Independence) the main opposition party either imprisoned or in exile, Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party (PAP) had little difficulty in capturing and holding all parliamentary seats in all general elections between 1965 and 1975. Although coercion (particularly through preventive detention) was used to suppress opposition, the effectiveness, efficiency and incorruptibility of Lee's regime made it extremely difficult for opponents to advance credible alternative political programmes.\(^33\)

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\(^33\) See Chan Heng Chee, "Political Parties" in Quah, Chan and Seah (eds.), pp. 146-72.
National Unity and Ethnic Pluralism

In Malaysia, the questions of which group should rule and the role of ethnic minorities were inseparable. Owing to the racial composition of the Malayan Federation, in which the indigenous Malays constituted a bare majority and Chinese and Indians large minorities, communal issues dominated the political scene to the extent that other lines of political cleavage such as class interest were subordinated. After independence in 1957, Malayan and later Malaysian politics were dominated by the Alliance of UMNO (United Malays' National Organization), the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress). Although communal interests precluded the formation of a politically significant non-communal party, they were not deep enough to prevent cooperation between these three rather conservative parties, which gained the greatest allegiance in their respective racial communities. The 1957 Constitution embodied an agreement between UMNO and the MCA involving privileges for the Malay community in terms of public service employment, education, land ownership, the constitutional role of the Malay rulers and the choice of Islam as the national religion. Non-Malays, on the other hand, benefited from the relaxation of citizenship regulations, which increased their voting strength. More importantly, it was implicitly allowed that the Chinese could retain their dominance in business free from the persecution which similar communities had suffered elsewhere in Southeast Asia.34

In 1963 the formation of Malaysia, involving the amalgamation of the Malayan Federation with the British territories of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak disrupted the modus vivendi which the 1957 Constitution had achieved. Although Singapore retained an important degree of autonomy under its own PAP government, its relationship with the Kuala Lumpur administration deteriorated rapidly. The conflict centred on the PAP's unsuccessful attempt in the 1964 elections to displace the MCA within the Alliance, and Lee Kuan Yew's subsequent campaign for a non-communal "Malaysian Malaysia". While the addition of Singapore's largely Chinese population to that of Malaya was balanced by the simultaneous absorption into Malaysia of the indigenous (but largely non-Malay) peoples of the Borneo territories, there was widespread concern in the Malay community that the Chinese would dominate a "Malaysian Malaysia" politically as well as economically. In the face of fears of large-scale racial violence, the Kuala Lumpur government effectively expelled Singapore from the federation, less than two years after its formation. But the separation of Singapore did not prevent violent racial clashes in May 1969 after the Democratic Action Party (as the Malaysian wing of the PAP had been re-named) and other non-Malay parties made significant electoral gains.

The May 1969 riots provoked a thorough overhaul of the entire Malaysian political system. A Sedition Act placed restrictions on the scope of political discussion, to prevent questioning of the 1957

Constitution, particularly in terms of the Malays' "special position". Under the New Economic Policy, firm action was taken to improve the economic position of the Malays. By the time political activity resumed in late 1970, the range of subjects open for discussion had been severely reduced. This opened the way for cooperation between the Alliance and some of the opposition groups, and the July 1974 general election was won by a six-party "National Front". The DAP remained outside the government, but by the mid-1970s parliamentary opposition became insignificant as the Front expanded to a ten-party coalition, winning Federal and State elections as a matter of course.36

Non-indigenous ethnic minorities were not so politically significant in the other ASEAN states as in Malaysia. In Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, the local ethnic Chinese communities traditionally fulfilled the roles of financiers, entrepreneurs and middlemen, thus gaining a disproportionately large economic role. But these communities were proportionally much smaller than their Malaysian counterpart, and in Thailand and the Philippines were well integrated into society by the 1970s. In Indonesia, however, the Chinese remained a distinct, as well as economically powerful, community. Resentment against Indonesia's Chinese population erupted as part of the backlash following the abortive coup of 1965, and in the 1970s the government tried without much success to transfer a

36 Milne and Mauzy, pp. 196-201. However, PAS (a conservative, but populist, Malay party emphasizing Islamic values) was expelled from the National Front in 1977, and subsequently became a focus for Malay opposition to UMNO and the Front.
greater proportion of the economy from Chinese to indigenous control. Paradoxically, Chinese economic interests were perpetuated particularly through symbiotic, and allegedly sometimes corrupt, business links with Indonesian military rulers from the President down. By the mid-1970s, this collaboration had become a principal cause of popular resentment against the Suharto regime.  

Virtually all of Singapore's population were immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. The majority of the population was ethnically Chinese, but there were minorities of Malays (about 15%) and Indians (7%). The role of the majority Chinese community was not a controversial political issue, but the Singaporean government sought to integrate the Malay minority into the wider community. However, by every socioeconomic indicator the Malays lagged behind the Chinese (and Indian) communities: for example, even in 1979 only 2.3% of Singaporeans educated to tertiary level were Malays.

As a result of a combination of ethnographic patterns and colonial policy, all the ASEAN states except Singapore included within their boundaries territorially-based ethnic minorities. Some of these minorities were unwilling to submit to political domination by distant and culturally alien capitals. Economic disparities between centre

37 For example, although the 15 January 1974 riots in Jakarta were precipitated by the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka, their underlying cause was the collusion of foreign (especially Japanese) business interests with "Chinese entrepreneurs... who in turn act as powerbrokers and fronts (tjukong) for the business interests of the Indonesian military". Justus M van der Kroef, Communism in Southeast Asia (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 101. See also Peter Sim, Asia Research Bulletin, 31 January 1974, pp. 2351-56.

38 Economist, 29 December 1979.
and periphery, often compounded by growth, tended to accentuate such separatist tendencies. In Indonesia, armed separatist struggles in northern Sumatra, Irian Jaya and (after December 1975) East Timor evinced continuing provincial resistance to Jakarta's rule. 39

In Thailand, inter-cultural hostility and the economic deprivation of the periphery contributed to rebellion in three regions. In the north, hill tribes (particularly the Hmong) resented the intrusion of land-hungry lowland Thais and provided the original bases for the Communist Party of Thailand's insurgency in the region. In the northeast, communist-led rebellion was rooted more in regional particularism (arising from poor economic and social conditions, and pride in local culture and language) than in ideology. The widest cultural divergence in Thailand was in the far south, where Muslim Malays formed the majority. But the armed separatist groups which challenged Bangkok's authority in this region were characterized by disunity and general lack of political credibility. 40

In the southern Philippines President Marcos's declaration of martial law in September 1972 effectively "precluded any hope for


struggle through peaceful means by the local Muslim population against development strategies which involved the loss of traditional lands. The imposition of martial law precipitated an open rebellion led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Despite division within the leadership, the MNLF was a far more united and effective force (numbering about 50,000 armed guerillas in 1973) than the Thai Muslim groups.

Nowhere in Southeast Asia was the artificiality of post-colonial state forms better illustrated than in Malaysia, where the Sabah and Sarawak state governments were allowed to retain considerably more autonomy than their peninsular counterparts. Although peninsular political parties had parallel organizations in the Borneo states, essentially non-communal parties favouring a greater degree of state autonomy secured a leading role in government, sometimes including a place in the federal National Front coalition. Ethnic differences and Borneo's great resource wealth helped to maintain separatist sentiment in Sabah and Sarawak.

The Impact of Uncertain Legitimacy on Perceptions of and Reactions to Developments in Indochina

The evidence suggests that, notwithstanding impressive rates of economic growth, the ASEAN governments had been by no means uniformly


successful in resolving the dilemmas of nation-building by the time of the Indochinese communists' victories in 1975. For this reason, the legitimacy of some of the ASEAN regimes was facing increasingly serious challenges. But rather than implement the political, social and economic reforms necessary to undercut such challenges, the ASEAN governments commonly responded by treating these challenges as threats to the 'security' or 'stability' of the state.\textsuperscript{43} This confusion of national security with regime security, and particularly the absence of any sincerely-held notion of "loyal opposition", contributed to growing polarization of political conflict, as ruling groups suppressed or co-opted opposition elements which had once provided a channel for the expression of alternative viewpoints on political, social and economic issues. In Malaysia, the ruling coalition frequently absorbed opposition parties. In Indonesia the Suharto regime forced the six main opposition parties to combine into two larger and more easily controllable groupings. Thai politics, even in the 1973-76 period, offered few opportunities for ideologically-based political groups: parliament became dominated by competing business interest groups. The legislature in the Philippines was reduced a mere "rubber-stamping" assembly. In all five ASEAN states, rigorous internal security and "anti-subversion" legislation further restricted political opposition. This suppression of opposition in the 1970s

\textsuperscript{43} In Malaysia, for example, the government held thousands of political prisoners in the mid-1970s claiming that they were all communists or communist sympathizers. But the fact that the detainees included prominent members of the opposition Democratic Action Party suggested that the ruling coalition was defining "subversion" so as to reinforce its own position. \textit{Amnesty Annual Report 1979} (London: Amnesty International, 1979), pp. 174-76.
further undermined governmental legitimacy and so helped to create a "vicious circle of instability".\textsuperscript{44}

The most extreme manifestation of the uncertain legitimacy of some of the ASEAN governments, which showed themselves unwilling or unable to make the reforms necessary to break this cycle, was the continuing resort to armed rebellion by many of those in underprivileged regions or classes throughout the region. As well as the phenomenon of insurgency by territorially-based ethnic separatist movements, communist-led revolutionary struggle remained an important security concern for the ASEAN governments.

While the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), previously the most widely-supported and dynamic political force in Indonesia, was devastated by the army-inspired purges and massacres which followed the attempted coup of October 1965, and subsequently lost virtually all significance as an active political organization,\textsuperscript{45} elsewhere in the ASEAN region communists continued to challenge governmental authority.

Although the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) was effectively defeated in both military and political terms by the British colonial and Malayan authorities during the "Emergency" which ended in 1960, from the early 1970s there was a revival in the Party's military operations. The splintering of the CPM into three factions in 1974 in some ways strengthened its overall impact as the CPM (Marxist-Leninist) and CPM (Revolutionary Faction) elements moved towards

\textsuperscript{44} Kusuma, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{45} van der Kroef, Communism in Southeast Asia, pp. 191-92; Crouch, pp. 62-68, 226.
broader multi-racial recruitment and innovatory tactics, including urban guerilla warfare. In Singapore, however, the continuing success of the PAP's economic and social programmes undercut support for revolutionary ideology (which in the 1950s had been widespread in the island). By the 1970s CPM activity in Singapore had been reduced to an insignificant level. But on the Borneo border between Malaysia and Indonesia, the North Kalimantan Communist Party also re-emerged as a fighting force in the early 1970s.

From the late 1960s, surviving members of the old Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which had led the Huk rebellion against the Manila government in the early 1950s, were attracted to a new, Maoist CPP and its military wing, the New People's Army (NPA). NPA guerilla activity was curtailed by the stricter measures available to the government, and its political appeal undercut by the implementation of land reforms, following the imposition of martial law in 1972. But in the late 1970s the Philippine revolutionaries demonstrated a marked resurgence as the New Society's reform programme


47 Sim, "Malaysia: Containing the Communist Insurgency", pp. 16-7; Clementson, pp. 53-4.

48 Huk was an abbreviation for Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (People's Liberation Army), as the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Army against Japan) or Hukbalahap had been restyled in November 1948.
faltered, and as the Marcos regime became ever more firmly entrenched and unassailable by constitutional means.\(^{49}\)

Drawing its support particularly from regional and ethnic antagonisms, by 1970 the Communist Party of Thailand was politically and militarily active in three peripheral regions: in the northeast amongst the culturally distinct and Lao-speaking Isan people; in the north amongst disaffected hill tribes, particularly the Hmong; and in the south, in cooperation with the CPM and sometimes with Islamic separatists. As in the Philippines, erosion of the political middle ground boosted the communists' strength: the CPT's membership base was significantly widened by the accretion of students and other radicals fleeing Bangkok after the October 1976 coup.\(^{50}\)

Although the Malayan and Thai Parties began as off-shoots of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with their main support among ethnic Chinese, and the Indonesian and Philippine Parties were also closely associated with the CCP in their early years, the material support given by Beijing to these organizations was never very great. To be sure, the CCP provided broad political support for communist insurgencies in what became "the ASEAN region", including facilities for propaganda broadcasting. But China donated very little military equipment to the guerillas, except to CPT-led hill tribes in northern


Thailand in the early 1970s. Until their victory in 1975, and even afterwards, the Vietnamese communists had even fewer resources to spare for supporting revolutionary change outside Indochina. In general, communists in the ASEAN states had to find their own arms and, while it was sometimes convenient for the ASEAN governments to claim that the communist insurgencies in their countries were sponsored by external communist powers (particularly the People's Republic of China and Vietnam), there is ample evidence that these rebellions were rooted almost entirely in domestic, indeed local, political and socioeconomic issues rather than in any externally-inspired conspiracy to impose communism in the region.

The impact of the evidently fragile legitimacy of the ASEAN governments on their perceptions of, and reactions to, Indochinese developments in the 1975-81 period was essentially five-fold.

Firstly, the ASEAN states' chronic domestic problems, of which communist insurgency, armed ethnic separatism and racially-inspired riots (as experienced by Malaysia in 1969) were extreme symptoms, heightened the ASEAN governments' sense of vulnerability in relation to the emergence of a new political, economic and social order in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Seen in this perspective, the communist successes in Indochina implicitly posed a profound challenge to the ASEAN governments. Whereas the ASEAN regimes had demonstrated considerable ability in fostering the creation of wealth, they had


52 See Chapter 6, pp. 192-94 below.
often failed to distribute this wealth sufficiently equitably to guarantee the loyalty of all classes and regions. Although the Indochinese communists' main achievements by 1975 lay in making war rather than wealth, there was considerable unease in the ASEAN governments that the Vietnamese communists, in particular, might demonstrate the same prowess in economic reconstruction as they had in their multifaceted war against South Vietnam and its American ally.53 The proven ability of the Vietnamese communists to plan and implement long-term strategies contrasted with the lack of direction which was often apparent in some of the ASEAN governments' development policies, particularly in the case of Thailand. Moreover, the communists' ideology emphasized the distribution of wealth -- the ASEAN governments' weakest point.54

Some influential policy-makers in the ASEAN countries stressed that the United States could play an important role in maintaining regional peace by assisting Vietnam's post-war reconstruction.55 But

53 See, for example, Ali Moertopo, "Future Indonesian-U.S. Relations: A View from Jakarta", Pacific Community, Vol. 7, No. 4 (July 1976), p. 582. According to Moertopo, Indochina and the ASEAN states were in "direct economic competition".

54 Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs Ghazali Shafie appeared to recognize the implicit socio-economic challenge posed to the ASEAN governments' legitimacy by communist Indochina when he said: "All societies be they Communist or non-Communist have to justify their validity and their relevance to the people they serve... Continuing validity and relevance to the society it serves is the perpetual goal that the Malaysian political process orients itself towards". "On the domino theory" (radio broadcast, 6 May 1975), Foreign Affairs Malaysia, Vol. 8, No. 2 (June 1979), p. 9.

55 See, for example, statement by Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik, Antara (the official Indonesian News Agency) in English, 1010 gmt, 25 April 1975 (SWB FE/4889/A3/8, 28 April 1978).
more generally, the ASEAN states' leaders were concerned that large-scale American and Japanese aid should not be given to communist Indochina, as this might both divert assistance from the ASEAN countries and help their ideological rivals to triumph in what was widely viewed in the ASEAN states as a confrontation between two developmental models.56

While the ASEAN leaders' stress on the need for "national resilience"57 evinced their concern with the implicit socioeconomic challenge posed by the communist victories in Indochina, they did not publicly stress this aspect of the "threat" to the same degree as, for example, the danger posed by the Indochinese communists' alleged links with communist insurgents in the ASEAN countries. There are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, the socioeconomic challenge of communist Indochina was considerably less tangible and quantifiable compared to the types of "threat" from Indochina which the ASEAN governments did choose to emphasize. Secondly, to place, publicly, great emphasis on the socioeconomic vulnerability of the ASEAN states would have been tantamount to an acknowledgement by the ASEAN governments of their own failure, thus further undermining their legitimacy and boosting opposition groups.

As it happened, concern that communist Indochina (and Vietnam in particular) would become a model for the development of the ASEAN region appeared extraordinarily ill-founded by the end of the 1970s.

56 This was particularly evident in Indonesian thinking. See David Jenkins, FEER, 24 June 1977, pp. 15-16.
57 See section on "Responses to the Political and Socioeconomic challenge of Indochina, 1975-77" in Chapter 9, pp. 362-77 below.
Indeed, by 1981 the size of Singapore's economy was roughly the same as that of Vietnam, which had a population twenty times as large. The aggregate Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the ASEAN countries (whose total population was about 270 million) was fourteen or fifteen times that of Vietnam (with a population of 60 million). Thailand's GDP was nearly three times that of all Indochina. But Vietnam's post-war reconstruction had been severely hampered by the cessation of Chinese aid and the failure of expected US and Japanese assistance to materialize. Bad weather adversely affected food production and the Vietnamese communists' peacetime planning and management proved unexpectedly deficient. However, these setbacks were essentially unpredictable in 1975, when the ASEAN governments made clear their recognition that the Indochinese communist victories presented the populations of the remainder of non-communist Southeast Asia with the spectacle of the overthrow of political, economic and social institutions that frequently had equivalents in their own countries. The ouster of anti-communist, free enterprise systems, together with the monarchy in Laos and Cambodia's Buddhist religion demonstrated vividly that the established order was not necessarily immutable.

The second way in which the ASEAN governments' domestic insecurity affected their attitudes and policies in response to Indochinese events was closely related to the socioeconomic challenge implicit in the communist victories. In order to maintain their


59 The reactions of the ASEAN governments to the socioeconomic threats they perceived in 1975 are discussed in Chapter 9, pp. 362-414 below.
legitimacy in the face of the perceived challenge of communist Indochina's alternative developmental model, the ASEAN governments saw continuing economic growth as vital. There was a pervasive belief in the ASEAN capitals that the benefits of growth would "trickle down" to relatively deprived classes, regions and ethnic groups, ameliorating the social and economic contradictions which might increase the appeal of the "Indochinese model" to marginalized elements in the ASEAN countries. For continued economic growth, it was highly important to maintain the confidence of both foreign and local investors: this required the ASEAN governments not to overemphasize the security implications of the communist takeovers in Indochina, while simultaneously showing that they were taking prudent measures to deter any military threat which might arise from the new situation. But military expenditure was limited by the requirement that it should not become a drain on national resources to the extent that other, developmental programmes were jeopardized.

Thirdly, the domestic vulnerabilities of the ASEAN governments suggested that they might find some political utility in manipulating foreign policy issues for domestic political benefit. It is widely recognized that such manipulation of foreign policy issues plays a major role in many Third World states as a governmental strategy for aggregating power in the face of domestic challenges. A government may attempt to improve its domestic standing by portraying itself as the nation's defender against real, or exaggerated, external threats: the spectre of such threats can be used to distract the population.

from domestic problems, to justify tightened political control and to rally disaffected elements which might otherwise be working against the government. The regime may also attempt to undermine the credibility of domestic opponents by portraying them as agents of the external enemy.61

The relative absence of political pluralism in the ASEAN states implied not only that their authoritarian governments needed to use legitimizing mechanisms other than (or as well as) the electoral process, but also that foreign policy would be formulated by narrowly-based elite groups. Although there were certainly differences in attitude towards foreign policy issues between various elements in the ASEAN governments' bureaucracies, foreign policy-making was influenced to a far lesser degree by the "political, economic, cultural and professional pressure groups with an articulated interest and stake in foreign policy and with a somewhat well-defined power based in society"62 which played such an important role in Western democracies. This relative lack of domestic constraints tended to give the top level of the ASEAN states' political hierarchies great latitude in foreign policy-making. In Indonesia and Thailand (and to a lesser extent the Philippines) this meant that military perspectives were likely to play a crucial role -- more pluralistic foreign policy-making processes might have assigned greater importance to economic, diplomatic and cultural factors and less weight to military and ideological issues in assessing the security implications of

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61 Ibid., pp. 221-36.
Indochinese developments and in responding to these assessments.  

Fifthly, issues relating to the ethnic Chinese communities in their countries were an important influence on various ASEAN governments' often divergent attitudes in relation to the Sino-Vietnamese conflict from 1978, and hence their policies towards the Cambodian conflict. In particular, the need for the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to demonstrate to their pribumi and bumiputra\textsuperscript{64} domestic constituencies that they were intent on resisting any expansion of Chinese political influence into Southeast Asia, tended to moderate their opposition to Vietnam's policies in Cambodia.

These five aspects of the influence which domestic political, social and economic problems exerted on the ASEAN governments' handling of their security concerns with Indochina were not necessarily always compatible. For example, a government's wish to reassure foreign investors that developments in Indochina posed no serious security threat would contradict the same administration's attempts to use "the Vietnamese threat" as a justification for tightened domestic political control.\textsuperscript{65} Nevertheless, at various times, the behaviour of the ASEAN governments in relation to Indochina evinced the operation of each of the five factors.


\textsuperscript{64} The indigenous inhabitants of Indonesia and Malaysia, respectively.

\textsuperscript{65} On occasion, however, different elements (for instance, the Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministries) within one government might use these apparently contradictory arguments simultaneously.
PART TWO

THE NATURE OF THE ASEAN STATES' SECURITY CONCERNS WITH INDOCHINA
CHAPTER 5

THE ASEAN STATES' PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGIC AND DIRECT MILITARY THREATS FROM INDOCHINA, 1975-81

Largely because it provided a justification for the American and allied involvement on the anti-communist side in the Second Indochina War, the idea that the collapse of the Thieu and Lon Nol regimes (in South Vietnam and Cambodia respectively) in 1975 would inevitably threaten the security of the ASEAN states had considerable appeal for many Western observers. The appeal of the "domino theory" extended to the US leadership, with President Ford reiterating its validity soon before the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon. To be sure, the non-communist Indochinese regimes collapsed more or less simultaneously. But special factors linked the fates of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and the simplistic domino theory was by no means equally applicable to the rest of Southeast Asia.

In the Cold War atmosphere of 1954 -- when Eisenhower first enunciated the domino theory -- the "Free World" was perceived by Western policy-makers to be challenged by a monolithic, expansionist communist threat. By 1975, though, the communist monolith was known to have disintegrated a decade and a half earlier, and the two competing communist great powers (the Soviet Union and China) both wished for detente with Washington.


In these circumstances, it seemed unlikely that either Moscow or Peking would back any overt challenge to the ASEAN region -- an area that was clearly an American sphere of interest (through its economic, political and military links with the West), despite Washington's inclination to disengage itself militarily from the region since the Paris peace agreement. It appeared equally unlikely that Vietnam -- the only Indochinese state with human and military resources sufficient to represent a direct threat to the ASEAN countries -- could make any aggressive moves without considerable support from either of the two communist giants. A further indicator against the likelihood of Vietnam directing its resources towards territorial expansion was the emphasis that Hanoi might reasonably be expected to place on post-war economic and social reconstruction. Furthermore, any invasion of the ASEAN region by Vietnam would necessarily be on land, by way of Cambodia and/or Laos. Bearing in mind the already evident friction between Phnom Penh and Hanoi, it seemed unlikely that the former would allow the latter's forces to traverse its territory in circumstances short of war between the two (which did not seem likely in 1975). Neither could the security of Vietnamese supply lines be guaranteed through Laos, which was not completely under communist control until the end of 1975.

Threat Assessments in 1975

Because the ASEAN governments published very few definitive statements regarding their threat perceptions, there are profound difficulties in attempting to analyse how they assessed the relevance to their countries' security of the strategic intentions and
capabilities of the Indochinese states after 1975. Nevertheless, statements by government politicians in the ASEAN states, though usually limited in scope, appeared to indicate an appreciation that the "domino theory" was unlikely to apply to what remained of non-communist Southeast Asia, at least in the short to medium term. Moreover, the ASEAN governments realized that there was a need to assuage the concerns of both the populace and foreign investors with regard to the new regional circumstances. Prophecies of doom could be self-fulfilling by encouraging a belief in the inevitability of a communist takeover in the general population and by causing the flight of foreign capital or a slowing of new capital inflow, with possibly disastrous effects on national development.

Although the ASEAN governments had good reasons to be confident that communist successes in Indochina would not foreshadow their own demise, there was nevertheless unease in the ASEAN capitals as it became clear that the communists would win. Even if, objectively, the threat to ASEAN's members was minimal in the short to medium term, the consolidation of Vietnam as a united communist state with the largest armed forces in the region (strengthened with the capture from

3 For example, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew noted the implications of the embryonic Vietnamese-Cambodian dispute at an early stage. Interview with Lee, quote by Singapore home service in English, 1330 gmt, 3 May 1975 (SWB FE/4896/A3/8, 6 May 1975).

4 Thus Jusuf Wanandi of the influential Indonesian "think-tank" CSIS (Centre for Strategic and International Studies) asserted: "An image that Thailand and other ASEAN countries are in a panic has to be prevented from developing, both for security and economic reasons. Capital flight or a slowdown in new capital inflows may severely hamper national development..." Jusuf Wanandi, Security Dimensions of the Asia-Pacific Region in the 1980s (Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1979), p. 63.
Saigon's forces of large quantities of modern US-supplied equipment constituted a dramatic shift in the regional balance of power.

Thai Perceptions

Thailand, the only ASEAN state sharing land borders with Indochina had more reasons to fear the advent of communist regimes there than the Association's other members. For hundreds of years the Thais had been sensitive to a threat from Vietnam. During the Second Indochina War, Bangkok had backed American policies in Vietnam with the intention of keeping this traditional rival divided, while simultaneously attempting to maintain Thai influence in a partitioned Laos and to cultivate friendly relations with Lon Nol's Cambodia. In 1975 this strategy had collapsed and Thailand faced a united Vietnam which not only viewed Bangkok askance for its enthusiastic support of America's role in Indochina, but which also possibly intended to dominate Thailand's traditional buffer zone in Laos and Cambodia.  

The rapidity of the communists' successes in early 1975 did prompt a degree of panic in Bangkok, with one newspaper claiming that "the discredited domino theory... already appears to be working". A specific Thai fear was that the Vietnamese and Laotian communists had

5 Nevertheless, Bangkok continued to compete with Hanoi for influence in Laos and Cambodia, although on less favourable terms than hitherto. Soon after the communist takeovers, Chatchai Choonhavan (the Thai Foreign Minister) declared that Thailand would like Laos and Cambodia to remain strong and neutral, and to continue their "buffer" role to "prevent aggression against Thailand". Straits Times, 31 July 1975.

6 "Can we be the next domino to fall?" (Editorial), Bangkok Post, 1 March 1975.
ambitions to detach some or all of northeast Thailand. According to what was alleged to be a document summarizing a briefing given to senior North Vietnamese army officers in January 1975, Hanoi aimed to create a liberated area 50-100 km deep along the Mekong River, particularly in the vicinity of Vientiane, which can become a protectorate of both the unified Vietnamese nation and Laos. 7

The main aim of "liberating" the west bank of the Mekong would ostensibly be to ensure complete control over all the major dams on the river, for hydro-electric power and irrigation purposes. The use of direct military force to establish the Vietnamese-Laotian "protectorate" was explicitly prescribed in the document, but it was predicted that the "maximum objectives" could not be achieved "before the 1976/77 offensive". 8 But although the document may have been genuine, 9 it may have been part of a feasibility study rather than a reflection of firm Vietnamese policy. As it happened, no such move was made against northeast Thailand in the 1975-81 period, but elements within the Thai government and security forces were frequently to reiterate their fears regarding Hanoi's and Vientiane's policies towards the area -- more usually with the emphasis on their links with the Communist Party of Thailand.

The alarmism of early 1975 and subsequently was partly inspired by the Thai political right-wing as part of its struggle to assert

8 Ibid.
9 It could have been a fabrication of Thai military intelligence.
itself over the more liberal forces that had entered the Thai political arena since the overthrow of the military regime in October 1973. In contrast, the democratically-elected governments in 1975-76 recognized the importance of ensuring that a mood of defeatism did not prevail and that the flight of foreign capital was not encouraged. So the official declaratory response from Bangkok attempted to dispel fears that Indochina might become a launching pad for direct aggression against Thailand. In the words of the Bangkok Post, soon after the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon:

For fifteen years, the military government played "the boy who cried wolf" with our populace, crying "Communist" when they wanted foreign and or further power. Today we no longer have to cry wolf: the wolf is at our door!  

By the end of April 1975 -- a matter of days after the fall of Phnom Penh -- acting Supreme Commander Krit Sivara, who had earlier been reassuring to the extent only of saying that the fighting in Vietnam and Cambodia had "not yet reached Thailand", denied reports that communist forces were poised to invade. Foreign Minister Chatchai Choonhavan emphasized that he foresaw no problems in

10 "The wolf is at the door" (Editorial), Bangkok Post, 12 May 1975. Ironically, the Bangkok Post had itself played an important role in supporting the government's cries of "Communist", and continued to publish alarmist articles concerning the "Vietnamese threat" after the 1975 communist victories. See, for example, "Could it happen here?", Bangkok Post, 14 December 1975, which claimed that "an invasion across the Mekong could come at any time".


12 Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 26 April 1975 (SWB/FE/4891/A3/12, 30 April 1975).
relations with Cambodia as long as that country preserved its "neutrality". A month later, after the fall of both Phnom Penh and Saigon, the *Bangkok Post* had also moderated its earlier position, admitting that "doom doesn't seem to be so close after all". Even though exchanges of fire occurred between Thai forces and their Khmer Rouge and Pathet Lao counterparts as the communists consolidated their control of Cambodia and Laos, these incidents were played down by Bangkok, with acting Prime Minister Pramarn Adireksan asserting in July 1975 that he did "... not believe that there will be any violent incidents originating from the neighbouring countries". Nevertheless, Bangkok attempted to ensure that any large-scale incursion from across its borders would be repulsed: although the border itself was defended only by Border Patrol Police units, these were backed by considerable numbers of more heavily-armed army troops just behind the border.

The Other ASEAN States' Perceptions

The other ASEAN governments, more physically distant from Indochina and without Bangkok's record of anti-communist intervention there, had less reason than their Thai counterpart to fear any immediate, direct security threat from the new communist regimes. A direct Vietnamese attack on any of the other ASEAN countries was


14 "No room for Cassandras" (Editorial), *Bangkok Post*, 31 May 1975.
even less likely than an onslaught against Thailand, and would have presented Hanoi's military planners with severe logistical problems.

In 1975, the Malaysian leadership was particularly dismissive of any direct security threat from Indochina. Tun Razak, the Prime Minister, was adamant that he did not subscribe to the "domino theory" in any form. The Minister of Home Affairs (who had responsibility for internal security), Ghazali Shafie, dismissed the domino concept as being of "little relevance" but stressed the danger that "in a climate of despondency the domino theory could well become ... a self-fulfilling prophecy", especially if linked with the recent upsurge in communist guerilla activity in Malaysia. The Deputy Finance Minister made a similar point, with special emphasis on the need not to frighten away American investors. Perhaps the most important reason for Kuala Lumpur's apparently optimistic outlook was its

15 For example, on 24 April there was an exchange of fire between Thai and Khmer Rouge forces, which ended with a Thai withdrawal -- "to prevent provocations", according to Bangkok. General Krit claimed that he thought only junior Khmer Rouge officers had been in control on the Cambodian side and that, anyway, the Khmer Rouge "... may only be firing to celebrate ... victory". Bangkok home service, 0001 gmt, 25 April 1975 (SWB FE/4888/A3/6, 26 April 1975).

16 Bangkok Post, 14 July 1975.
17 Straits Times, 25 April 1975.
18 Interview with Tun Razak, Age, 26 June 1975.
20 Speech by Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan, Deputy Minister of Finance, in New York, 8 September 1975, Foreign Affairs Malaysia, Vol. 8, No. 3 (September 1975?), pp. 36-37.
commitment under Tun Razak to political rapprochement across the region's ideological divide, as embodied in the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) proposal. Whether or not it genuinely believed that a "policy of neutrality" would neutralize any threat from Indochina, the government's credibility in foreign policy terms was staked on an effort to promote conciliation rather than confrontation with communist Indochina.

The common view within the Indonesian military and political elite that nationalism rather than communism was the Vietnamese leadership's dominant value, coupled with Jakarta's attempt to maintain an "independent and active" foreign policy predisposed the Indonesian government to de-emphasize the significance of developments in Indochina as a security concern in 1975. According to Ali Alatas, "... many of us were startled by the speed and the manner in which North Vietnam's military victory came about". But Jakarta's declaratory position at the time was summed up by Adam Malik, the Foreign Minister, when he described the domino theory as an "outdated" idea used "to frighten the people of Southeast Asia and keep them dependent on the USA".

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21 According to Ghazali, this was what Malaysia was pursuing. Straits Times, 15 April 1975.

22 Alatas was Secretary, Directorate-General of Political Affairs in the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1972-73) and Ambassador to the United Nations (1975-78).

23 Summary record of proceedings, Seminar on Aspects of the Australian-Indonesian Relationship (Canberra, 16-20 October 1979), p. 98.

Alatas later claimed that in 1975 there were "some alarmist views ... that Vietnam would now be in a position to move swiftly in establishing its long-cherished aim of an Indochinese federation under its leadership". But Malik claimed that the Vietnamese communists' ideology would prevent them from becoming "imperialist forces". Certainly, there was confidence in Jakarta that Hanoi had no territorial ambitions beyond the bounds of what was once French Indochina.

The Singaporean and Philippine leaders were similarly disposed to discount fears regarding any direct security threat from Indochina. Lee Kuan Yew asserted that it would be "a long time before the communist advances in Southeast Asia had any effect on Singapore": in his view the domino theory was "old hash". President Marcos claimed that the fall of Cambodia and South Vietnam would not pose an immediate external threat to his country or other regional states: this was particularly so in the case of the Philippines, which was separated from the Southeast Asian mainland by the South China Sea.

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25 Seminar on Aspects of the Australian-Indonesian Relationship, loc. cit.
28 Straits Times, 3 April 1975.
Threat Assessments, 1975-78

In general, the ASEAN governments were restrained and moderate in their assessments of Southeast Asia's new security environment as the communist Indochinese governments consolidated their rule in 1975-78. This attitude complemented diplomatic policies of coming to terms with the reality of the communist ascendancy in Indochina and the United States' lessened interest in the region, by attempting to improve relations with not only the Indochinese states, but also Moscow and Beijing. A commonly held view within the region in 1976-77 was that a direct threat from Indochina was unlikely, particularly as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia appeared to be directing their main energies towards post-war economic and social reconstruction. According to a leading Indonesian commentator:

By 1977 it seemed almost clear to many that Hanoi was opting for reconstruction and development, as indicated by the leaders' move towards normalization with the West, in particular with the U.S.31

But there was concern, even in Jakarta, regarding a longer-term strategic challenge from Vietnam if Hanoi successfully overcame its domestic problems. In the view of one Indonesian general:

We are now witnessing an industrial race between Vietnam and the countries of ASEAN. If the race enters the belligerent diplomacy phase, the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea would increase even further in

30 See Chapter 3, pp. 74-96 above, and section on "Responses to the Political and Socioeconomic Challenge of Indochina, 1975-77" in Chapter 9, pp. 377-414 below.

31 Wanandi, p. 57.
strategic importance. If these were to fall in their [Vietnam's] control ... Indonesia would face a direct threat. 32

As Hanoi moved towards better relations with the West (and particularly the United States), Jusuf Wanandi thought it "understandable" that the ASEAN countries should "express concern over the prospect of Vietnam being granted massive amounts of aid". 33

There was much greater sensitivity in Bangkok than the other ASEAN capitals to the possibility of direct security threats from Indochina, even after the initial panic which had followed the Indochinese communists' victories in 1975 had died down. But although armed clashes occurred between Thailand and its Indochinese neighbours more or less continually after the communist takeovers in Cambodia and Laos these incidents were essentially the result of ill-defined borders, lack of communication between locally opposed forces, and complications caused by insurgent groups operating in both directions across the borders (that is, Thai communists from bases in Laos and Cambodia, and right-wing Laotian and Cambodian exiles from Thai sanctuaries). Nevertheless, the Thai military and political right-wing exaggerated these local problems, in order to undermine both the progress of democratization in Thailand and the Kukrit and

32 Lieutenant-General Widodo, quoted by Antara, 3 March 1977.

Seni governments' attempts to improve relations with Indochina. Typical of this exaggeration was a press report in December 1975 claiming that there were no signs that the Vietnamese were engaging in significant post-war reconstruction, that they wished to "punish" Thailand for its role in the Vietnam War, that the Soviet Union (Vietnam's ally) coveted Thailand's American-built air bases, and that a Vietnamese invasion "could come cross the Mekong at any time" (but most likely between April and June when the river could most easily be forded). The immediate pretext for such an invasion might be the "rescue" of the 50,000 "strategically-located" Vietnamese refugees in northeast Thailand. The article noted Thailand's military weakness and stressed the need for not only stronger armed forces but also for "national unity".

Objectively, the direct threat to Thailand remained minimal. Although Hanoi's army was, numerically, the fifth largest in the world and began to augment its strength with conscripts from South Vietnam in 1976, the main purpose of maintaining such a large force was probably partly related to the need for a massive reservoir of skilled technicians and disciplined labour in the early phase of post-war rehabilitation. To be sure, the Vietnamese forces captured huge amounts of American equipment in 1975, but much of this was unserviceable, or immobilized for lack of fuel, spare parts or training facilities. But even if Hanoi had possessed the military capability for an invasion of northeast Thailand, it would almost

34 "Could it happen here?", Bangkok Post, 14 December 1975.
certainly have lacked the political will. As one observer remarked at a later stage:

One ill-considered act of naked aggression could ... jeopardise the recovery of the spastic economy, alienate impoverished millions suffering from battle-fatigue and fray the confidence of the capitalist investor, the patience of Hanoi's communist friends and the tentative goodwill of the world.\footnote{Dennis Bloodworth, "Hanoi too hard-hit to fight", \textit{Bulletin}, 5 March 1977, pp. 46-47.}

The controversial and possibly dangerous nature of the Thai right-wing's claims was balanced not only by the government's generally calm approach, but also by some journalists' more critical attitude. According to one Bangkok newspaper in late 1975:

There seems to be very poor reason [sic] for North Vietnam to invade Thailand ... Press reports should not be allowed to create panic among people to the extent of stopping business and damaging the economy.\footnote{\textit{Daily News} (Bangkok) quoted by \textit{Bangkok Post}, 29 November 1975.}

The military-backed coup d'etat in Bangkok in October 1976, which was justified partly on the grounds that Thailand faced a communist threat with an external as well as a domestic dimension, elevated to power extreme right-wing politicians and military officers who then endeavoured to use the spectre of a security threat from Vietnam to bolster both the domestic and the international legitimacy of their regime. In early December 1976 the new Interior Minister, Samak Sundaravej, resuscitated the claim that Hanoi intended to inspire Vietnamese refugees in northeast Thailand to fight amongst themselves to provide a pretext for an invasion. According to Samak the invasion...
would be launched the following February. Although the new right-wing prime minister, Thanin Kraivichien, refuted Samak's alarmism, he continued to emphasize the imminence of external as well as internal communist threats. Other influential conservatives, both within and outside the government, likewise stressed Indochina's threat potential throughout the Thanin regime's tenure in 1976-77.

Kriangsak's relatively moderate regime which replaced the Thanin government after its ouster in October 1977 pursued a revival of detente with the communist powers and was correspondingly less alarmist in its assessments of the strategic threat from Indochina. For example, in October 1977 a claim that the Laotian air force's newly-acquired MiG-21 fighters "might be used in an attack on Thailand" was played down by the government.

38 Bangkok Post, 12 December 1976.
39 For example, in late December 1976, former Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman alleged quite erroneously that the Soviet Union had built missile silos in Laos which could be used "against China or the South". The following September, Deputy Defence Minister General Lek Naewalee claimed that Vietnam was "seeking to control the Mekong River valley in northeast Thailand". Straits Times, 30 December 1976; FEER, Asia Yearbook 1978, p. 348.
40 Bangkok Post, 12 October 1977.
41 Thus Foreign Minister Upadit Pachatriangkul emphasized that the fact that the Laotian MiG-21s might be using aviation fuel bought from Thailand was "the internal affair of Laos". Derek Davies, FEER, 9 December 1977, p. 22.
The Vietnamese Invasion and Occupation of Cambodia

The ASEAN states' relatively sanguine assessments in 1977-78 of the direct military threats posed by the Indochinese states were dependent to a large degree on the emergence of an intra-communist balance of power in Indochina between Vietnam and its ally Laos (backed by the Soviet Union) on one side and Cambodia (supported by China) on the other side. But although Lee Kuan Yew's claim (made as early as 1975) that the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam would "buy us considerable time" was probably seen as valid by many policy-makers throughout the ASEAN region, there was also a widespread appreciation in the region of the fragility of the intra-communist balance and of the dangers to non-communist Southeast Asia if that balance was overturned.

Although the incompatibility of Chinese and Vietnamese interests in Indochina was widely recognized in the ASEAN states by 1978, there is evidence that a Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Kampuchea was deemed unlikely in the near future by well-placed officials in the ASEAN countries. For example, in November 1978 (a few weeks before the Vietnamese move) a Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College paper, written by a syndicate of high-ranking military officers and security officials from Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand asserted:

42 Interview with Lee Kuan Yew, quoted by Singapore home service in English, 1330 gmt, 3 May 1975 (SWB FE/4896/A3/8, 6 May 1975).

43 See section on "Responses to the Emerging Conflict in Indochina, 1977-78" in Chapter 9, pp. 415-29 below.
Though Vietnam could easily overrun Kampuchea on the basis of her military might, and it is highly suspect whether China will indeed retaliate, Vietnam will not do so as yet.44

Thai Reactions

The eventual onslaught by the Vietnamese army and Cambodian exiles against Democratic Kampuchea was an unpleasant surprise for ASEAN's members, and particularly for Thailand. Several weeks before the invasion the Chief of Staff of the Thai Supreme Command45 had claimed that Thailand was capable of dealing with any internal or external security problem "except perhaps for total Cambodian collapse" -- in other words the very situation faced by Bangkok at the beginning of 1979. But a month later, as this worst case scenario was realized, with Vietnamese forces taking Phnom Penh and advancing towards the Thai border, Kriangsak asserted that Thailand's armed forces were "well-prepared at all times ... to protect the country against any form of external aggression".46 While this extravagant claim was probably intended to forestall panic, both domestically and amongst foreign investors, Kriangsak nevertheless attempted to use the

45 General Saiyud Kerdphol, address to the Inter-American Defense College, 7 December 1978, in Rattha pithak ("Guardian of the State") (Bangkok), Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1979), p. 40.
46 Bangkok Post, 8 January 1979.
situation to enhance his regime's legitimacy, stressing that Thailand's unity (and hence security) was based on "the three institutions of the nation, religion and monarchy", and calling on the people to "have confidence in the government". 47

In the early stages of the invasion, the Thai government (and other observers) were unsure of Vietnam's ultimate objective in invading Cambodia. Exactly one year earlier, Hanoi's previous large-scale thrust into its neighbour had advanced only 30 km or so before withdrawing: a similarly limited repeat of this "punishment" now appeared to be a possibility. The Thai deputy defence minister stated in early January that "we have to wait and see the next move of the invasion forces -- whether they will conquer all of Cambodia or only Phnom Penh". 48 According to Kriangsak, Bangkok warned Hanoi that it should not send troops as far as the Thai-Cambodian border "as this would be tantamount to a threat to Thailand". 49 Although Kriangsak received an assurance from his Vietnamese counterpart (Pham Van Dong) that such a situation would not eventuate, 50 by this time a surprisingly rapid advance had taken Vietnamese forces to within a few miles of the border. In the words of one observer: "The Vietnamese rolled up Cambodia so quickly that the Thais have not yet had time to panic". 51

47 Quoted by Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 8 January 1979 (SWB FE/6012/A3/10, 10 January 1979).
48 Bangkok Post, 8 January 1979.
50 Ibid.
Strategic Implications for Thailand

The Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia had serious strategic implications for Thailand. For the first time the kingdom was bordered to the east wholly by territory which was effectively controlled by Vietnam. The interjacence of Laos had been lost by the end of 1975 with the Pathet Lao's ascendancy and now Thailand's Cambodian "buffer" against Vietnam had been removed. Although the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975 had cancelled Cambodia's role as an ideological buffer, Democratic Kampuchea had constituted a military buffer against Vietnam. There was some nervousness in Bangkok that Hanoi might now be in a position to use its preponderance in Indochina and superior military power to "Finlandise" Thailand: Thai and Vietnamese forces were virtually in direct contact, and some of Hanoi's forces were little more than 300 km from Bangkok. From Bangkok's viewpoint, the strategic threat represented by long-term Vietnamese domination of Cambodia was so serious that it was deemed necessary to challenge Hanoi's occupation by giving succour to the Cambodian resistance forces. But this policy carried with it the risk of border incidents triggered by Vietnamese "hot pursuit" of Khmer Rouge guerillas across the Thai border, with the possibility of


escalation to a broader and more open conflict between Thailand and Vietnam.

A Vietnamese Invasion of Thailand?

From the time of the Vietnamese invasion there was much speculation -- particularly in the ASEAN capitals -- on whether or not Vietnam would seek to extend its hegemony beyond the borders of Indochina into Thailand. Although many observers agreed with the subsequently much-quoted view of a former Thai prime minister (Kukrit) that "only Bangkok's traffic jams stood between the Vietnamese forces on the border and the Thai capital" the situation was actually considerably more complicated.

In early 1979, the Thai armed forces apparently considered that a direct Vietnamese assault on Thailand could take one of three forms: a thrust through the Wattanakorn pass (just north of the Thai town of Aranyaprathet); an invasion across the Mekong to separate Thailand's northeast from the rest of the country; or a more gradual "nibbling" encroachment into the northeast. Although the first of these

55 Robert Whymant, Guardian Weekly, 11 February 1979. The Thai army's assessment of the threat to northeast Thailand was expounded in more detail in December 1979 when a senior officer alleged that intelligence reports in September had indicated that Vietnam and the Soviet Union had plans to invade northeast Thailand, seizing the sixteen provinces claimed by Laos for inclusion in the "Indochina federation". The plans allegedly called for the deployment of 39 Vietnamese divisions, and were based on optional five, eight or ten year timescales. While this intelligence seemed to confirm the Thai military's fears
scenarios was a direct product of the occupation of Cambodia, those relating to the Thai northeast had been current since 1975. However, the techniques used by the Vietnamese in the invasion of Cambodia appeared to support the Thai military's claim that the Vietnamese might use a Laotian-based "United Front" of disaffected Thais to provide legitimacy for any move against the northeast.

When examined closely, none of the Thai military's scenarios were particularly convincing: objectively, Vietnam still appeared to lack both the military capability and the political will for a large-scale military assault on Thailand. Although Thailand's 145,000 strong army was small compared to Vietnam's, which numbered one million personnel, Hanoi almost certainly lacked sufficient military resources to invade and occupy even Thailand's northeastern provinces. About 200,000 Vietnamese troops were tied down on the border with China, and another 40-50,000 in Laos. Resistance to communist rule continued even within Vietnam itself, and this security problem absorbed more of Hanoi's military potential. The 150-200,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia were preoccupied with fighting the Khmer Rouge.\footnote{56} In the event of a Vietnamese invasion of Thailand, the Cambodian resistance would have

\footnote{55} regarding Vietnamese intentions towards the Thai northeast, there was every reason to regard it with as much scepticism as earlier allegations. If these plans really existed, they were probably contingency plans and thus by no means a reliable forecast of Vietnamese intentions, particularly as the total strength of the Vietnamese army in 1979-80 amounted to only 39 divisions. See Lieutenant-General Abhichart Dhiradharmrong, "Political-Military Dimensions of Southeast Asian Security" (Paper presented at Conference on New Foundations for Asian and Pacific Security, Pattaya, Thailand, 12-16 December 1979), p. 147; Military Balance 1980-81 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1980), p. 76.
severely threatened the invading force's lines of supply. Indeed, an invasion of Thailand could have over-extended Vietnam's forces to the extent that the Khmer Rouge might have regained control of much of Cambodia.

Vietnam's existing military commitments were a strain on Hanoi's limited economic resources and were distractions from post-war reconstruction and development. Although Moscow supplied substantial economic and military aid to Hanoi, perhaps in the order of US$2-3m a day by 1981, this support was intended to bolster Vietnam against China. As commitments elsewhere, particularly in Afghanistan and Poland, became more burdensome from 1980, it appeared ever less likely that the Soviets would be willing to underwrite any large-scale Vietnamese military adventure outside Indochina. The idea of Vietnam garrisoning even northeast Thailand appeared economically, as well as militarily and politically, infeasible.

The opposition which might be encountered in an invasion of Thailand would be of a very different quality to that faced during the onslaught against Democratic Kampuchea, which had been internally weak and internationally isolated (apart from its relationship with China). The Vietnamese army included large numbers of apparently unwilling conscripts from the former South Vietnam, whose morale probably would not have matched that of Thai troops who would be fighting in defence


57 U.S. government figures quoted by Suhrke, p. 17.
of their own country's territory. Also, from 1976 the Thai armed forces had been going through a modernization programme, and were less concerned than previously with countering the CPT, which had receded as a threat as it lost its sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia. Moreover, Thailand could expect varying degrees of physical support from the United States, China (perhaps to the extent of a second "lesson" being taught to Hanoi) and other ASEAN members in the event of large-scale Vietnamese aggression.

Objectively, Hanoi still lacked not only the military capability but also a rationale for invading even northeast Thailand. There were certainly no obvious counterparts to the motives which had precipitated the invasion of Cambodia. So the presence of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia did not pose a serious direct threat to Thailand's security in the short term at least. Even if the Vietnamese succeeded in eradicating the Khmer Rouge and consolidated their position in Cambodia, there would still be numerous factors restraining Hanoi from open and unprovoked aggression against Thailand. The "Finlandisation" of Thailand might become more likely, but an invasion would remain a remote possibility.

While the Thai government's outwardly calm response to the "Vietnamese threat" from the beginning of 1979 was undoubtedly motivated partly by a desire to allay popular panic and prevent capital flight, it also almost certainly reflected an appreciation of the factors which constrained Vietnam from moving against Thailand. For example, in August 1979 General Charoen Pongpanich (the Thai Deputy Supreme Commander) asserted that Vietnam would not invade Thailand under "the present circumstances" -- at least not within the
next five years. According to Charoen, a successful invasion would require strong "advance", "follow-up" and "supporting" forces. In Charoen's view, the Communist Party of Thailand (the advance force) was weak and fragmented, Vietnam itself (which would provide the follow-up forces) was inundated with other problems, both internal and external (including a possible Chinese threat) and the supporting force (the USSR) would not risk backing an invasion. Likewise, Premier Kriangsak strenuously denied reports that he had claimed that Vietnam posed a threat to the Thai northeast.

The Cambodian Resistance and Vietnamese Incursions

Bangkok's efforts to pre-empt the possible long-term strategic implications of Vietnam's control of Cambodia by allowing the Cambodian resistance to use Thai territory for resupply and refuge was accompanied by the immediate risk that Vietnamese forces would carry the war into Thai territory.

Despite reports by mid-1979 of Vietnamese incursions into Thailand by Vietnamese troops in "hot pursuit" of Cambodian resistance fighters, Hanoi maintained that its forces were "under strict orders to stay away from the border" and that there was no possibility of

58 Bangkok Post, 10 August 1979.
60 See, for example, Bangkok Post, 2 June 1979.
61 Interview with Phan Hien, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister, by the Thai magazine Thai Nikorn, quoted by Bangkok Post, 5 November 1979.
Vietnamese troops crossing into Thailand. Nevertheless, the Thai government's concern was aroused as Vietnamese troops moved into position for a series of pincer attacks against Khmer Rouge forces pinned against the Thai border in November 1979, with Bangkok's Foreign Minister Upadit Pachariyangkul warning of the danger that the fighting might spill into Thailand if it intensified any further, necessitating a Thai military response. Indeed, according to the Thai authorities there were seven incursions by "foreign forces" between mid-November 1979 and mid-February 1980, involving up to 2000 intruders at a time, with penetrations to a depth of 3 km into Thailand. Thai territory was also frequently shelled from across the border, and Thai airspace was violated several times.

In late December 1979 the Supreme Command put the Thai armed forces on full alert, moved additional armoured and infantry units closer to the border the following January and soon afterwards began construction of a 100 km long "anti-tank ditch". But Kriangsak had

63 Bangkok Post, 17 November 1979.
64 The Times, 21 November 1979.
68 Michael Richardson, Age, 22 March 1980.
invested considerable energy in improving relations with Hanoi after the hiatus caused by the Thanin regime, and still hoped for a negotiated solution to the Cambodian problem. Moreover, although it was unlikely that Hanoi could mount a successful large-scale military action against Thailand, it was conceivable that Vietnamese forces might emerge victorious from a small-scale border incident. This the Thai military regime wished to avoid as it might seriously damage the armed forces' political as well as military credibility; the Kriangsak government's responses to the problem of frequent, small-scale Vietnamese border incursions therefore emphasized diplomatic protest rather than military confrontation.

It was not until late June 1980 that Vietnamese forces made a substantial incursion into Thailand. The attack involved about 900 Vietnamese troops and was precipitated by Bangkok's announcement that over 100,000 Cambodian refugees might be repatriated from holding centres in Thailand. The Vietnamese and their allies in Phnom Penh saw this as an attempt to bolster the strength of the Khmer Rouge as it intensified its struggle. The Thai authorities were almost certainly aware that the Vietnamese might react strongly to the

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69 See section on "The Evolution of Thai Policy on Cambodia" in Chapter 10, pp. 437-41 below.


72 Michael Richardson, Age, 20 June 1980.
repatriation, although in the event probably less than 10,000 Cambodians were sent back.\textsuperscript{73}

According to Nguyen Co Thach, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Thailand deliberately timed the repatriation to provoke a Vietnamese incursion which would force ASEAN to consolidate behind the Thai position on Cambodia at the annual ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Conference which commenced on 26 June.\textsuperscript{74} The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry's official explanation of the Vietnamese incursion into Thailand was less Machiavellian, but still emphasized that it had been provoked by the "Chinese and American-supported" repatriation.\textsuperscript{75} Nevertheless, the fact that the ASEAN ministers were about to meet may have been an additional factor in a Vietnamese calculation that it was time to impress Thailand and its associates with a show of strength on the Cambodian issue:\textsuperscript{76} the Vietnamese may have hoped to provoke a more open disagreement within ASEAN over Cambodia.

Although the Vietnamese attack included shelling along an 80 km stretch of border,\textsuperscript{77} the incursion itself was physically aimed at the Nong Chan land bridge and the sprawling shanty towns dominated by the Khmer Serei (non-communist Cambodian resistance) which had grown up


\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Age}, 27 June 1980.


\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 25 June 1980.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 24 June 1980.
around it, rather than at the points on the border where the repatriation of predominantly Khmer Rouge-controlled refugees was taking place, about 15 km to the south. The repatriation may have triggered the incursion, but the Vietnamese military action had broader aims -- indeed, it was not an isolated incident but the culmination of escalating Vietnamese military activity along the border over the previous month, aimed at sealing the frontier. So although the Vietnamese incursion did halt the refugee repatriation, it also brought other benefits to Phnom Penh: in particular the incident seemed to convince tens of thousands (over 100,000 by the end of 1980) of refugees that life in the Cambodia interior, under the Heng Samrin government and Vietnamese occupation, was better than their dangerous existence in the border agglomerations. Moreover, cross-border trade along a critical 50 km stretch of the frontier was severely disrupted, and the cross-border feeding programme conducted by UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross at Nong Chan was immediately suspended. A desire to disperse the agglomerations and disrupt the "land bridge", both of which were

78 Keyes Beech, Age, 4 July 1980.


81 Shawcross, pp. 343-44.
detrimental to political and economic control over the Cambodian population, may have been an important factor in the Vietnamese decision to send troops into Thailand. Another effect of the incursion, presumably hoped for by the Vietnamese, was the casualties incurred by the pro-Sihanouk Moulinaka resistance group. But if the Vietnamese attack had been partly intended as a show of force to persuade Thailand and its ASEAN associates to adopt a more conciliatory stance towards the Cambodian issue, or to bring out into the open divisions between the Association's members, it signally failed, as it had the effect of strengthening ASEAN's resolve to bring about a Vietnamese withdrawal.

The Thai military response to the June 1980 incursion demonstrated Bangkok's wish to avoid a direct, large-scale military confrontation with Vietnam. The Vietnamese attack came as Thai army units on the border were being rotated: the area was thus only lightly defended. Colonel Prachak Sawangjit, the officer responsible for the defence of the violated sections of the border, was in Bangkok and did not return until 36 hours after the incident began. By delaying their counter-attack until the Vietnamese intruders were withdrawing, the Thai military ensured that their response avoided the possibility of a Thai humiliation of the battlefield. When the Thais

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83 Shawcross, p. 317.
did eventually respond militarily, it was in a disorganized and militarily unimpressive manner which reflected the Thai armed forces' lack of competence in conventional warfare. The first Thai artillery barrage hit the centre of the Nong Chan refugee agglomeration;\(^\text{84}\) according to the one source, "about 400 refugees were killed and 900 were wounded" in the crossfire.\(^\text{85}\) Nevertheless, air strikes raised the number of Vietnamese dead to at least 72, for 45 Thai soldiers killed and two aircraft shot down.\(^\text{86}\)

Thai Threat Assessments after the June 1980 Incursion

Despite the events of June 1980 the Thai military leadership often appeared confident in the following months that there was no serious, direct military threat from Vietnam, either immediately or in the near future. Very soon after the June incursion, the Thai Supreme Command Chief of Staff asserted that it would take a ten-year Vietnamese build-up to create a serious invasion force for the conquest of Thailand.\(^\text{87}\) Although the divisional commander on the border (Major General Arthit Kamlang-Ek) was, as a front-line field commander, understandably more cautious than his colleagues on the Staff, warning that Vietnam still had a "plan to annex part of

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\(^{84}\) Gerrand, p. 14.

\(^{85}\) Shawcross, _loc. cit._

\(^{86}\) Paisal Sricharatchanya, _Focus_ (Bangkok), Vol. 1, No. 5 (January 1981), p. 11.

\(^{87}\) Interview with General Saiyud Kerdphol, _Washington Post_, 5 July 1980.
Thailand for its Federation of Indochina", even he thought that three or four years might elapse before a further "large-scale" Vietnamese intrusion.  

Such realistic threat assessments were obscured at times by more alarmist prognostications. In part this was a reflection of divergent interpretations (of the putative threats) between various elements of the Thai armed forces and bureaucracy. But perhaps more importantly it indicated a recurring conflict between two governmental aims. The first aim was to play down the threat in order to reassure both the Thai public and foreign investors that the government was able to cope with any threat that might arise, thus forestalling defeatism at home and disenchantment with Thailand as an investment prospect. In contrast, the second aim was to emphasize -- and at times exaggerate -- the threat as a justification for authoritarian rule and as a distraction from socioeconomic inequity at home. The threat of external aggression provided a useful means by which the Prem government could divert public attention from the painful economic realities of high inflation and a stagnation in industrial production. It may also have intended to direct the energies of elements in the army such as "the Young Turks" (a group of field commanders -- mainly Colonels -- with political ambitions) away from political matters (such as the protests in August and September 1980 over the extension of the Prime Minister's tenure as army commander),  

88 Sydney Morning Herald, 30 June 1980.
military role. Moreover, Bangkok's emphasis on the Vietnamese threat was an indispensable means of securing political, economic and military support from the West, particularly in terms of US military assistance. The advent of the more overtly anti-Soviet Reagan administration in early 1981 increased the potential dividends for the Thai regime of emphasising Thailand's credentials as a "front-line state".

Typical of the Prem government's periodic exaggeration of the Vietnamese threat was the way in which it linked the Vietnamese incursion across the Cambodian border with an incident a week earlier on the riverine border with Laos in which a Thai naval officer was killed. Bangkok asserted that the two occurrences were together part of a wider Vietnamese plan of aggression against Thailand, and closed the border with Laos for two months. In August air raid drills were held in Bangkok: according to the Supreme Commander, these exercises (which were unprecedented since the Second World War) were "necessitated by the situation on the eastern and northeastern borders". In September, October and November 1980, Hanoi increased its order of battle within 20 km of the Thai-Cambodian border to nine divisions. As had happened at the time of the June incursion, the Thai government made the most of this build-up to win domestic and international support, with Prem reiterating the claim that Hanoi had expansionist designs on northeast Thailand.

90 General Serm Na Nakorn, quoted by Bangkok Post, 5 August 1980.
91 Michael Richardson, Age, 24 September 1980; Paisal, p. 11.
92 Speech delivered by General Prem Tinsulanond, Prime Minister of Thailand, Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, Bangkok, 10 September 1980, p.4.
Border incidents involving Vietnamese and Thai forces in early 1981 prompted the Thai authorities to complain again that "... Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea and subsequent deployment of some 120,000 of its troops along the Thai-Kampuchean border poses a serious security threat to Thailand...". But interviews at this time with senior Thai officials confirmed that underlying the concern expressed about the Vietnamese threat was a more optimistic assessment. One senior Thai government security analyst claimed that although Thailand was "seriously threatened" by two Vietnamese armoured divisions just across the Cambodian border from the Thai town of Aranyaprathet, Thailand's forces would be able to counter a large-scale incursion if necessary, owing to fundamental weaknesses in Vietnam's strategic posture. Similarly, the Secretary-General of the National Security Council, while claiming that the 250,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and Laos were the principal near-term threat to Thailand's security, also asserted that:

We must compare the overall balance of forces. It is often said that "Vietnam is the strongest military power in the region, but Thailand is weak". Vietnam is only strong due to Soviet support. Vietnam is economically and socially weak. There is armed resistance within Vietnam. True, Vietnam has 58

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95 Personal interview with senior official, National Economic and Social Development Board, Bangkok, March 1981.
divisions against only 12 Thai divisions... but we can't compare these figures in isolation. We must compare the total populations of the two countries: there are 50 million Vietnamese against 47 million Thais -- but we must bear in mind the quality of Thai people. Furthermore, the Thai forces have large reserves... 96

In this official's view, there was "no indication at the present time" that Vietnam was planning another large-scale incursion into Thailand.

**The Other ASEAN States' Assessment of the Vietnamese Threat, 1979-81**

Although the putative military threat from Vietnam after the intervention in Cambodia was not such an important issue elsewhere in the region as it was in Bangkok, all the other ASEAN governments were, to a greater or lesser extent, concerned over the strategic implications of the new regional balance of power.

**Singapore**

Although Lee Kuan Yew had been dismissive of the "domino theory" in 1975 he had also intimated that this was at least partly due to an appreciation that disharmony between the Vietnamese and Cambodian communists would provide a respite for the ASEAN states. 97

96 Personal interview with Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General, National Security Council, Bangkok, 20 March 1981.

97 Interview with Lee Kuan Yew quoted on Singapore home service in English, 1330 gmt, 3 May 1975 (SWB FE/4896/A3/8, 6 May 1975). According to Nayan Chanda of Far Eastern Economic Review, Lee's prediction of future disharmony between Vietnam and Cambodia was based partly on the worries that the Chinese leadership expressed (over the implications for Chinese security of Soviet influence in a unified Vietnam) when Singaporean Foreign Minister Rajaratnam visited Beijing in March 1975.
Singapore's political relationship with Vietnam was characterized by tension and mistrust throughout the 1975-78 period\textsuperscript{98} and in late 1978 Lee reiterated the value of the intra-communist dispute in Indochina for the ASEAN states.\textsuperscript{99}

Although the Singaporean leadership apparently anticipated that Hanoi might take drastic military action against Cambodia, it was not expected that the Vietnamese would occupy all of Cambodia indefinitely.\textsuperscript{100} Nevertheless, the Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia and the ouster of the Khmer Rouge regime appeared to confirm the Singaporean leadership's fears regarding Vietnam. From then onwards Lee and Rajaratnam propounded the most consistently "hawkish" views within ASEAN on the Vietnamese threat.

Considering the Singaporean leadership's early appreciation of the intra-communist schism in Indochina and the possibility of forceful Vietnamese military action against Cambodia, there was a notable element of sensationalism in the response of Lee and his

\textsuperscript{98} See section on "Singapore's Globalist Outlook" in Chapter 9, pp. 407-11 below.

\textsuperscript{99} Lecture given by Lee Kuan Yew at the 26th World Congress of the International Chamber of Commerce, Orlando, Florida, 5 October 1978, reported in Straits Times, 7 October 1978.

\textsuperscript{100} In November 1978, Goh Keng Swee (Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence) drafted a conference paper which "predicted the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea... but not the manner in which it was carried out". Goh had, perhaps unrealistically, expected the Vietnamese to follow the "more prudent" option of destroying or dispersing the Khmer Rouge army without occupying the whole country. Goh Keng Swee, "Vietnam and Big-power Rivalry", in Richard H. Solomon (ed.), Asian Security in the 1980: Problems and Policies for a Time of Transition (Cambridge, Mass.: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain, 1980), pp. 148-51.
government to the new situation: the Prime Minister described the Vietnamese move as "so startling, so unexpected, so audacious that its significance and implications are only gradually being grasped" and claimed:

Other countries in the region have always known that there was nothing in Southeast Asia that could stop the armed forces which the Vietnamese have built over 30 years of war, but... they had never imagined that they would be used directly... Most military analysts are convinced there is no combination of forces in Southeast Asia that can stop the Vietnamese on the mainland of Asia... We are all thinking what were previously the unthinkables. 101

Whereas the most important aspect of the Vietnamese threat for Thailand was the fact that Hanoi had demonstrated its willingness to use direct military force to intervene in and occupy a neighbouring state, the Singaporean viewpoint stressed -- to a greater degree than that of the other ASEAN countries -- Vietnam's links with the Soviet Union and the threat posed not only to the region but to the non-communist world as a whole by "communist imperialism". This view found definitive expression in the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs' booklet From Phnom Penh to Kabul, which linked the Vietnamese role in Cambodia and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as the "forerunners" of a Soviet "empire". 102

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101 Lee Kuan Yew interviewed by the BBC, reported on Singapore home service in English, 1330 gmt, 8 February 1979 (SWB FE/6040/A3/15, 12 February 1979). Goh Keng Swee echoed this assessment, claiming that Vietnamese military superiority over the ASEAN states prevailed "in almost every aspect" and that in any military contest "the outcome would be quick and decisive". Goh, p. 163.

102 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, From Phnom Penh to Kabul (Singapore: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1980).
Apart from objective assessments, several factors influenced Singapore's threat perceptions after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Firstly, although the Singaporean leadership may not have objected to a strong, united Vietnam exercising its influence throughout Indochina, it did object to the direct, military means used by Vietnam to take Cambodia under its wing. There was apparently a genuine concern over the implications of the Vietnamese intervention for Singapore's security -- not in the present or the immediate future, but ten or twenty years hence if the Vietnamese action went unprotected. This concern may have gone beyond a fear of Vietnamese aggression to the possible precedent that the intervention might set for Malaysia or Indonesia vis-a-vis miniscule, vulnerable Singapore.

Singapore's economy, being almost totally dependent on foreign investment and trade, required for its continued success as stable and secure a regional environment as was possible. For this reason, since the late 1960s, the Singaporean government had striven to encourage the United States to maintain its interest and military presence in the region, even after the collapse of non-communist Indochina. One obvious means of achieving this aim was to emphasize

103 Personal interview with a Straits Times leader writer close to the Singaporean leadership, Singapore, January 1981.

104 Alone among Jakarta's ASEAN partners, Singapore had refused to condone Indonesia's annexation of East Timor in 1976.

105 Personal interview with See Chak Mun, Director (Political Affairs), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, 7 February 1981.
the relationship between regional events and the global balance of power: hence the stress on Vietnam's alleged role as a proxy for the USSR in Southeast Asia. But it could be argued that Singaporean alarmism had the potential to undermine the confidence of foreign investors, although no evidence of this had appeared by mid-1981.

Another reason for the Singaporean attitude towards the Vietnamese threat was perhaps the government's wish to consolidate national unity and the legitimacy of the People's Action Party (PAP) as not only the ruling party, but also the only party represented in Parliament. Opposition to a relatively distant communist "threat" represented a safer way to convince Singapore's culturally diverse society to unite behind the PAP than a campaign stressing the official threat potentially posed by the city state's two ASEAN neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia. Moreover, opposition to communism came naturally to the PAP, which had risen to power in the context of an anti-communist struggle within Singapore. But the fact that Singapore's population was predominantly ethnic Chinese effectively meant that the People's Republic of China could not be vilified as a serious threat, although the few remaining Singaporean communists (members of the CPM) were undoubtedly oriented towards Beijing. Indeed, the leadership may have seen its anti-Vietnamese and anti-Soviet line as a useful device with which to placate otherwise frustrated pro-Chinese sentiment amongst much of the population.

106 Within days of the invasion of Cambodia, Rajaratnam warned that "if the rest of Southeast Asia is taken over, directly or indirectly, not just the balance of power in this region is upset, but also the world balance". Singapore home service in English, 1130 gmt, 19 January 1979 (SWB FE/6022/A3/16, 22 January 1979).
The Philippines

Although the invasion of Cambodia altered the Philippine government's perception of Vietnam as a security threat, Manila's view was not as alarmist as Bangkok's or Singapore's. The Philippines was physically and psychologically separated from events in mainland Southeast Asia by the South China Sea, and was virtually guaranteed American protection against direct external threats -- particularly from Vietnam or the USSR -- under arrangements which were satisfactorily renegotiated a few days before the Vietnamese moved into Cambodia. Unlike Singapore, the Philippines was not potentially threatened by larger regional powers which could take the Cambodian case as a precedent if it was not contested. Thus, as Vietnamese forces were occupying Cambodia, although the Philippine Foreign Minister asserted that the events in Indochina could potentially have serious consequences for the rest of Asia, he also indicated that the ASEAN states had little or nothing to fear from the Vietnamese intervention. Indeed, Romulo interpreted the continuing struggle in Indochina as showing that "the dominoes are falling the other way". In a speech in February 1980, President Marcos made it quite clear that although the Cambodian problem posed "a very real threat to Thailand", he did

107 Personal interviews in Manila, 23 March 1981, with Carlos P. Romulo, Philippine Foreign Secretary, and Hazel P. Gacutan, Director for Research, The President's Center for Special Studies.

... not believe that Thailand will be attacked. The threats to its security are the expected ones which develop when one is neighbour to a nation in the midst of conflict. There will be moments of extreme precariousness... but I do not believe this will result in outright aggression against Thailand. 109

Manila's moderate stance in relation to the direct implications for Thai, Philippine and regional security of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia was paralleled by the Philippines' political response to the issue -- that is, somewhere between the "hardline" Thai and Singaporean position and the more conciliatory Indonesian and Malaysian approach. 110

Malaysia

The essential premise on which Malaysian and Indonesian evaluations of Vietnam as a direct threat were based after the invasion of Cambodia was the continuing relevance of China as their principal security concern. But the new situation did cause rethinking of this concern with China, particularly in Kuala Lumpur. Nevertheless, various elements of the Malaysian bureaucracy expressed divergent views on the seriousness of the Vietnamese threat. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' line that Vietnam posed no serious threat

109 President Ferdinand Marcos, "The PMA Graduates: The Pillar of our Nation's Strength and Security", Speech on graduation day at the Philippine Military Academy, Baguio, 18 February 1980, p. 4.

110 See section on "Philippine Policy on Cambodia" in Chapter 10, pp. 455-57 below.
to the ASEAN region continued to dominate Malaysian policy even after the refugee crisis of 1978-79 and the invasion of Cambodia, both of which were seen in some Malaysian quarters as highly deleterious to national and regional security. Official statements continued to reiterate Foreign Affairs' belief that Vietnam had no plan "to overrun weak nations in Southeast Asia".

In contrast, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Defence Ministry took the idea of a Vietnamese threat more seriously. Ghazali Shafie, the Home Affairs Minister (with responsibility for internal security) did not envisage a direct Vietnamese threat to Malaysia, but was nevertheless concerned that Hanoi would intervene in northeast Thailand. In Ghazali's view, any serious Vietnamese aggression towards Thailand seemed sure to affect Malaysia adversely -- particularly as it would imply the diversion of Thailand's military attention away from its southern border, where cooperation between the two countries' armed forces against the Communist Party of Malaya's guerillas was essential from Kuala Lumpur's viewpoint.

Although the Defence Minister claimed in the wake of the invasion of Cambodia that "the situation in Indochina did not pose an immediate

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111 Personal interview with senior official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuala Lumpur, April 1981.

112 According to Foreign Minister Rithauddeen, 4 April 1980, reported by Agence France Presse (Hong Kong) in English, 1153 gmt, 4 April 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-068, 7 April 1980).

113 Ghazali made this explicit in a speech in April 1979. See Ghazali Shafie, "The ASEAN Countries and Indochina" (Text of an address at Conference on Southeast Asian Banking and Finance organized by The Financial Times, Singapore, 19 April 1979), p. 19.
threat to Malaysia", later declarations by senior Malaysian military figures tended to reflect less optimistic assessments. In mid-1980 the Chief of Armed Forces Staff described the region's political situation as "uneasy" and asserted that "external dangers" arising from political upheavals in Southeast Asia were a challenge to be ranked with the country's internal security problem.

The armed forces may, however, have exaggerated their concern -- which included preparations for "any eventuality" -- in order to support their demands for increased defence expenditure with which to finance large-scale expansion and modernization.

Indonesia

The Indonesian government saw less danger than any of its ASEAN counterparts as a result of the invasion of Cambodia. It seemed clear to the Indonesian leadership that at its present stage of development Vietnam could not threaten Indonesia even if it wanted to, particularly in view of Hanoi's extremely limited capability for maritime warfare. In the view of Ali Murtopo, the powerful

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117 Personal interview with Dr Kirdi Dipoyudo, Head, Department of International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, 7 April 1981.
Information Minister, the invasion of Cambodia was a continuation of "the independence struggle... aimed at establishing a greater Indochina with Hanoi at its centre" rather than the manifestation of a desire to dominate the whole region. Henceforth, "Vietnam would be busy with its domestic affairs", precluding any possibility of Vietnam launching aggression against neighbouring countries, including ASEAN.118

As the Cambodian problem persisted through 1979, Jakarta seemed to be taking the issue more seriously. In December, the Director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies declared that although an open invasion of Thailand was unlikely, Vietnam's pressure on the Thai border and its links with a faction of the CPT made it the most immediate external threat to the region.119 But Wanandi's use of the term "immediate" was significant, indicating that China was still seen as the most serious external threat to the security of the ASEAN region, particularly in the longer term.

A Soviet Threat?

As a result of factors which were objectively beyond Moscow's control -- Vietnam's conflicts with Cambodia and China, and the West's


virtual cessation of economic aid to Hanoi -- from 1978 the Soviet Union was able to develop an unprecedentedly close relationship with Vietnam. Although the relationship included an important economic dimension, most attention in the ASEAN region was concentrated on the political and military aspects of the Moscow-Hanoi nexus: the apparent identity of strategic interest and the intensifying security relationship between the USSR and Vietnam was seen in some quarters as compounding the Vietnamese strategic threat to non-communist Southeast Asia.

Between 1975 and 1978 the ASEAN governments generally saw the Soviet Union as much less of a threat than China to regional security. Unlike China, the USSR was physically distant with little capacity for projecting military power into Southeast Asia; there was no ethnic minority in the region which might act as a Soviet "fifth column"; and Moscow's links with communist parties in the region were minimal. Indeed, relations between the ASEAN countries and Moscow generally improved in the 1975-78 period as Southeast Asia emerged from what had effectively been, until 1975, a regional extension of the Cold War. In particular, economic links were intensified. Even the Singaporean government, which since the early 1970s had expressed suspicion of the USSR's growing regional presence and influence, strove to develop commercial relations with Moscow. An important aspect of the burgeoning Soviet-Singaporean economic relationship was the repair of Soviet ships, including naval auxilairies, at the Singaporean government-owned Keppel Shipyards.120

The political relationships between the ASEAN states and the USSR were not always so cordial. The extreme anti-communist Thanin regime
disrupted the relationship between Bangkok and Moscow in 1976-77. Moscow's refusal in 1976 to supply Jakarta with spare parts for Soviet-supplied military equipment may have been a manifestation of Soviet disapproval of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. The death of the pro-neutralist Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Razak, in January 1976 and the subsequent arrest of some of his closest associates on espionage charges clouded Moscow's relations with Kuala Lumpur. In political terms, the Singaporean government remained extremely cautious of the USSR. Although Manila's political relations with Moscow apparently blossomed in 1976-78 this phenomenon was largely a reflection of the Marcos regime's efforts to secure a favourable outcome to the simultaneous negotiations with Washington over the future of the American military bases in the Philippines.

There was, however, little concern over the Soviet Union as a military threat. The prevailing view in the ASEAN region that the USSR posed a much lesser security threat than China did not substantially change until the intensification of Soviet-Vietnamese links in 1978-79. Vietnam joined the Soviet-dominated economic community, COMECON, in June 1978 and entered into a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow the following November.121

120 Straits Times, 4 November 1978. The Singaporean government's interest in developing commercial links with the USSR clearly conflicted with strategic considerations in this instance: as early as 1973, Lee Kuan Yew had called for the creation of a joint US, West European, Australian and Japanese naval task force to counter the growing Soviet naval presence in the region. Straits Times, 12 May 1973.

121 Article 6 of the Treaty, which was clearly intended by Hanoi to provide a degree of strategic insurance against an attack by China, committed Moscow and Hanoi to "immediately begin mutual consultations for the purpose of removing that threat" if either was attacked or threatened with attack. See Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, reprinted in International Affairs (Moscow), 1/1979 (January), pp. 146-47.
Soviet military and economic aid to Vietnam increased dramatically in 1979 — possibly by a factor of twenty. Soviet aid, particularly in terms of arms supplies, made possible both the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978 and Vietnam's defence of its northern provinces against the Chinese invasion in early 1979.

In return for this broad economic and political support, Moscow was able to secure a military toehold in Southeast Asia for the first time. In March 1979, soon after the eruption of the Sino-Vietnamese war, a Soviet naval task force visited the Vietnamese naval bases at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang. Ninety-one Soviet naval vessels used these facilities over the next year. Soviet Tu-95 Bear reconnaissance aircraft also began regular visits to Da Nang in 1979 and by 1981 Soviet electronic intelligence and fleet communications facilities were operating at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang.

The idea that the Soviet-Vietnamese security relationship might be used as a base for regional adventurism by the Soviet Union was not expressed with uniform vigour throughout the ASEAN region. The Singaporean and Thai governments apparently took the Soviet threat most seriously. Singapore was more hostile than any other ASEAN state towards Soviet policy in the region. By mid-1978 the Singaporean government's declaratory line depicted Hanoi as a client of Moscow and the Cambodia-Vietnam conflict as a Sino-Soviet proxy war.

125 Peter Weintraub, FEER, 4 August 1978, pp. 10-11.
According to Lee Kuan Yew, if the United States and its allies did not make efforts to balance the growing Soviet naval presence in the region, the ASEAN states might be forced to take sides in this regional extension of the Sino-Soviet dispute with the danger that they could become "Finlands" by falling under Soviet-Vietnamese (or Chinese) influence.

Bangkok was not so overtly hostile as Singapore towards the USSR in 1979, owing to a consciousness of the danger of over-reliance on China and the effect this might have on Indonesian and Malaysian support for Thai policy on Cambodia. Nevertheless, Thailand's partial accommodation of Moscow did not prevent Bangkok from demonstrating its concern over the increased Soviet naval presence in the Gulf of Thailand by joining with the other ASEAN members in declining permission for a visit by Soviet warships and by refusing to accept a Soviet naval attache.

Despite Jakarta's long-standing security concern with China and pride in a vague "special relationship" with Vietnam, after the events of 1978-79 the Indonesian regime was concerned to prevent the Soviet Union from becoming more deeply involved in the Indochina conflict, as this might involve Soviet demands for more permanent military bases in

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126 Straits Times, 24 October 1979.
127 This accommodation was evident in Kriangsak's visit to Moscow in March 1979 and later by Bangkok's initial willingness to allow Soviet use of Thai airspace for cargo flights to Hanoi. Rodney Tasker, FEER, 23 March 1979, pp. 13-14; "Intelligence", FEER, 18 March 1979, p. 7.
Vietnam, transforming the USSR "from being a second-class to a first-class power" in the region.\textsuperscript{129}

The invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 apparently heightened perceptions of the Soviet threat in the ASEAN region. This was most obvious in Singapore, where Foreign Minister Rajaratnam linked the invasions of Cambodia and Afghanistan as elements of "the strategic offensive of World Communism under the... leadership of the Soviet Union".\textsuperscript{130} Lee Kuan Yew claimed that "the Soviet Union and Vietnam have got enormously more military muscle than China to bring to bear on Southeast Asia".\textsuperscript{131} Dhanabalan, the Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, went so far as to assert that Moscow might be willing to escalate the conflict in Southeast Asia (even if this involved "a severe setback for Vietnam") as a means of deflecting "demands to retreat from Afghanistan". By April 1981, Dhanabalan was claiming that "we see... the Soviet Union... as the biggest threat to peace in the region".\textsuperscript{132} One concrete Singaporean response was to ban Soviet naval auxiliaries from Singapore's ports and dockyards.\textsuperscript{133} Bangkok similarly stressed the connection between the occupations of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131} Lee Kuan Yew, interviewed by Derek Davies, \textit{FEER}, 26 September 1980, p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{132} \textit{Straits Times}, 14 November 1980; S. Dhanabalan, interviewed by Wayne Morrison, \textit{Mirror} (Singapore), 15 April 1981.
\item \textsuperscript{133} \textit{Straits Times}, 15 July 1980.
\end{itemize}
Afghanistan and Cambodia, and re-emphasized the threat posed by the Soviet naval presence in the region.\textsuperscript{134} Manila made increasingly more strident complaints to Moscow over repeated Soviet violations of Philippine airspace and the suspicious activities of Soviet naval and merchant vessels. Carlos Romulo, the Philippine Foreign Minister, argued that "the West" should act quickly to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{135} One explanation for Manila's increasingly tough line on Soviet activities in the region may have been a desire to justify to a domestic audience the continued presence of US military bases in the Philippines.

Although the invasion of Afghanistan involved the violation of a fellow Muslim country, the Indonesian and Malaysian response was muted. This was partly because of a fear that protests against the occupation of Afghanistan might be used by domestic Islamic opposition groups to arouse Muslim feelings on other issues -- including America's role in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{136} But it was also because Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur were not as interested as Singapore, Bangkok and Manila in engaging in "linkage diplomacy" by coupling events in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{134} Sydney Morning Herald, 20 February 1980. Thailand protested loudly when a Soviet flotilla including the aircraft carrier Minsk appeared in the Gulf of Thailand in November 1980. International Herald Tribune, 4 November 1980. Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General of the National Security Council then claimed that the USSR posed "a direct threat to Thailand and the region". Bangkok Post, 8 November 1980.
\bibitem{135} Straits Times, 15 July 1980; Agence France Presse (Hong Kong) in English, 0328 gmt, 2 September 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-171, 2 September 1980).
\end{thebibliography}
Southeast Asia to developments in other regions of more direct importance to Western security as a means of maintaining Western (and particularly American) political, economic and military support. Nevertheless, important elements within the Indonesian security establishment were increasingly concerned that the continuing conflict in Indochina was pushing Vietnam into ever greater dependence on the USSR, increasing the Soviets' political influence in Hanoi and providing an opportunity for Moscow to heighten its regional military profile.\(^{137}\)

Although the security relationship between Moscow and Hanoi -- particularly the Soviet use of Vietnamese naval and air facilities -- injected an important new element into the Southeast Asian military balance, objectively it did not pose a serious direct threat to the ASEAN states. The Vietnamese facilities were of considerable use to the USSR in peacetime, most importantly by providing

\[\ldots\text{a modest power-projection role in Southeast Asia and much greater flexibility for extended operations for Soviet naval forces operating in the South China Sea area, the Straits of Malacca and the eastern Indian Ocean... continuous intelligence coverage of US surface, submarine and air assets based in the Philippines.}\(^{138}\)


But there was no evidence to support the claims of commentators in the West, which were echoed in the ASEAN region (particularly by the Singaporean and Thai governments), that Moscow's naval and air presence in Southeast Asia would be of use in the interdiction of shipping in the Malacca Straits and in the operations against American forces in the region, including their bases in the Philippines. Even if the Soviet Union's forces in the South China Sea were assigned these roles, it is almost certain that the regionally preponderant US naval and air forces (not to mention the increasingly sophisticated capabilities of the ASEAN states and Australia) would have little trouble in neutralizing the relatively small Soviet presence and its vulnerable and logistically isolated Indochinese facilities.

Maritime Issues of Contention

A rather different aspect of the threat that ASEAN governments perceived to come from Vietnam arose from conflicting maritime claims between themselves and Hanoi in the South China Sea. With the increasing recognition of the importance of regional waters in economic and strategic terms, and the evolution of new law of the sea concepts, the interest of littoral states in securing control over

139 One Thai general, for example, claimed that "the Soviet naval presence may be able to cope with the US 7th Fleet thus diminishing the chances of US support for regional allies". Lieutenant-General Abhichart, pp. 142-44.

140 The third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea at Caracas in August 1974 had confirmed the right of states to enforce 200 mile maritime Exclusive Economic Zones.
islands (and hence surrounding sea areas) increased significantly in the 1970s. Offshore oil, which research in the late 1970s showed to be present in substantially greater quantities than previously believed, was important for littoral states both as an energy source and as a balance of payments input. The South China Sea was also one of the world's richest fishing areas, with fish providing 70% of the rapidly growing regional population's animal protein. The Sea's natural resources were particularly important to Vietnam in its post-1975 drive for reconstruction, and Hanoi initiated a major scientific programme involving oceanography and maritime resources (including fisheries). As well as viewing the South China Sea as their last major resource frontier, the ASEAN states were aware of its potential strategic importance. A large proportion of the world's crude oil and oil products was shipped through the Sea, mainly in transit to Japan and South Korea, and the important Hong Kong-Singapore shipping route passed through the Paracel Islands. Bases on the South China Sea littoral were increasingly important as forward staging posts for reinforcing the superpowers' naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Although the main conflict in the South China Sea was between the claims of Beijing and Hanoi (involving principally the Gulf of Tonkin, the Paracels and the Spratly Islands), there were also disputes between Vietnam and all the ASEAN states except Singapore. While the People's Republic had occupied all the Paracels since January 1974 (when the Chinese ejected South Vietnamese forces from several of the islands), various of the Spratlys were occupied by Taiwan (whose claims more or less paralleled Beijing's), the Philippines and (from May 1975) Vietnam. Compared to the Chinese and Vietnamese claims, the
Philippine claim to the Spratlys was weak, being based more on the islands' proximity than on any real historical precedent. Nevertheless, seven islands were occupied by Philippine forces between the late 1960s and 1976, when Manila gave approval to a Swedish consortium to begin drilling for oil in the Reed Bank area of the Spratlys, provoking angry reactions from Hanoi and Beijing.\(^{141}\) By early 1978 the Philippine military presence in the Spratlys had been built up to a strength of a thousand marines, and an airstrip was being built.\(^{142}\) The Philippine military build-up in the Spratlys followed the construction by Vietnam of fortifications on Pugad, only 5 km from the nearest Philippine-occupied island.\(^{143}\)

Although the Philippine government attempted to signal to its rivals the seriousness of its claims in the Spratlys by maintaining a small military presence in the islands, there was unease in Manila at the prospect of an armed clash there with Vietnam.\(^{144}\) As it became clearer in the late 1970s that the offshore petroleum potential in the area was substantially greater than had originally been thought, and in view of the huge balance of payments burden imposed on both Hanoi

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142 Rodney Tasker, FEER, 24 February 1978, pp. 11-12.

143 Michael Richardson, Age, 2 June 1976.

144 Hostilities with Beijing over the Spratlys appeared extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future, particularly because of China's probable unwillingness to risk combat outside its air cover.
and Manila by their oil imports, such a clash appeared slightly more likely.  

Although Manila's navy was larger than Hanoi's, the Philippine military leadership apparently felt that their forces were not sufficient to defend their country's claims in the Spratlys. Furthermore, Washington had indicated that its security guarantees to Manila did not extent to helping the Philippines fight a war over the Spratlys, by excluding the subject from discussions on mutual defence problems prior to the drawing up of new security arrangements between the two countries at the end of 1978.

But the latent dispute over the Spratlys did not prevent Hanoi (like Beijing) from actively promoting improved links with Manila, and in 1980 President Marcos made it known that the Vietnamese had indicated a wish to resolve the problem by negotiation in the near future. With the effective (if perhaps temporary) defusing of the dispute with Vietnam, Manila apparently became more immediately concerned with its maritime problems with Taipei -- particularly the Taiwanese garrison on Itu Aba in the Spratlys.

Vietnam's maritime dispute with Indonesia involved an area of 20,000 km² on the potentially oil-rich continental shelf north of the

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147 Lim Joo-Jock, Geo-strategy and the South China Sea Basin (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979), p. 75.

148 Personal interview with senior Australian diplomat, Manila, March 1981.

Natunas Islands. However, both Hanoi and Jakarta took a fairly measured approach to the problem from the time of the reunification of Vietnam, and there never appeared to be any Indonesian concern that the dispute would escalate to armed conflict. Nevertheless, from Jakarta's viewpoint the Vietnamese appeared implicitly to be questioning Indonesia's archipelagic doctrine. The Indonesian regime seemed keen to remove what could become an impediment to the "special relationship" between the two countries. But although negotiations began in June 1978, the issue flared up in December 1979 when Jakarta granted oil and natural gas concessions in the disputed area, leading to Vietnamese protests.

Although there was some speculation that Vietnam's attitude towards its maritime boundary dispute with Indonesia would be influenced by ASEAN's policies towards the Cambodian problem, by May 1981 it appeared that the disputed sea area could be reduced (after perhaps one more round of negotiations) to 3300 km², with the Indonesian authorities being largely satisfied that known gas and

150 Jakarta's archipelagic declaration of December 1957 claimed all waters "surrounding, between and connecting" Indonesia's islands as being "under the exclusive sovereignty of the Indonesian state". The declaration reflected Jakarta's concern over Indonesia's vulnerability owing to its physical and ethnic fragmentation, and in 1973 the "Archipelago outlook" was confirmed as a guideline of state policy. Michael Leifer, Indonesia's Foreign Policy (London: George Allen and Unwin for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1983), pp. 48-50, 143-7.

151 Agence France Presse (Hong Kong) in English, 1046 gmt, 6 December 1979 (FBIS-APA-79-238, 10 December 1979).

oil resources were secure. Hanoi -- perhaps anxious to improve relations with the least hostile ASEAN member -- did not explicitly link these bilateral negotiations to Cambodia, although its deferral of a final maritime settlement may have been intended as an incentive for Indonesia to maintain its relatively sympathetic approach on the Cambodian issue. But in any event, senior Indonesian military officers were apparently worried by the prospect of sharing a confirmed, direct maritime boundary with Vietnam for the first time.

Kuala Lumpur's maritime dispute with Hanoi began in 1978, when Malaysian officials visited and claimed several islands in the south of the Spratly group, north of Sabah -- probably with an eye to future oil exploration and exploitation in the area. In 1979, new Malaysian maps claimed territorial rights over the continental shelf surrounding the country -- including Amboyna and other small islands in the southern Spratlys. But Kuala Lumpur did not maintain a physical presence on these islands, whereas a few months after Malaysia had claimed it in 1978 Hanoi (which claimed all islands in the group) had sent troops to occupy Amboyna. Kuala Lumpur de-emphasized the issue, however, and although it was discussed by the Malaysian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister with their Vietnamese

154 Personal interview with senior Australian diplomat, Jakarta, April 1981.
156 Canberra Times, 28 February 1980.
counterparts when the latter visited Malaysia in October 1978 and May 1980 respectively\textsuperscript{157} no agreement was reached on either occasion. Vietnam was in the secure position of physically occupying Amboyna and probably saw no point in pressing for Malaysian recognition of its claim, particularly as it wished to win Malaysia's sympathy over the Cambodian problem. Malaysia was wary of emphatically pursuing a claim of doubtful legitimacy, which might not be supported by its ASEAN associates, bearing in mind the number of latent territorial disputes between the Association's members themselves. Presumably, neither side saw an interest in taking the matter any further at that time.

According to the Vietnamese document allegedly confirming Hanoi's nefarious intentions towards northeast Thailand, Hanoi also intended to "obtain a favourable agreement (from Thailand) over the sea areas falling under our national sovereignty".\textsuperscript{158} But little more was heard of this aspect of Thai-Vietnamese relations until 1978 when Bangkok and Hanoi announced that their rival claims to part of the Gulf of Thailand would be "settled on the basis of... equitable principles".\textsuperscript{159} Although little movement was subsequently made towards a solution, equally the issue was not used by either side to exacerbate their confrontation over Cambodia from the beginning of 1979. Before the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia, Bangkok was

\textsuperscript{157} Agence France Presse (Hong Kong) in English, 1517 gmt, 8 May 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-092, 9 May 1980).

\textsuperscript{158} Pipake, "Document discloses Hanoi's intentions towards Thailand", Bangkok Post, 30 March 1975.

\textsuperscript{159} David Jenkins,\textit{ FEER}, 7 August 1981, p. 25.
also in dispute with Phnom Penh over overlapping areas of the Gulf. But by 1981 it was still not clear what policy the Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin regime would adopt towards the problem, although the fact that Democratic Kampuchea had also been in conflict with Hanoi over maritime boundaries probably militated against an early reassertion of Cambodia's claims.

Thus a military threat from Vietnam owing to maritime disputes was perceived only in Indonesia and the Philippines, and in both these cases it was expressed more or less privately by armed forces leaders, rather than in public government statements. Furthermore, there was little comparison between these worries and Thai fears of a major Vietnamese military onslaught across the border with Cambodia, although a defeat at sea -- even in a minor clash -- could have had unfavourable repercussions on the credibility of Marcos's New Society or Suharto's New Order. But direct Vietnamese aggression against any of the ASEAN states in the South China Sea seemed an unlikely prospect while Vietnam was seeking to neutralize their opposition to its role in Cambodia. Objectively, a far more likely prospect was that Sino-Vietnamese rivalry could be extended to armed conflict over the Paracels and Spratlys (perhaps as part of a second Chinese "lesson" to Vietnam), in which case some or all of ASEAN's members might be involved willy-nilly.

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160 Ibid., loc. cit.

161 This particular possibility was not stressed by the ASEAN governments, but was apparently subsumed in their more generalized concern over the impact of intensified Sino-Vietnamese conflict on regional security.
Conclusion

Objectively, the communist Indochinese states posed no serious, direct military threat to the ASEAN countries in the 1975-81 period. The ASEAN governments generally appeared to recognize that their Indochinese counterparts (most importantly, Hanoi) lacked both the political will and the military capability to embark on expansion beyond Indochina, in the short to medium term at least. Moreover, the ASEAN governments wished to reassure both domestic and international audiences that there was no serious threat from Indochina, in order to bolster an image of stability as a means of forestalling panic and defeatism at home and concern amongst foreign investors. Furthermore, the "regionalist" approach of the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to security problems in Southeast Asia predisposed them to emphasize conciliation rather than confrontation in relation to Hanoi even after the invasion of Cambodia, and their concern (particularly in Indonesia's case) with a long-term threat from China caused them to view the advent of a unified and militarily strong Vietnam in a less unfavourable light than other non-communist governments in the region.

Nevertheless, official and semi-official commentators in the ASEAN states quite frequently expressed alarm over alleged direct military threats from Indochina. On occasion -- notably at the time of the Indochinese communist victories in April 1975 and again when Vietnam was occupying Cambodia in December 1978 and January 1979 -- such alarmism was probably at least partly a sincere reaction to dramatic changes in the regional balance of power, although these developments did not immediately pose serious security threats. Similarly, the June 1980 Vietnamese incursion was a violation of Thai
territory which was unprecedented in modern times: it was not surprising that some commentators were genuinely shocked by this forceful remainder that Thailand could no longer rely on a buffer zone to protect it from Vietnam.

But in general -- and to some extent even at the time of the 1975, 1978-79 and June 1980 crises -- much of the alarmism which politicians, officials and senior military men in the ASEAN region expressed over the direct military threat from Indochina (particularly Vietnam) was not inspired by straightforward concern for national or regional security. Although it was necessary to reassure both the populace and foreign investors that the external challenge was not so severe and immediate that the government could not cope with it, the "Vietnamese threat" was frequently used both to enhance the domestic legitimacy of the regime in power (particularly in the face of political dissent and economic problems) and to secure political, economic and military support from the West, especially the United States. A stress on the linkage between Vietnam's role in Southeast Asia and the Soviet Union's supposed global ambitions was often used to help achieve the latter objective.162

162 There is also evidence that armed forces' leaders in the ASEAN region exaggerated the threat to justify increased military expenditure. See Chapter 8, pp. 333-61 below.
CHAPTER 6

INDOCHINA AND COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN
THE ASEAN STATES 1975-1981

After the collapse in 1975 of the anti-communist regimes in Indochina, the governments of the ASEAN countries -- particularly Thailand -- frequently expressed concern over the direct military threat posed by their communist neighbours in the region. But equal, if not greater, attention was paid by the governments of Southeast Asia's non-communist states to the indirect threat that they saw (or purported to see) from the relationship between communist Indochina and revolutionary movements in the ASEAN countries.

Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines were in 1975 already coping with communist insurgencies, and there were residual underground communist movements in Indonesia and Singapore. Despite the ASEAN states' economic success relative to most other Third World countries, large segments of their populations remained impoverished by any standard. Widespread socioeconomic inequality, often compounded by maladministration and official corruption, implied that communism had an inherent appeal to many people in the ASEAN region.

There were several aspects to the ASEAN governments' concern regarding communist insurgency in relation to events in Indochina. In the first place there was a widespread fear that the victories of the Viet Cong, Khmer Rouge and Pathet Lao would encourage communism in the rest of Southeast Asia: the fall of Indochina's right-wing regimes, close to home, might be interpreted by local revolutionaries as demonstrating that the established order could be overcome. It was
also feared that North Vietnam and the new communist regimes in Indochina would give direct assistance to regional revolutionaries, in the form of arms, training and, in Thailand's case, sanctuaries across the country's long eastern borders with Laos and Cambodia.

**Vietnam: A Revolutionary Mainspring?**

On one level it seemed that the Vietnamese communists, at the time of their victory in 1975, were doing a great deal to encourage communist insurrection in the ASEAN region. Hanoi certainly took a grand view of Vietnam's new international role, with Party Secretary Le Duan asserting that "our nation was joined the ranks of the vanguard nations of the world" with the potential to become "an inviolable bastion of national independence, democracy and socialism in Indochina and Southeast Asia". At the Fourth Non-Aligned Conference in Lima in late August 1975, the North Vietnamese avowed, in what was interpreted in some ASEAN capitals as a clear encouragement to regional insurgents:

1 Although there was concern within the ASEAN administrations that the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon would result in the transfer of large quantities of arms (originally supplied by the United States) to local insurgents, this anxiety centred on the activities of commercial gun-runners rather than the Indochinese regimes. *New Straits Times*, 9 May and 22 November 1975; *Economist*, 6 December 1975.


3 See, for example, Lau Teik Soon, "ASEAN, North Vietnam and the Communist Challenge", *Southeast Asian Affairs 1976* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), pp. 72-79.
We, the Vietnamese people, always consider our struggle and victory as part of the struggle and victory of the revolutionary movement of the world's people in general and of the national liberation movement in particular ... We have always persisted in our solidarity with the socialist countries, the non-aligned countries, with all forces struggling for independence, democracy, peace and social progress...

In February 1976 a rather more specific declaration by Le Duan claimed:

The Vietnamese people fully support the just sure-to-win cause of the peoples of the countries of Southeast Asia for peace, national independence, democracy and social progress and contribute actively to helping the nations in Southeast Asia really become independent, peaceful and neutral... The Vietnamese people fully support the Thai people's struggle for a really independent and democratic Thailand without the US forces and military bases...5 [Emphasis added]

But although Vietnamese leaders issued broad declarations in support of revolutionary change throughout Southeast Asia, these were essentially de rigueur for a regime wishing to maintain a revolutionary image domestically and in international communist circles. While Hanoi certainly saw the emergence of a socialist Indochina as having very important implications for the future of non-communist Southeast Asia, the evidence suggests that the Vietnamese leadership was not really calling for revolutionary warfare throughout the region or attempting to become the main sponsor of Southeast Asian communist insurgency.

4 VNA in English, 0734 gmt, 1 September 1975 (SWB FE/4997/A1/1, 3 September 1975).

In the first place, Vietnamese spokesmen made it clear in the mid-1970s that they judged that "prospects for the success of broad-based political efforts directed against imperialism were good, while the prospects for armed struggle were not", in view of the virtual destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party a decade before, and the subsequent failure of the Thai, Malayan and Philippine communist insurgencies to make significant headway. Hanoi emphasized the potential role of the ASEAN societies' "upper strata", who wanted economic development, prosperity and regional peace, in influencing the ASEAN governments to adopt "anti-imperialist" foreign policies. There were no Vietnamese calls for the people of the ASEAN states to overthrow their governments.

Secondly, given Vietnam's massive domestic problems, and its burgeoning difficulties in its relations with the United States, China and Cambodia, it seems unlikely that Hanoi would have wished to take on additional international burdens by actively promoting revolutionary upheavals in the ASEAN countries. Any really substantial escalation of insurgency in the region carried with it the risk that the residual US military presence in the region might be built up again.

Thirdly, while in the long-term it might well have been useful to Hanoi for Indochina to be surrounded by communist satellite states

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6 Gareth Porter, "The Vietnamese Perspective on Thailand" (Paper presented at the Workshop on Future ASEAN-Vietnam Relations, Institute of Security and International Affairs, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 7-9 February 1983), pp. 6-7.

7 Ibid., pp. 7-9.
toeing a pro-Vietnamese line, it was clear that the pro-Beijing orientation of the communist movements in the ASEAN countries implied that in the mid- or late 1970s further communist successes in the region could have meant a drastic weakening of Vietnam's position in relation to China.

But although Hanoi was more interested in encouraging political change in the ASEAN region through the development of "democratic forces" rather than revolutionary insurgency, declarations which might be (and often were) construed as supporting regional revolutionaries were probably seen by Vietnam's leaders as a useful bargaining counter as they made efforts to develop working relationships with the ASEAN states. Indeed, Hanoi possessed no other significant lever on the ASEAN governments.

**Vietnam, Laos and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), 1975-78**

The Thai government expressed considerably more concern than its ASEAN partners over the possible impact of the Indochinese communist victories on domestic communist insurgency. Not only did Thailand share extensive land borders with Laos and Cambodia, but the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) already maintained important relationships with the Vietnamese and Laotian communists.

Although the CPT grew originally from roots in Thailand's large Chinese community, in the northeast of the country the Party always drew a large part of its external support from the communist movements in Vietnam and Laos. In part this reflected the contiguity of these
countries with the northeastern provinces, but it was also the result of ethnic ties -- not only between Lao-Thais and their kin across the border, but also between the ethnic Vietnamese in the northeast and their ancestral homeland. Indeed, the Vietnamese party's connection with Thailand could be traced back to the late 1920s, when Ho Chi Minh visited the northeast secretly as a Comintern representative and helped to form a communist organization (as part of the Indochinese Communist Party) among the Vietnamese community there. During 1931-33 the Indochinese party moved its headquarters temporarily to northeast Thailand to avoid the French colonial authorities' efforts to repress it. After World War Two the Viet Minh again used Thailand as a sanctuary during their continuing struggle against the French. At the same time large numbers of Vietnamese fled to Thailand from the fighting in Indochina: some of these refugees were politically oriented towards Hanoi. In the 1950s and 1960s -- long before Hanoi's formal break with Peking -- it was no doubt a sensible and efficient arrangement for all concerned that Thai communists should go to North Vietnam (as well as China) for training. Until 1975 a school at Hoa Binh near Hanoi reportedly trained at least 70 to 80 (and perhaps several hundred) Thais each year, along with revolutionaries from Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. But unlike similar training centres in China, it seems that the Hoa Binh school was run principally by cadres


of the national communist parties in question (although the centre was under the overall control of the Vietnamese party).^10

The CPT began its armed struggle in 1965. Despite evidence that the Thai communists were backed by Beijing and Hanoi, it seems that the insurgency was not initiated as a result of prompting by the Chinese or North Vietnamese, but quite independently.^11 Until the late 1960s there was no evidence that the CPT's guerillas had received significant supplies from either China or North Vietnam: only about half a dozen Soviet and Chinese weapons had been captured.^12 But in July 1968 the CPT mounted several attacks on US air bases in Thailand: perhaps impressed by the role that the Thai communists might thus play in disrupting the American war effort, Hanoi and Beijing stepped up their material support for the CPT.^13 Almost all Vietnamese material aid for the CPT was channelled through Laos by way of the Laotian left-wing movement, the Pathet Lao, which also allowed the establishment of training camps for CPT guerillas in the territory that it controlled.^14 Moreover, the CPT Central Committee established its headquarters in the Laotian province of

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10 "No, they haven't changed" (Editorial), Bangkok Post, 21 October 1974; John McBeth, FEER, 19 September 1980, p. 43; Interview with Hoang Hun Quynh, a veteran Vietnamese cadre who was a refugee in France by January 1980, quoted by Thai Quang Trung, 'L'enjeu Cambodien dans l'équilibre du Sud-Est Asiatique', Politique Etrangere, Vol. 46, No. 3 (September 1981), p. 343; Personal interview with Nayan Chanda of Far Eastern Economic Review, Canberra, 16 December 1982.

11 See George K Tanham, Trial in Thailand (New York: Crane, Russak, 1974), pp. 33-35. Tanham was formerly the State Department Special Assistant for Counter-insurgency at the US Embassy in Bangkok.

12 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 27072 (14-20 April 1975).
Sayaburi, although it had transferred to Nan province in northern Thailand by 1977.

Although the relationship between the CPT and the Pathet Lao was essentially subordinate to that between the Thai and Vietnamese communists, Lao cadres could move in and out of Thailand's northeast at will, passing themselves off as Thai-Lao. The presence of Vietnamese cadres might have been counterproductive, due to the lack of historical and cultural affinity between Vietnamese and Thais. But the Pathet Lao's close association with the Vietnamese communists was itself apparently sufficient to provoke suspicion within the CPT's Central Committee. CPT cadres were quick to correct any "dangerous tendencies" towards pan-Laoism instilled in recruits from Thailand's northeast by Pathet Lao instructors.

Vietnamese and Pathet Lao Support for the CPT from 1975

Vietnamese communist and Pathet Lao backing for the CPT continued in the immediate aftermath of their own triumphs in 1975, despite a

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13 Ibid., loc. cit. But at least one commentator has claimed that the attacks on U.S. bases in Thailand were carried out by the Vietnamese communists themselves, against the wishes of the CPT. Porter, p. 13.

14 Support for the southern division of the CPT's northeast command was provided by way of Cambodia from 1973.

15 Zimmerman, p. 27.

16 Interview with a CPT defector, Daily Time (Bangkok), 30 January 1977 (FBIS-APA-77-21, 1 February 1977).

downgrading of Hanoi's declaratory support for the Thai communists' armored struggle after the "spontaneous uprisings" by non-communist progressive forces against the Thai military regime in October 1973.\(^\text{18}\) Although Hanoi placed greater emphasis in the 1974-76 period on the significance of political struggle by non-Party forces in Thailand, and despite growing ideological differences between the steadfastly Maoist and Beijing-oriented CPT Central Committee and the increasingly pro-Soviet stances of Hanoi and Vientiane,\(^\text{19}\) Vietnamese and Laotian material aid for the CPT increased from 1975.\(^\text{20}\) Indeed, Vietnam was reportedly the CPT's major external source of arms and other supplies throughout the 1975-78 period.\(^\text{21}\)

It seems unlikely, however, that Vietnamese communist and Pathet Lao support for the CPT constituted part of a concerted drive to destabilize, let alone dismember, Thailand as military elements in Bangkok frequently alleged. Rather, this assistance to the CPT served

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18 Porter, pp. 13-5.
19 See Stuart-Fox, p. 339. But a significant proportion of lower level cadres, many of whom had been trained by the Vietnamese and some of whom were ethnic Vietnamese, in the CPT's northeast command were oriented more towards Hanoi. Zimmerman, p. 22.
20 Hanoi repudiated claims that it was sending arms into Thailand as "shop-worn slanders" used as a pretext for repression of the "patriotic movement" and Vietnamese residents in Thailand. VNA in English, 1701 gmt and Hanoi home service, 0200 gmt, 17 June 1975 (SWB FE/4933/A3/1, 19 June 1975); Hanoi in English for abroad, 1600 gmt, 19 June 1975 (SWB FE/4936/A3/4, 23 June 1975). The Pathet Lao also denied supplying arms to the CPT. Statement by Laotian Information Minister, Thao Srichana Srisane, Bangkok Post, 20 February 1976.
more limited political purposes for Hanoi and Vientiane in the 1975-78 period.

In the first place, Hanoi and Vientiane may have attempted to use their increased ability to support the CPT (allowed by the increased security of sanctuaries in, and supply routes through, Laos and the greater availability of military resources once the anti-communist forces in their own countries were no longer a problem) to undermine the pro-Beijing orientation of the Thai communists. Certainly this aid was welcome to the CPT, as Chinese assistance had virtually ceased after the opening of diplomatic relations between Bangkok and Beijing in July 1975. There were other possible reasons for the continuing phenomenon of indirect Vietnamese backing for the CPT from 1975. Until July 1976 Thailand continued to host important US Air Force units and intelligence-gathering facilities, and until June 1977 was a member of the US-sponsored regional defence organization, SEATO. In 1975 Hanoi strenuously resisted Thai proposals that the US bases could be "bargained away" against Vietnamese support for the CPT and the American military presence in Thailand. But the opening of diplomatic relations with Bangkok, and agreement to a "non-interference" principle as part of the basis for this new relationship, in August 1976 suggested an implicit bargain had been struck even if Hanoi was unwilling to admit it.

Apart from the closeness of relations between the Pathet Lao and Hanoi, continuing Thai support for anti-Pathet Lao resistance groups and other difficulties on the Thai-Laotian border provided an

22 Stuart-Fox, pp. 339-40.
important reason for the maintenance of Laotian involvement with the CPT. In their official pronouncements, the Pathet Lao adopted much the same attitude as Hanoi towards the CPT, claiming that the Thai people "with... the sincere support and assistance of... fraternal countries in... the socialist bloc" would "carry their struggle to complete the final victory". Since the early 1960s successive Thai governments had seen it in their interests to intervene militarily in Laos in support of anti-communist political elements. The Thai military, in particular, found this habit difficult to discard after the Pathet Lao finally gained the upper hand in Laos in 1975. They apparently saw continuing resistance to communist rule in Laos as a valuable way of preventing the threat to Thailand which might emanate from Laos if the Pathet Lao (and by association, Hanoi) were allowed to consolidate their control. They may also have seen continuing support for Laotian rebels as a potential bargaining counter against Vietnamese and Laotian backing for the CPT.

In July 1975 the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs reportedly opposed a military plan to use right-wing Laotian General Vang Pao's CIA-trained Meo tribesmen as a "buffer" force against "communist incursions" from Laos. But despite this, and the expulsion of several senior Lao rightist leaders from Thailand later in the year, some elements of the Thai military -- notably in the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) -- apparently continued to support (or at

least acquiesce in) armed operations across the border by Laotian anti-communist groups. Vientiane's concern over what it saw as Thai-sponsored subversion in Laos was indicated in the way it forced the closure of Bangkok's three consulates in Laos (which the Pathet Lao alleged were being used for espionage and gun-running to rebels) and the arrest in August 1975 of two assistant military attaches from the Thai embassy on charges of spying.\textsuperscript{26} The temporary occupation of eight Thai villages by 200 Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops in October 1977 was partially motivated by a desire to ascertain the location of Laotian rebels, according to villagers interrogated by the cross-border intruders.\textsuperscript{27}

Combined with confusion over where exactly the Thai-Laotian boundary lay, particularly along the Mekong River where some (but not all) islands close to the Thai bank belonged to Laos,\textsuperscript{28} the reciprocal support of Laos for the CPT and of some Thai military elements for Laotian rebels resulted in an incessant low intensity border conflict. Thailand and Laos each maintained an indirect and inexpensive means of harassing each other, which neither side appeared willing to relinquish unless the other did likewise. In July 1976, for example, the Thai military claimed that two Pathet Lao regiments stationed across the Mekong posed a "grave threat" to Thailand's 2nd Region

\textsuperscript{26} Norman Peagam, FEER, 22 August 1975, pp. 12-13.

\textsuperscript{27} Bangkok Post, 11 October 1977.

\textsuperscript{28} In an effort to defuse tension on the border in late 1975, Thai Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj blamed the problem on the legacy of the French "imperialist-colonialists". Bangkok Post, 20 November 1975.
Army, although the Pathet Lao claimed (not unreasonably) that this deployment was intended to prevent infiltration by Lao rightists from Thailand. Similarly, the Thai Foreign Minister (Major-General Chatchai Choonhavan) declared that Thailand was ready to terminate its Mekong flotilla's "special operations" -- which frequently aggravated the tense situation on the river -- if Laos would cooperate in eradicating the flow of illegal weapons to the CPT.

In August 1976 Thai Foreign Minister Pichai Rattakul visited Vientiane and Hanoi in the hope of improving relations with Laos and opening formal relations with communist Vietnam. In each capital a joint communique was signed by Pichai and his local counterpart. Laos and Thailand agreed to "respect... each other's right to exist without interference or coercion from outside and without interfering in each other's internal affairs" and to refuse "to let other people use their respective territory in any form as a base for intervention aggression or threat against other countries". Vietnam and Thailand opened diplomatic relations with each other on the basis of four principles, the first of which was:

Respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, mutual interests and peaceful co-existence.

29 Bangkok Post, 13 July 1976.
30 Bangkok Post, 21 November 1975.
Taken at their face value, these statements appeared to imply a disavowal by Laos and Vietnam of their support for the CPT. But in practice, there was not a noticeable decline in their backing for the CPT after August 1976.

The most likely explanation for this apparent duplicity on the part of Vietnam and Laos is related to the Thai military's coup in October 1976 and the subsequent installation of the extreme anti-communist Thanin regime. The new Thai government's words and actions (including continued support for right-wing Laotian rebels operating from Thai territory, and an attempt to revitalize Thailand's security relationship with the United States) exacerbated the tensions in the Thai relationship with Indochina. In these circumstances it is not altogether surprising that Hanoi and Vientiane should have sought to maintain or even increase their influence over the CPT, which could be used as a response to -- or implicit bargaining counter against -- Bangkok's increased pressure on Laos and links with Washington. However, the advent of the more moderate Kriangsak regime in October 1977, coupled with the impact of the widening Sino-Vietnamese rift, were soon drastically to change the Vietnamese and Laotian relationships with the CPT.

33 Hanoi's intensified security concerns after the October 1976 coup in Thailand were encapsulated in a Quan Doi Nhan Dan article in early 1977. Quoted by Hanoi radio in Thai, 0500 gmt, 15 February 1977 (SWB FE/5441/A3/1, 17 February 1977).
Thai Views of the CPT's Links with Vietnam and Laos

The fact that the CPT received assistance from its Indochinese (and Chinese) counterparts by no means implied that the Thai insurgency was engineered from outside Thailand. External support could be increased or decreased, but the evidence shows clearly that the CPT's insurgency was rooted firmly in Thailand's internal social, economic and political contradictions. That the CPT was thriving on profound defects in Thai society was acknowledged by a minority of officers in the Thai military establishment, but the majority portrayed the insurgency as either the criminal disruption of society or as a type of invasion, dependent on support from external communist sources. This dominant military group thought principally in terms of a military solution to the communist problem, combining counter-insurgency drives within the country with an attempt to seal Thailand's borders against infiltration of communist personnel and supplies.

Some senior military officers may have been sincere in their belief that the communist insurgency was an alien phenomenon best dealt with by an overwhelmingly military response (although this approach had failed during the Second Indochina War), but this


attitude also served their own interests. In the first place, it implied that those (particularly the upper echelons of the military and their business associates) who benefited from Thailand's economic, political and social status quo need not relinquish any of their privileges as part of a solution to the problem of insurgency. Secondly, this attitude towards the insurgency meant that the externally- and/or criminally-caused 'threat' could be used as a justification for the repression of human and political rights (including the elimination of leftist and liberal opposition groups) in the interests of "security", while simultaneously legitimizing the very important role of the military in Thai politics, even during the democratic interlude of 1973-76. Thirdly, the adoption of an overwhelmingly military (rather than developmental) approach to the problem provided the armed forces with a seemingly vital role and ensured the continuing large-scale diversion of the country's resources to the military, allowing senior officers to maintain and enhance their prestige, influence and wealth. A supposedly externally-manipulated "communist threat" was also a useful device for obtaining US military aid. For all these reasons, it is important to regard with caution the Thai military's claims on the subject of the CPT's links with Indochina.

36 For example, the spectre of "externally-sponsored subversion" was used to justify the retention of martial law in many Thai provinces and discouraged voters in the northeast from returning left-wing candidates in the April 1976 elections. See Charles E Morrison and Astri Suhrke, Strategies of Survival: the Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Smaller Asian States (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p. 141 and Frank C Darling, "Thailand in 1976: Another Defeat for Constitutional Democracy", Asian Survey, Vol. 17, No. 2 (February 1977), pp. 120-21.
During Thailand's 1973-76 period of democratic rule, both civilian politicians and some elements in the armed forces attempted to reduce the military component in Bangkok's handling of the CPT insurgency. In April 1975 both Prime Minister Kukrit and Foreign Minister Chatuchai Choonhavan asserted that the CPT should be allowed to participate openly in politics, if it ceased its underground operations. The Kukrit government also initiated projects to tackle the basic socioeconomic causes of insurgency including rural poverty and lack of local political participation. But the Thai right-wing, backed by Washington, placed the blame for the increasing CPT activity squarely on Thailand's eastern neighbours. For example, in early 1975 an article in the Bangkok Post claimed that the CPT in the northeast and north was supported by a joint Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese organization run from Hanoi with operating units in Laos. The main role of this "Combined Command" was allegedly to provide the CPT with safe routes for supplies and personnel moving between Thailand and Laos, North Vietnam and China. A secondary role was to provide training facilities for the CPT. It was also reported that Hanoi

37 Bangkok home service, 0001 gmt, 17 April 1975 (SWB FE/4882/8/1-2, 19 April 1975) and 0001 gmt, 26 April 1975 (SWB FW/4889/A3/9, 28 April 1975).

38 Sarasin Viraphol, Directions in Thai Foreign Policy (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Occasional Paper No. 40, 1976), pp. 53-54.

39 "How the Communists get their support", Bangkok Post, 6 April 1975. This article was based on a de-classified, but originally secret, report prepared by the Intelligence staff of the US Army Pacific Command in late 1973 and entitled "The 35th PL/95th NVA Combined Command: External Support to the Thai Insurgency".
referred to Thailand as "war zone D".\textsuperscript{40} This allegation (apparently originating with the US Embassy in Vientiane) appeared to correlate with alleged evidence that the Vietnamese and Laotian communists had plans for the annexation of Thai territory on the west bank of the Mekong.\textsuperscript{41} But it would be unwise to take these reports at face value. These details were first "revealed" by the US Army in early 1975 in an effort to make the Kukrit government "face up to the problem",\textsuperscript{42} at a time when domestic political pressure was forcing the Thai authorities to take measures to end the US military presence in the country. While there is no clear-cut evidence to suggest that Washington mounted a disinformation exercise, the US military and Thai right-wing may have over-emphasized links between the CPT and Hanoi to justify a continuing US military presence in Thailand, particularly in terms of intelligence-gathering facilities.

Throughout 1975, the Thai military continued to exaggerate the implications of Vietnamese and Laotian links with the CPT. Major-General Pramarn Adireksan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, voiced concern over reports that some of the "terrorists" on the border with Laos were actually North Vietnamese troops.\textsuperscript{43} A senior officer in the field -- Nakhon Phanom provincial Police

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} "Intelligence", FEER, 28 February 1975.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Pipake, "Document discloses Hanoi's intentions towards Thailand", Bangkok Post, 30 March 1975.
\item \textsuperscript{42} "Intelligence", FEER, 28 February 1975.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 15 April 1975 (SWB FE/4880/A3/2, 17 April 1975).
\end{itemize}
Commissioner, Police Lieutenant-General Sanan Narinsorasak -- echoed Pramarn's concern in early June when he alleged that Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops had crossed the Laotian border into Thailand to support local CPT insurgents. Acting Supreme Commander General Krit Sivara declared that the CPT had been "reinforced from abroad" with heavy weapons such as recoilless rifles and RPG rockets, and the Thai Border Patrol Police alleged that large consignments of "high-powered war weapons" were being filtered across the Mekong into Thailand for use by "hard-core Vietnamese refugees" and communist insurgents in a "major attempt to 'liberate' Thailand's northeast".

According to the officer commanding the Thai navy's Mekong Flotilla, there had been a "considerable increase" in the infiltration of both arms and personnel to the CPT in the three months since the Pathet Lao effectively took control in Vientiane in early June 1975, with "many Thai communists... crossing the Mekong to undergo political and military training in North Vietnam". In the view of many Thai political and military commentators this apparently increasing support for the CPT was linked to Vietnamese and Laotian plans to sever some or all of Thailand's sixteen north-eastern provinces. But later,

45 Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 14 April 1975 (SWB FE/4880/A3/2, 17 April 1975).
46 Bangkok Post, 15 June 1975.
47 Joel Henri, Indonesian Times, 12 August 1975.
48 See, for example, Democrat Party leader Sawasdi Kamprokab's warning, Bangkok Post, 25 November 1975.
new evidence suggested that the CPT was generally as anxious as the Thai government to keep Vietnamese and Laotian troops off Thai territory, and that the CPT had extracted a pledge from Hanoi that Thai guerillas undergoing training in Vietnam would not be subjected to political indoctrination.49

The Thai press frequently served the interest of elements in the military wishing to maintain the spectre of Vietnamese and Laotian subversion and expansionism. The Bangkok Post greeted Le Duan's speech of 7 February 1976 with an editorial asserting that this "call for regional revolution" made it clear that Vietnam and Laos would not tolerate a non-communist system in Thailand and could be expected to intensify their material and moral support for the CPT.50 Reporting tended to be uncritical and based largely on dubious sources and circumstantial evidence. For example, in July 1976 the Post reported that an "officer of the former Laotian neutralist army who worked closely with the Pathet Lao for 10 months" (and who was by then a refugee in Thailand) had revealed that the Laotian town of Paksane near the Thai border had recently become "an important logistical base" and that the next dry season "could be a hot period for Thailand".51 There was no firm evidence to support these claims.

The most blatant manipulation of the issue of Vietnamese support for the CPT came during the military-sponsored backlash against

49 "Intelligence", FEER, 16 June 1983, p. 11. This report was based on the testimony of a Thai communist who spent three years in Vietnam.

50 Bangkok Post, 16 February 1976.

51 Ibid., 14 July 1976.
democratic rule in October 1976, when the right-wing press and radio claimed, to incite support for the attack on Thammasat University, that the National Students' Centre of Thailand (NSCT) was composed of Vietnamese-supported communists set on destroying the monarchy. Ultimately, the NSCT's alleged indirect link with Vietnam through the CPT was used to justify the military coup that followed the assault on Thammasat.

In the year following the coup, the extreme right-wing regime under Thanin Kraivichien frequently reiterated exaggerated claims of Vietnamese and Laotian support for the CPT. While this may have reflected a genuine concern that Vietnam would take advantage of the impetus received by the CPT after the October 1976 coup as several thousand students and intellectuals fled Bangkok to escape persecution by the new regime, it also represented an attempt to justify the suspension of Thailand's democratic experiment owing to external as well as internal threats. For example, a month after the coup it was reported that over 400 students had crossed into Laos, fifty of whom had been selected by the Pathet Lao for training in Vietnam. Some of the students were alleged to have formed a "Thailand Liberation

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52 The NSCT was a left-wing grouping, centred on Thammasat University in Bangkok, pressing for greater political freedom, a more equitable socio-economic system, and a non-aligned foreign policy. The organization had played a key role in the overthrow of military rule in October 1973.


54 Text of statement by the Administration Reform Party, Bangkok home service, 1200 gmt, 6 October 1976 (SWB FE/5331/B/6, 7 October 1976); Bangkok Thai Television Radio in Thai, 0348 gmt, 6 October 1976 (FBIS-APA-76-195, 6 October 1976).
Movement" to cooperate with Laos and Vietnam against Thailand. A week later, the Governor of Thailand's Nakhon Phanom province claimed that a Thai "government-in-exile" had been formed in Laos. In early 1977, Bangkok reported joint attacks by Thai communists and Pathet Lao troops. Later in the year, a Thai military intelligence officer asserted that Vietnamese and Laotian military officers were being taught Thai by renegade Thai students in southern Laos. The same officer also claimed that a "combined battalion" of 50 Vietnamese, 100 Laotians and 300 Thai communists was operating across the Laotian border with Thailand's northeast.

The Khmer Rouge and the CPT, 1975-78

In the first eighteen months after the fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge an ambivalent relationship developed between Thailand and Cambodia. Despite protestations of friendship, the opening of diplomatic relations and the resumption of trade across the border, there were frequent armed clashes on land and sea between the two countries' forces. Both Phnom Penh and Bangkok had an interest in

56 Interview with Phisan Mulasatsathan, Governor of Nakhon Phanom province, quoted by Bangkok home service, 0001 gmt, 18 November 1976 (SWB FE/5369/A3/2, 20 November 1976).
59 See, for example, Bangkok Post, 13 June 1975; 26 June 1975; 13 December 1975.
maintaining reasonably amicable relations with each other: Thailand was a proximate source of raw materials that even autarkic Democratic Kampuchea needed, and the Thais had an interest in maintaining Cambodia's independence in relation to Vietnam. But the formal reconciliation between the two capitals owed much to Chinese pressure (or at least to Chinese willingness to assist the process) as part both of Beijing's aim to block potential Vietnamese expansion by detente with Bangkok and its drive to cement links with Phnom Penh. Despite their overt willingness to pursue better relations, Thailand and Democratic Kampuchea remained deeply suspicious of each other.

Unlike the Vietnamese and Laotian communists, the Khmer Rouge had not maintained politically or operationally significant relationships with the CPT before 1975. But Vietnamese communist forces based in Cambodia to assist the Khmer Rouge in their struggle against the Lon Nol regime had also supported the CPT, and Khmer Rouge backing for the CPT probably began when the Cambodian communists took over their erstwhile Vietnamese allies' role in supporting the Thai communists' northeast region's southern sector through the so-called "Headquarters 303" camp in Cambodia's Northern Phra Viharn province sometime in late 1975 or early 1976. According to the Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP), cooperation between the CPT and the Khmer Rouge was

subsequently conducted through the medium of the so-called "Siam Organization". For example, in July 1976 the BPP alleged that 300 Thais had been trained earlier in the year at two Siam Organization schools in Cambodia and had infiltrated back into Thailand.61

There is no clear evidence suggesting why the Khmer Rouge opted to support the CPT, but several suggestions seem plausible. Apart from the Cambodian communists' memories of Bangkok's recent intervention in their country during the Second Indochina War, seven or more groups of anti-communist Cambodian (Khmer Serei or Free Khmer) exiles (numbering over 2000 armed personnel) remained active on the Thai-Cambodian border engaged in military activities such as mine-laying and intelligence-gathering.62 According to one report, these Khmer Serei groups were:

... bound up with the nether world of the [Thai] Insurgency Suppression Operations Command (ISOC), where secret budgets and lack of any clear command and control structure effectively allow agents to run their own covert projects with almost no accountability.63

61 The Siam Organization was never referred to by the CPT on the "Voice of the People of Thailand", prompting speculation that it was not connected with the Thai communists and was possibly either a Vietnamese-controlled grouping intended to prevent a Thai-Cambodian alliance (according to some Thai intelligence officers) or a "ploy" by Bangkok's ISOC "to create confusion in the progressive movement" (according to some Thai leftists). But majority opinion in both Thai intelligence and radical circles supported the assessment that the Siam Organization was a joint CPT-Khmer Rouge venture. See "Second thoughts on the 'third party'". FEER, 5 May 1978, pp. 14, 17.


As on the Laotian border it seemed that the Thai military was finding it difficult to give up its habit of sponsoring (or at least sanctioning) cross-border interference. Although Phnom Penh wished for a working relationship with Bangkok, the Thai military's continued connivance at Khmer Serei operations threatened the security of Democratic Kampuchea's western border. The Cambodian leadership may have decided that support for the CPT would be a useful bargaining counter for "trading off" in the future against Thai backing for subversion the other way across the border. Ironically, Thai support for the Khmer Serei may have been based on a similar, but mirror-image, premise.

A second important reason for the Khmer Rouge's backing for the CPT may have been pressure from Beijing, at a time when China was Cambodia's only significant external source of support (particularly in the Khmer Rouge's burgeoning conflict with Vietnam), to do so, perhaps in competition with Laotian and Vietnamese backing for the Thai communists. Although Beijing had reduced its support for the Thai communists very substantially as it strove for closer relations with the civilian government in Bangkok in 1974-75, the Chinese would not have wished Vietnam to take over as the principal external ally of the CPT, which remained the most important Party in non-communist Southeast Asia.

The problems in the frontier zone were exacerbated by the conflicting territorial claims of Bangkok and Phnom Penh to fairly substantial areas of land and sea. Throughout 1976 and until late 1977 the main immediate cause of the border problems appeared to be an attempt by the Khmer Rouge to extend a cordon sanitaire (already 20 km
deep on the Cambodian side) to the Thai side of the border along the 140 km stretch of ill-defined and relatively featureless frontier terrain from the border town or Aranyaprathet north to Ta Priya district at the foot of the Banthat mountains.\textsuperscript{64} Such a buffer would have reduced the security threat perceived from internal dissidents' attempts to link up with the Thai-based Khmer Serei and from Thai efforts to exert sovereignty over disputed border areas. Naturally, this policy met stiff resistance from the Thai armed forces, and there were fierce armed clashes between Thai and Cambodian troops.\textsuperscript{65} The accession to power in Bangkok of the Thanin regime after the October 1976 coup hastened the breakdown of restraint on the border, and increased the Cambodian communists' interest in backing the CPT in order to compensate for the loss of Democratic Kampuchea's diplomatic influence in Bangkok.\textsuperscript{66}

Although the frontier conflict intensified in the aftermath of the October 1976 coup,\textsuperscript{67} during 1977 there was little mention of any CPT role in the Thai-Cambodian frontier strife: this may have been because the Siam Organization was working so closely with the Khmer Rouge that its involvement was camouflaged. Perhaps this was a deliberate policy on Phnom Penh's part as it attempted to break out of its diplomatic isolation by improving relations with the ASEAN countries. Ieng Sary averred, when visiting Malaysia and Singapore in April 1977,\textsuperscript{68} that the Khmer Rouge had no interest in promoting

\textsuperscript{64} Richard Nations, \textit{FEER}, 14 July 1987, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Bangkok Post}, 22 February 1976; 30 June 1976, 1 August 1976.
revolution outside Cambodia. Another possible explanation is that the Siam Organization was building up its strength and assimilating the new recruits that it had gained after the October 1976 coup in Thailand, in preparation for the offensive that began in late 1977. Certainly it appeared that cross-border sanctuaries in Cambodia, as well as in Laos, became more important for the CPT after the coup.

In contrast to the previous two years, in 1978 the principal trouble on the border appeared to result directly from a CPT (rather than Khmer Rouge) initiative. By the beginning of the year over a thousand armed Thai communists were reportedly active on the Thai-Cambodian border, which the Siam Organization divided into three "Operation Zones". CPT activities were supported by base camps and training schools up to 25 km inside Cambodia. From late 1977 cross-border attacks on Thai villages shifted from the Aranyaprathet-Ta Priya section to the northern stretch of the Thai-Cambodian frontier. According to defectors and captured documents, the CPT was anxious to "liberate", by 1979, Lahan Sai and Ta Priya, two Thai

67 For reports of typical frontier clashes, see Bangkok Post, 5 November 1976; 25 November 1976; 2 December 1976; 29 December 1976; 21 January 1977. At the end of January 1977, 34 Thais were massacred in what appeared to be the most determined Khmer Rouge effort so far to depopulate in Thai border region by demoralizing its inhabitants, Bangkok Post, 31 January 1977.

68 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 29 April 1977, p. 11.

69 Bangkok Post, 14 February 1978.

70 Ibid., 14 March 1978.


provinces at the foot of the Banthat range. Not only would this give the CPT bases inside Thailand, but it would also secure supply lines through the Banthat mountains into Thailand's central plains. In turn this was apparently part of a wider Thai communist plan to link the northern and southern arms of the CPT's military structure, giving the communists strategic mobility inside Thailand.73

In 1978 the Cambodian border area accounted for 42 per cent of all insurgency-related "incidents" in Thailand.74 February saw the first of a series of mass kidnappings by the CPT, assisted by the Khmer Rouge,75 when 350 villagers were abducted and taken to a training camp at the extreme south of the Thai-Cambodian border.76 In the following weeks there were several similar raids, and by July 1978 at least 1200 Thais (and perhaps many more)77 had been seized.78

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73 Ibid., loc. cit. Stuart-Fox argued that this CPT thrust into Thailand from Cambodia "represented an attempt by the Chinese, working through the Kampuchean in much the same way as the Vietnamese worked through the Lao, to challenge Vietnamese influence within the northeastern insurgency". (Stuart-Fox, "Tensions within the Thai Insurgency", p. 193.) Undoubtedly, there was active debate between Hanoi- and Beijing-oriented elements in the CPT, but to attribute the strategies of different regional CPT commands to manipulation by Vietnam and China seems far-fetched.

74 John McBeth, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 19.

75 On request, the Khmer Rouge's 755th Regiment provided the CPT with manpower back-up for these operations. John McBeth, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 19.


77 Up to 5000, according to John McBeth, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 19.

According to Mao Ze Dong "the guerilla must be to the population as little fishes in the water". A CPT cadre interviewed several years after the kidnappings claimed that the bizarre objective was to bring the "water" (that is, a mass base) to the Siam Organization "fishes" across the border in Cambodia. Contemporary reports in the Thai press, based on the evidence of some who later escaped from their captors referred to the indoctrination and training of villagers.

Apart from the objective of rapidly creating a mass base before driving into the Banthat range, Thai analysts also thought the kidnappings were aimed at creating a CPT-controlled cordon sanitaire along a part of the border, particularly along the Thai communists' main supply and infiltration routes into the Banthats. The CPT had some success in achieving this objective: an official estimate put at 25,000 the number of villagers who moved from the border to more secure areas.

Although the Thai authorities intensified their counter-insurgency efforts (including strikes across the border by the air force and special forces) in the sensitive areas bordering northern Cambodia from March 1978, Kriangsak (who had become Prime Minister after Thanin's ouster in October 1977), apparently judged that aggressive Thai military action across the border -- which he had

80 Bangkok Post, 14 and 29 March 1978.
82 Ibid., p. 14; John McBeth, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 19.
threatened in July 1977 -- might work against Thailand's broader interests, as well as exacerbating the local problem. In early 1978 Democratic Kampuchea already appeared to be dangerously at Hanoi's mercy: Kriangsak probably saw little sense in further weakening Thailand's eastern neighbour, which played a continuing role as a buffer against Vietnam.

Kriangsak emphasized diplomatic means in attempting to ameliorate the border situation. But visits by Thai Foreign Minister Upadit Pachariangkul to Phnom Penh in February 1978 and by his Cambodian counterparts, Ieng Sary, to Bangkok in July did not achieve decisive results. While both sides were highly conciliatory in their declarations, they skirted around the central issue -- Khmer Rouge support for the CPT (and to a lesser extent, Thai backing for the Khmer Serei). Upadit was careful not to blame the continuing strife on Cambodian support for the Thai communists, suggesting instead that a "third force" was behind the problem. Similarly, although it was agreed to upgrade Thai-Cambodian diplomatic relations when Sary visited Bangkok, negligible progress was achieved on the border question. Some Thai observers speculated that the Khmer Rouge intended to wait until the CPT had vacated their Cambodian bases before commencing serious talks on the issue. Phnom Penh would then

have been in a much better position to argue that Thailand should cease its support for Cambodian rebel groups. 84

In October 1978, Ieng Sary asserted in Manila that Cambodia was not supporting the CPT, but at the same time expressed sympathy for "people's liberation movements abroad". 85 There may have been at least an element of sincerity in this denial of support for the Thai communists. Increasingly threatened internally by provincial rebellion and externally by the Vietnamese army, the Khmer Rouge regime may have decided to discourage the CPT from aggressive operations along the Thai border. Moreover, the CPT reportedly decided that abduction was not "an effective mass mobilization technique". 86 In any event, from Bangkok's viewpoint there was a marked improvement in the border situation from September 1978. But by the end of the year, Hanoi's subjugation of Cambodia rendered speculation on the subject redundant.

Thai Views of the CPT-Khmer Rouge Relationship

The relationship between the Thai and Cambodian communists was apparently less alarming to governments in Bangkok during the 1975-77 period than Vietnamese and Laotian support for the CPT. Unlike Vietnam, Cambodia was not a major military power and, although there

85 Bangkok Post, 21 October 1978.
86 John McBeth, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 19.
were disagreements between Bangkok and Phnom Penh over border demarcation, these disputes were minor compared to Vientiane's alleged irredentism in relation to the northeast Thailand.

But neither the fact that Khmer Rouge links with the CPT were not coupled in Thai perceptions to a wider threat, nor Bangkok's interest in fostering a working relationship with Democratic Kampuchea in order to maintain Cambodia in its traditional role as a buffer state in relation to Vietnam, prevented elements in the Thai military from exaggerating the dangers of the Cambodian border situation. Such exaggeration was particularly evident under the Thanin regime in 1977; constant instability on the frontier served to justify domestic political repression and increased defence expenditure. Moreover, there was evidence that local field commanders, such as the 'Young Turk' leader Lieutenant-Colonel Prachak Sawangjit, may have been purposely provocative in order to enhance their prospects for promotion. 88

Vietnam and Communism in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines, 1975-78

Although concern was greatest in Bangkok, there was also considerable unease in the other ASEAN capitals concerning the impact


that the communist successes in Indochina in 1975 might have on
domestic insurgencies, despite their physical distance from Indochina
and the historical lack of contact between local and Indochinese
communists. The fact that no delegates from the Malayan, Indonesian
or Philippine communist parties were invited to the Vietnamese
Workers' Party congress in late 1976 was indicative of the lack of
importance attached to these parties by Hanoi.

Malaysia

Official discomfiture was particularly evident in Kuala Lumpur,
although the only evidence of Vietnamese involvement in the insurgency
of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) was the latter's use of new
booby trap and ambush techniques, which was seen by some informed
sources as confirming that some CPM cadres had received training in
North Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Insofar as the CPM
received any substantial external assistance, this came from Beijing
rather than Hanoi or other Indochinese communist sources. But in any
case this support was overwhelmingly moral rather than material.

89 But in the 1930s a Vietnamese, Lai Tak, became General Secretary
of the CPM. It was later discovered that Lai Tak was also a
British agent, thus contributing to the phenomenon of repeated
purges in the CPM.

90 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 14 January 1977, pp. 16-17. A delegation
from the CPT was invited.

91 Australian Financial Review, 24 June 1975; Richard Sim, Malaysia:
Containing the Communist Insurgency (London: Institute for the
Vietnamese cadre Hoang Huu Quynh claimed that CPM members were
trained at the Hoa Binh school. See Thai Quang Trung, p. 643.
Whereas the Thai insurgency had been of some interest and usefulness to Hanoi during the Vietnam war, the CPM's insurrection had not. Despite this apparent lack of common interest between the CPM and its Indochinese counterparts, the CPM's radio station, the **Voice of the Malayan Revolution (VMR)** (based in southern China) was quick to claim that "the disasters of the Lon Nol and Thieu cliques were also defeats for the Razak and Lee Kuan Yew cliques". But the CPM's pro-Beijing orientation was clear from the way that it contrasted the "great, consistent and effective assistance" that the Cambodian revolution had received from China with Moscow's "collusion" with Lon Nol. Nevertheless, at a declaratory level relations with Vietnam were still cordial: in the words of the Vietnamese Workers' (Communist) Party's greeting to the CPM on its 45th anniversary, Hanoi was

... convinced that with our long-standing relations, and with mutual support and encouragement in the course of our revolutionary struggle, these close relations will be further consolidated.

This exercise in mutual congratulation coincided with a distinct upsurge in CPM activity: on 1 April 1975 rockets were fired at the Kuala Lumpur air base and bombs exploded near several army camps.

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94 VNA in English, 0243 gmt, 30 April 1975 (SWB FE/4892/A3/8, 1 May 1975).
Over the next few months there were frequent serious incidents, with soldiers being ambushed and killed and Special Branch detectives assassinated. The campaign climaxed with the bombing of Kuala Lumpur's National Monument (commemorating the defeat of the CPM in the 1948-60 Emergency) on 26 August and an attack on the Police Field Force headquarters in the capital a week later. Superficially, it seemed that there was a link between events in Indochina and this new CPM campaign: indeed, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Razak, seems to have believed this at first, asserting in mid-April that "...communist elements in our country have stepped up their activities as a result of communist successes in Vietnam and Cambodia". A more sanguine view was taken by the Minister of Home Affairs, Ghazali Shafie, who was responsible for internal security and was in a better position to assess the situation accurately: he described the most recent terrorist incident as a "temporary setback having no real connection with the war in Indochina". By the time that Razak next expressed an opinion on the issue it seemed that he had been properly briefed for he claimed that there was "no connection" between the terrorist upsurge in Malaysia and the collapse of the Phnom Penh and Saigon regimes.

The escalation in the CPM's guerilla activities was probably

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95 K Das, FEER, 5 September 1975, pp. 28-29 and 12 September 1975, pp. 10-II.
96 Straits Times, 16 April 1975.
97 Kuala Lumpur home service in English, 1400 gmt, 14 April 1975 (SWB FE/4879/B/2, 16 April 1975).
98 Straits Times, 5 May 1975.
largely due to a factor quite independent of events in Indochina. Several years earlier, a three-way split and occurred in the Party.\textsuperscript{99} This schism had its origins in a purge ordered by the CPM's North Malayan Bureau (which believed that the Party was infiltrated by government agents), resulting in the execution of two hundred revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{100} Elements in the CPM's 8th Regiment and the 2nd District of the 12th Regiment, under powerful local commanders, resisted the purge and hived themselves off from the Party, forming (respectively) the CPM (Revolutionary Faction) and the CPM (Marxist-Leninist).\textsuperscript{101} Unlike the "orthodox" CPM, which favoured a classic Maoist "long war" strategy of gradually working towards the domination of rural areas to encircle the towns, with an eventual uprising by a united front of peasants and workers, the CMP(RF) and CMP(M-L) appeared to favour a more urban-oriented style of "anomic terrorism". The establishment of diplomatic relations between the Chinese and Malaysian governments in May 1974 may have exacerbated the dissatisfaction of some CPM cadres with the party's pro-Beijing orientation.

It was this split in the CPM and the subsequent move towards

\textsuperscript{98} Straits Times, 5 May 1975.


\textsuperscript{100} Sim, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{101} "How real is the Red Threat?", Asiaweek, 24 April 1981, p. 31; Sim, p. 8.
urban activity by the splinter groups that were the main reason for the eruption of revolutionary violence that made 1974 and 1975 Malaysia's most troubled years in terms of internal security since 1958.¹⁰² There may even have been an element of competition as the CPM's factions strove to outdo each other: the attack on the National Monument was attributed to the CPM (M-L)¹⁰³ while the assassinations of Special Branch officers were believed to have been carried out by the "orthodox" CPM.¹⁰⁴ The communist successes in Indochina may have been a contributory factor to the CPM violence of 1975, but the fact that there had also been an upsurge in CPM activity in 1973-74,¹⁰⁵ beginning almost two years before the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon seems to confirm that the pace of the insurgency was determined largely by factors independent of the situation in Indochina. Although intelligence sources subsequently alleged that small consignments of arms that may have originated in Indochina were reaching the CPM in 1975, there was no evidence to suggest anything like the expected flood of weapons from former US stockpiles abandoned in Vietnam. Indeed, a large proportion of CPM weapons captured in the late 1970s dated back to the Emergency.¹⁰⁶ Those arms which could

¹⁰² Clementson, p. 53.
¹⁰³ South China Morning Post, 11 September 1975.
¹⁰⁴ K Das, FEER, 1 April 1977, pp. 18-20.
¹⁰⁵ This upsurge in guerilla warfare was concentrated against the police Special Branch, and culminated in the assassination of the Inspector-General of Police in June 1974. See Harvey Stockwin, FEER, 17 June 1974, pp. 14-16.
¹⁰⁶ Clementson, p. 56.
have come from Vietnam might alternatively have been supplied by the Khmer Rouge, or more likely, by Thai smugglers and gun-runners. Apart from Chinese-supplied funds and facilities for radio broadcasting, external aid to the CPM appeared minimal throughout the late 1970s. Nevertheless, Hussein Onn, the Malaysian Prime Minister, reacted quite adversely to Le Duan's speech of February 1976 (which could be construed as expressing support for regional communist insurgents).

**Singapore**

The CPM did not recognize Malaysia and Singapore as separate political entities, and still worked towards the eventual establishment of a People's Republic of Malaya, comprising peninsula Malaysia and Singapore. But an easily-policed society, an efficient Special Branch, and the success of the People's Action Party's economic policies had undermined most local support for the communists in Singapore by 1975. The most important incident relating to Singaporean communism in that year was the arrest of six members of a clearly Chinese-oriented "Mao Tse Tung Thought League" linked to the CPM. The Singaporean leadership was thus not greatly concerned with the impact that the Indochinese communist victories might have on the island republic's internal security situation. There was nevertheless a profound concern with the domestic stability of Thailand and Malaysia, as any changes there might have important

107 Kuala Lumpur domestic service in English, 1030 gmt, 7 March 1976 (FBIS-APA-76-46, 8 March 1976, 01).

repercussions in Singapore. But even here, no immediate problem was envisaged -- in Lee Kuan Yew's opinion:

... Thailand has ample time to work out what is in her best interests. The North Vietnamese will take many years to mend a war-shattered Vietnam before undertaking further adventures in helping Thai insurgents.\(^\text{109}\)

Lee later revealed that in 1975 he was thinking in terms of a ten to fifteen year interval before the Vietnamese would have enough spare capacity "to spread revolution to all the unenlightened, capitalist countries around them".\(^\text{110}\) But Lee's Foreign Minister, Rajaratnam, nevertheless warned Hanoi against interfering in the ASEAN countries\(^\text{111}\) after Le Duan's February 1976 declaration. Lee showed considerable prescience in postulating that Chinese-influenced Cambodia might come into conflict with Vietnam -- and thus act as a "buffer" to Vietnamese expansion -- and could "buy us considerable time".\(^\text{112}\) But he was less accurate in warning that the "vast quantities of weapons -- many of the latest US design -- now in the possession of the Vietnamese government" might become a source of "incalculable mischief" for the rest of Southeast Asia.\(^\text{113}\)

\(^{109}\) Straits Times, 8 April 1975.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 7 October 1978.

\(^{111}\) "The Week", FEER, 12 March 1976, p. 5.

\(^{112}\) Singapore home service in English, 1330 gmt, 3 May 1975 (SWB FE/4896/A3/8, 6 May 1975).

\(^{113}\) Straits Times, 2 May 1975.
Indonesia

Soon after the Indochinese communist victories President Suharto claimed that he expected the Indochinese regimes to "encourage the local communists and indeed assist them to go further", possibly by transferring surplus weapons. But Suharto's claims were probably more a reflection of a wish to capitalize on recent events in Indochina as a means of securing increased military assistance from Washington, than of the Indonesian military's threat assessments. Indeed, the events of 1965 (when Beijing was allegedly implicated in a communist attempt to seize power in Jakarta), the pro-China orientation of not only the majority of surviving Indonesian Communist Party members but also the few remaining communist insurgents in Kalimantan, and a continuing comparison by the "generation of '45" of Indonesia's revolution with Vietnam's, meant that it was China rather than Vietnam which was usually seen in Jakarta as the main vector of communist subversion.

Jusuf Wanandi, Executive Director of the influential CSIS "think-tank" argued that even if Hanoi decided to support subversion in the ASEAN countries,

114 Interview with Lee Kuan Yew, quoted by Hamish McDonald, National Times, 28 July 1975.

115 The "generation of '45" was composed of senior Indonesian military figures -- including President Suharto -- who had participated in the war of independence and who now dominated Indonesia's armed forces and government.

116 CSIS (Centre for Strategic and International Studies), while officially independent of the government, was widely recognized as reflecting the views of Lieutenant-General Ali Murtopo, deputy head of BAKIN, the Suharto regime's intelligence coordinating body.
... it should be noted that all communist parties in the South-east Asian region still lean towards Peking and not towards Hanoi. Thus, whatever aid the Vietnamese might grant them would have only limited impact. 117

Another official Indonesian commentary 118 pointed out that it was expected that "the communists" would step up their "subversive activities" outside Indochina, but that this should not be seen as part of a Vietnamese policy of expansion: such an upsurge in communist activity (as was "already felt in Malaysia") would more likely be sponsored by Beijing as a way of limiting "Moscow-supported Hanoi's sphere of influence".

But the Jakarta regime's claims that the communist victories in Indochina might encourage, directly or indirectly, the Indonesian communist movement, should be regarded with due scepticism. The upper echelons of the Indonesian military had a range of vested interests, in both domestic and international spheres, in the continuing existence of an externally-supported "communist threat". As well as helping to secure political, military and economic support from the West (and especially the United States), the threat of a communist revival provided a justification for the continued repression of political and human rights. 119


The Philippines

There was probably less concern in Manila than in any other ASEAN capital regarding the likely impact of the new situation in Indochina on local communist insurgency. Although President Marcos warned against the danger of "massive infiltration" in support of domestic insurrections, he was also "confident" that the Philippines was effectively insulated from events in Indochina by the interjacence of the South China Sea.120 There was apparently some anxiety in Manila that surplus arms from Indochina should not find their way to the communist New People's Army (NPA) or the Muslim separatist guerrillas,121 but the indisputably indigenous origins of the NPA coupled with the Philippine armed forces subservience to civilian authority in matters of foreign policy meant that there was generally no attempt to blame the country's current communist insurgency problems on Vietnamese interference. Marcos instead stressed the need for a developmental approach to internal security,122 although this rhetoric was not always matched with practical efforts in the years that followed.123

As early as 1975, a CPP Central Committee plenum reportedly displayed a wish to move the party towards greater independence of

120 Manila home service in English, 1000 gmt, 6 May 1975 (SWB FE/4899/B/3, 9 May 1975); South China Morning Post, 29 April 1975.
121 Straits Times, 23 July 1975; 20 December 1976.
122 Ibid., 29 January 1976.
123 See, for example, Michael Richardson, "How not to mount a counter-insurgency campaign", Pacific Defence Reporter, May 1982, pp. 56-58, 64.
China when it decided to delete the phrase "Mao Ze Dong thought" from the movement's full title. This move may have been spurred by the successes of the Vietnamese communists -- who were increasingly autonomous of Beijing -- but no conclusive evidence is available.

The Impact of the Sino-Vietnamese Rift and the Third Indochina War on Communist Parties in the ASEAN States

Thailand

The communist parties of the ASEAN states, like the governments of these countries, saw it as in their interests to avoid taking sides in the intensifying dispute between Hanoi (and to a lesser extent, Vientiane) and the Beijing-Phnom Penh axis in the 1976-78 period. This was particularly so in the case of the CPT which, while not dependent on external assistance, valued the support that it received from all three Indochina countries, especially as Chinese material assistance had diminished since the opening of relations between Bangkok and Beijing in 1975. Although the CPT's international line emphasized support for China and opposition to the Soviet Union (which it had regarded as "revisionist" since the late 1960s), in the northeast the Thai communists received important backing from Hanoi and Vientiane, both of which became oriented increasingly away from Beijing and towards Moscow from 1975. The CPT's ability to maintain

124 Personal interview with Philippine academic, University of the Philippines, Manila, March 1981.
amicable relations with both sides of the growing Beijing-Hanoi rift was exemplified by the continuing transit of its cadres to and from Beijing by way of Laos and Vietnam. But, perhaps partly because of a concern that too close a relationship with Vietnamese and Laotian communism might jeopardize the independence of the CPT (or a communist-ruled Thailand in the future), as well as for ideological, historical and ethnic reasons, the CPT's top level leadership -- even in the northeast -- remained politically oriented towards Beijing rather than Hanoi.

However, there is substantial evidence that the CPT was increasingly riven with conflict over issues of ideology, strategy and external links in the late 1970s. A debate over revolutionary strategy which followed the success of the student-led uprising in Bangkok in October 1973 was exacerbated by the large numbers of urban radicals who fled the capital to join the CPT after the October 1976 coup ended Thailand's democratic experiment. After the CPT refused an offer of direct Vietnamese and Laotian assistance to help "liberate" northeast Thailand in late 1977, Hanoi and Vientiane apparently had few qualms about effectively disavowing their links with the Thai communists. The September 1978 Thai-Vietnamese communique was followed by Thai-Laotian accords in January and April 1979: these three agreements deprived the CPT of not only Vietnamese and Laotian moral and material support, but also its sanctuaries in Laos. Simultaneously, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia deprived the CPT of its other safe havens in Indochina. Vietnamese and Laotian attempts to improve relations with Bangkok by disowning the CPT were matched by a substantial cut in Chinese assistance to the Thai
communists as Beijing strove to involve Thailand in the strategic encirclement of Vietnam.

The combination of bitter internecine debate and drastic cuts in the CPT's external assistance seriously damaged morale within the Party, and enabled the Thai government to implement a new counter-insurgency campaign (emphasizing an amnesty for CPT defectors) with great success in the late 1970s and early 1980s.\(^{125}\)

Soon after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia it was reported\(^{126}\) that the Thai authorities' immediate fear was that Hanoi would use its newly consolidated control of territory along the length of Thailand's eastern border to increase dramatically its assistance to the CPT. But in the light of the Vietnamese and Laotian disavowals of support for the CPT (in September 1978 and January 1979 respectively) and Hanoi's obvious wish to procure Thai acquiescence in its occupation of Cambodia it seems unlikely that this was truly a pressing worry for Bangkok. To be sure, elements within the Thai military wished to exploit fears concerning the relationship between Thai communism and Indochina, just as they manipulated a putative threat of direct invasion by Vietnam. But when interviewed in early 1981, the Secretary-General of the National Security Council asserted that although the CPT was currently receiving only negligible amounts of material aid from the People's Republic of China, and was making...

\(^{125}\) For a detailed account of the debates within the CPT over revolutionary strategy and external allegiances in the late 1970s, see Appendix 1, pp. 518-44 below.

efforts to be more self-sufficient, it remained oriented towards Beijing and essentially Maoist in outlook. And despite Bangkok's continuing concern over Vietnam's role in Cambodia, in 1980 the Thai Prime Minister, Prem, ranked the mainstream CPT as "Thailand's No. 1 enemy".

A desire to manipulate the threat probably provided part of the motivation for the emphasis given by Thai military sources to the dangers posed by the splintering of a pro-Vietnamese faction from the CPT from 1979. According to Thai military intelligence a new Thai communist party called the Thai Northeastern Liberation Party (TNLP) was formed in Laos in 1979. Another Thai security source claimed that the new "party" was merely a component of an "Indochinese Communist Party" which had been set up in March 1979. But both sources asserted that the new organization's goal was to gain control of Thailand's northeast, as part of Hanoi's strategy for extending an

127 Personal interview with Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, Bangkok, 20 March 1981.

128 Straits Times, 26 January 1981.

129 For example, the Supreme Command Chief of Staff (Lieutenant-General Thuanthong Suwannathat) claimed that Thailand might have to face "enemies on two fronts" -- that is, from both "pro-Chinese" and Vietnamese-influenced communist movements. Nation Review (Bangkok), 12 June 1979.


131 Colonel Sangiam Rattanasmakon, spokesman for the 2nd Army Region, reported by Agence France Presse in English, 0942 gmt, 21 June 1979 (SWB FE/6149/A3/8, 23 June 1979).
"Indochina Federation". Unlike the CPT, the TNLP (or "Isaan Liberation Movement") was allegedly willing to allow Vietnamese forces to play a significant role in "liberating" the northeast. According to one senior Thai army officer the new insurgent movement backed by Vietnamese forces could be expected to move against the northeast in two or three years' time -- after Hanoi had consolidated its gains in Cambodia. In September 1979 the Director of the Information Office of the Thai Supreme Command claimed that a "first batch" of 60 TNLP members had infiltrated into Thailand from Laos. After General Prem Tinsulanond came to power in February 1980, Thai military and intelligence sources often emphasized the continuing threat allegedly posed by Vietnamese and Laotian support for the TNLP. Indeed, Prem himself asserted:

... the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea is part of an expansionist campaign likely to be extended to the sixteen provinces of Northeast Thailand proclaimed as future targets for the so-called Liberation Movement who aim to detach these provinces from Thailand and join them... to the "Federation of Indochina".

However, the highest levels of the Thai political and security establishment apparently recognized that the Thai communist

135 Speech delivered by General Prem Tinsulanond, Thai Prime Minister, at dinner hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, Bangkok, 10 September 1980.
insurgency's only significant external links from 1979 were with Beijing. In September 1979 Kriangsak dismissed as "nonsense" rumours concerning a Vietnamese-backed Thai communist movement.¹³⁶ According to the Chief-of-Staff of the Thai Supreme Command, General Saiyud Kerdphol, pro-Vietnamese Thai communists were "too weak" to form a rival party to the CPT.¹³⁷ Saiyud later stressed that although "Vietnamese-fostered insurgency" was a more likely threat to Thai security than a conventional invasion by Vietnam, it was still not a major security concern for Bangkok.¹³⁸ The Secretary-General of the National Security Council, Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, asserted in early 1981 that there was "no fear of a pro-Vietnamese faction of the CPT supported through Laos and Kampuchea", and stressed that the so-called TNLP was composed only of former students and politicians and did not field fighting troops.¹³⁹

Unlike the CPT, the communist parties in the ASEAN countries other than Thailand were not profoundly affected by the renewal of conflict in Indochina from 1978. But the consolidation of Vietnam's control over all Indochina did re-awaken concern in these countries' security establishments that Hanoi might attempt to intensify its links with local communist movements.

¹³⁶ Winnacker, p. 19. Kriangsak's apparent cynicism may be explained by his wish to maintain a moderately conciliatory policy towards Hanoi, despite Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.


¹³⁹ Personal interview with Prasong, 20 March 1981.
In October 1978, Pham Van Dong pledged in Kuala Lumpur that Vietnam would refrain from interference in Malaysia's internal affairs, implying a renunciation of support for the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM). As was the case with Dong's similar promise in Bangkok a few weeks previously, this assurance appears to have been aimed at improving Vietnam's image in the region compared with Beijing's. In view of the Malay establishment's traditional suspicion of China, the Vietnamese leadership may have thought that it would be particularly worthwhile to stress Vietnam's supposedly peaceful intentions towards Malaysia. In Kuala Lumpur, Dong went so far as to lay a wreath at the National Monument commemorating government security force personnel killed fighting the CPM in the 1948-60 "Emergency".

In practical terms, Dong's assurances to the Malaysian authorities were made at little cost to Vietnam: Hanoi's links with the CPM had never been more than tenuous. Unlike the CPT, which did not openly and unambiguously attack Hanoi until the middle of 1979, the CPM's response to Dong's assurances to Hussein Onn was both soon in coming and vitriolic, asserting that "Dong's despicable behaviour" was "the inevitable outcome of the expansionist policy that is being..."
carried out abroad by the Vietnamese authorities". But the CPM lost virtually nothing as a result of this move by Hanoi to appease Kuala Lumpur. The three CPM factions were highly self-sufficient in terms of their material needs: in particular they had never used sanctuaries in Indochina like the CPT. The 'rump' or orthodox CPM remained ideologically loyal to Beijing. Although the CPM(RF) and CPM(M-L) factions were less tied than the mainstream CPM to a Maoist strategy, it would have been extremely difficult for even these splinter groups to develop an anti-Chinese, pro-Vietnamese orientation, due to their largely Chinese ethnic composition.

Despite their knowledge that the CPM was essentially a Beijing-oriented movement, the Malaysian authorities were unconvinced that Hanoi could be trusted not to support insurgent groups in the region, particularly in the light of the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia. According to Ghazali Shafie, the Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs (responsible for Kuala Lumpur's internal security policy), the installation by Hanoi of the Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh confirmed that:

... whatever assurance was given to the states in ASEAN there is always that nagging suspicion that when and if Vietnam decided to pursue the creation of a Comecon in Southeast Asia, in line with the aim of Vietnamese Southeast Asian hegemony, Vietnam would have no compunction in directing all her energies towards producing cadres who would be the creatures tasked to subvert the ASEAN states.


143 See K Das, FEER, 8 June 1979, pp. 20-1.

According to one journalist,\footnote{145} Ghazali feared that the Hanoi-oriented TNLP might foment rebellion in Thailand's northeast, setting the scene for Vietnamese military intervention there. The consequent diversion of Thai military attention away from Thailand's southern border might have a serious effect on efforts to contain the CPM.

Official concern in Kuala Lumpur that the new conflict in Indochina might necessitate a weakening of military pressure on the CPT became apparent by mid-1979.\footnote{146} It seemed possible that the Thai Fourth Army (which deployed only one division to assist the Border Patrol Police in securing Thailand's seventeen southernmost provinces against the CPM, CPT, Muslim separatists and bandits) might be required by Bangkok to redeploy some of its forces to the border with Cambodia following the Vietnamese occupation of that country. The Malaysian armed forces already had the new responsibility of patrolling the east coast to detect landings by seaborne refugees from Vietnam and would be overstretched if they were obliged to compensate for the withdrawal of Thai forces from the border area.

If the various CPM factions had planned to take advantage of the Thai and Malaysian security forces' new commitments to intensify their armed activities they were to be disappointed. The Thai-Cambodian border and refugee situations never became so serious as to divert the attention of Bangkok's and Kuala Lumpur's forces from their primary counter-insurgency role, and the Malaysian security forces were able


\footnote{146} See K Das, \textit{FEER}, 8 June 1979, p. 21.
to inflict serious casualties on the CPM in the 1979-81 period. The CPM was thus unable to make any significant advances as a result of the renewed regional instability.

Singapore

In October 1978, Pham Van Dong and Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, agreed on a pledge of mutual non-interference similar to those Dong had recently signed in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. While Dong's promises were welcomed by the Singaporean leadership, it seemed that it would be some time before Hanoi's recently militant revolutionary rhetoric was forgotten. But in Lee's view the conflict in Cambodia between the Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin regime and the Khmer Rouge would provide a respite for Thailand and the other ASEAN countries from the threat of Vietnamese-supported insurgencies. Lee asserted that once "mopping-up" operations by Vietnamese and Heng Samrin regime forces in Cambodia had been completed, increased communist insurgency in the ASEAN countries would become a probability. His view that the Khmer Rouge would act as a buffer for the ASEAN states against Vietnamese expansionism had thus changed

147 See, for example, "Malaysia claims 36 killed in war against guerrillas", Sydney Morning Herald, 17 July 1980.

148 Text of joint statement by Pham Van Dong and Lee Kuan Yew, VNA in English, 1815 gmt, 17 October 1978 (SWB FE/5946/A3/1, 19 October 1978).

149 Straits Times, 17 October 1978.

150 K Das and Peter Weintraub, FEER, 27 October 1978.

151 Interview with Lee Kuan Yew, Straits Times, 9 February 1979.
little since 1975. Lee believed (or purported to believe), in classic "domino theory" fashion, that a continuing conflict in Cambodia would, by absorbing Vietnam's supposedly adventurist energies, "buy time" in which the ASEAN countries (particularly Thailand and Malaysia) could work to eliminate the domestic weaknesses which provided the basis for externally exploitable communist insurgency. But the Singaporean leadership probably had ulterior motives in adopting a "hawkish" position on the "Vietnamese threat". These included concern over the implications of Vietnam's direct military intervention in Cambodia for the security of small states such as Singapore, the need to promote a climate of confidence amongst foreign investors, and a wish to consolidate national unity and maintain the legitimacy of the People's Action Party.

Indonesia

Lacking a major active communist problem of its own, Jakarta was less concerned than the other ASEAN governments over the possibility of Vietnamese support for regional insurgencies in the 1978-81 period. But the invasion of Cambodia did seem to result in greater Indonesian concern. Jusuf Wanandi, who had argued in 1977 that Vietnam could not exert more than limited influence over regional communist parties even if it wished to, was by the end of 1979 propounding that although


an open invasion of Thailand was "unlikely", Vietnam's military presence on the Thai border and its "links with the CPT" made it the most immediate external threat to the region. By this stage, of course, Hanoi was able, with sincerity, to deny any links with the CPT. There were indications of a small Hanoi-oriented Thai communist splinter group, but there was no evidence that it fielded any fighting forces or posed any tangible threat to Thailand. It is probable that Wanandi was attempting to emphasize the gravity with which Jakarta viewed the regional security situation. From the Indonesian viewpoint the continuing conflict in Cambodia appeared as a destabilizing influence on the rest of Southeast Asia, likely to lead to renewed, and unwelcome, great power interference in the region. In the longer term, China was still seen as the most important external threat to the ASEAN region.

The Philippines

The available evidence points to a debate in the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA) after the outbreak of the Third Indochina War, which was comparable in scope and duration to that which occurred simultaneously in the CPT. The CPP was established in late 1968 "on the foundation of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Ze Dong thought", after the original Philippine communist party, the pro-Soviet PKP, had decided to capitulate to the Philippine government in order to work within a legal political framework. In the first months after the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia, it appeared that the CPP was adopting a
strongly pro-Chinese position, as would be expected from the party's decade-long record of opposition to the Soviet Union (and hence Vietnam, which was apparently seen as a Soviet ally). Ang Bayan (The People), which voiced the CPP Central Committee's opinions, published articles in January and February 1979 which blamed Moscow for launching the attack on Cambodia and endorsed China's reasons for launching its subsequent attack on Vietnam. But there was no direct attack on Hanoi in these commentaries: the Vietnamese leadership was said to have been "enticed" by the Soviets into the November 1978 friendship treaty, which the CPP argued "was nothing but a thinly-disguised military pact designed to abet social-imperialist trouble-making in this part of the world".

An article by a "Filipino activist" in a left-wing US journal was more directly critical of Hanoi. Vietnamese and Laotian moves against the CPT were seen as a "betrayal", and "liberation movements" in the region were now said to be asking "what is to prevent Vietnam from treating them the way it did Kampuchea". Hanoi was accused of applauding the Marcos regime's counter-insurgency successes and the pro-Soviet PKP of cooperating with the Philippine government to the extent of sending cadres "to accompany Marcos' military in search of NPA guerrillas". Hanoi's links with the PKI were allegedly

154 Quoted by Sheilah Ocampo, FEER, 8 June 1979, pp. 21-22.
156 Ibid., p. 4.
confirmed by the visit to Vietnam and Cambodia of Jose Lava, a member of the PKP Central Committee.\(^{157}\)

The CPP did not, however, adopt an unambiguously pro-Chinese stance. Like the CPT, the Philippine party still saw "US imperialism" and local "exploitative classes" (rather than Soviet "hegemonism" and Vietnamese "regional hegemonism") as its principal enemies,\(^{158}\) although the Philippine people were urged by the CPP to beware of "social-imperialist schemes".\(^{159}\) Within the Party leadership, there was growing disenchantment with China's international policies -- especially after Deng's return to power in 1977.\(^{160}\) Beijing's new policies, particularly its "alliance with the US", were "to say the least, confusing".\(^{161}\) As Chinese assistance to the CPP declined in the late 1970s,\(^{162}\) there was increasing pressure from cadres who thought that the Party should not take sides in the Sino-Soviet conflict. A number of such cadres who were generally sympathetic to Vietnam's defiance of China formed the People's Liberation Movement (PLM).\(^{163}\)

\(^{157}\) VNA in English, 1543 gmt, 10 October 1978 (SWB FE/5941/A3/6, 13 October 1978).

\(^{158}\) "Letter from Southeast Asia", p. 5; Ang Bayan, quoted by Ocampo, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 22.

\(^{159}\) Ibid.

\(^{160}\) Personal interview with academic close to the CPP leadership, University of the Philippines, Manila, March 1981.

\(^{161}\) "Letter from Southeast Asia", p. 5.

\(^{162}\) Personal interview with academic close to CPP leadership. By August 1981 there was apparently no evidence of any foreign supplies reaching the NPA. "Intelligence", FEER, 7 August 1981, p. 9.

\(^{163}\) Personal interview with academic close to CPP leadership.
The Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia appeared to exacerbate divisions within the CPP. Immediately after the invasion, there was a sharp exchange of messages between the CPP and the Vietnamese Workers' Party, with the Philippine Party denouncing Hanoi in Chinese terms, such as "regional hegemonist", "Trojan Horse", and "Cuba of the east". But then, CPP commentary on the Indochinese conflict ebbed, apparently due to disagreement with the Central Committee on the correct line to take. In early 1981, one informed observer in Manila described the Central Committee as "ramshackle".

Bearing in mind the potential threat posed by the US bases in the Philippines to Vietnam, Hanoi's principal foreign policy objective with regard to Manila was probably to secure the removal of these facilities. The emergence of a faction of "Hanoi-liners" in the CPP appeared to present an opening for Vietnamese influence over the Party, or at least part of it. But by mid-1981, there was no indication that Hanoi had taken advantage of this opening to exert control over a revolutionary movement with the potential to topple the Marcos regime and expel the US military presence. Several reasons may be suggested for this. In the first place, the Vietnamese leadership had adopted a strategy of attempting to convince the ASEAN countries that it posed less of a threat than Beijing. Although this may have been a short-term device aimed at lessening opposition to its role in

164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
166 Personal interview with senior U.S. diplomat, Manila, 31 March 1981.
Cambodia, it precluded active support for regional insurgencies. Secondly, the PLM, and Hanoi-oriented factions remaining within the CPP, were probably small and weak relative to the majority opinion within the party which was still loyal to Beijing. Thirdly, the Vietnamese leadership may have thought that its best chance of influencing the Philippines' revolutionary potential lay through the semi-legal activities of the already anti-Chinese PKP.

In early 1981, President Marcos claimed that "... the principal threat against Southeast Asian countries is not outright aggression but the export of wars and subversion". But as Marcos was aware, the Philippines' relative isolation from the rest of Southeast Asia, coupled with efforts by both Beijing and Hanoi to win ASEAN support on the Cambodian issue, implied that internal economic, social and political conditions dictated the progress of communist insurgency within his country -- probably to an even greater extent than in the other ASEAN countries. Marcos's threat assessment was relevant to the situation in Thailand (and perhaps Malaysia), but not to the Philippines -- except in the sense that he may have wished to exaggerate the external threat to the Philippines' security as a partial justification for the continuation of martial law.


168 The Philippines tended to occupy a position in the middle of the spectrum of the ASEAN governments' public positions on the Cambodian issue from 1979: Manila was neither as "hawkish" as Bangkok or Singapore, nor as conciliatory towards Hanoi as Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. See section on "Philippine Policy on Cambodia" in Chapter 10, pp. 455-57 below.
Conclusion

After the communist victories in Indochina in 1975, communist parties in the ASEAN countries looked to Vietnam for political and material support, to supplement the assistance that they received from China. By 1979 the same parties faced a Vietnam that was openly hostile to these "bands of armed Maoist terrorists".169

The breach between Vietnam and the communist parties in the region's remaining non-communist countries resulted from two separate, but related, phenomena. As Vietnam's disputes with China and Democratic Kampuchea deepened in 1978, Hanoi and Beijing both attempted to win the support of their mutual ideological enemies, the ASEAN governments. For both of the communist powers this effectively necessitated the disavowal of support for communist parties in the ASEAN region. China's links with the CPT, CPM, PKI and CPP were deep-rooted and far-reaching: rather than abandon these useful allies completely, Beijing adopted the ingenious strategy of attempting to divorce its "party-to-party" relations from its "government-to-government" links. This was seen as duplicitous by the ASEAN governments and provided propaganda opportunities for the Vietnamese,170 but it did result in a noticeable reduction of aid to Southeast Asian communist parties, including the closure of the CPT and CPM radio stations in China. Hanoi went even further in

169 Santi, p. 16.

170 For example, in August 1980 Quan Doi Nhan Dan alleged that every year several thousand overseas Chinese from South and Southeast Asia went to China for training as "dissidents". Sydney Morning Herald, 13 August 1980.
renouncing its nexus with the CPT and CPM, but in both cases it had less to renounce than Beijing.

The schism between the communist parties of the ASEAN region and Vietnam was also a result of the desire of the former for greater independence and freedom of action. This was particularly so in the case of the CPT: indeed, it appears that the CPT's refusal to subjugate its revolutionary strategy to Hanoi's plans, or to tolerate direct Vietnamese military intervention on its behalf, contributed to its eventual expulsion from its Laotian sanctuaries. More generally, communist parties in the ASEAN region viewed the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia -- another communist country -- as an indication of Hanoi's intolerance of autonomous revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia.

The breach between Hanoi and its former communist allies in the ASEAN states did not result in greater Chinese influence over regional revolutionary movements. In fact, the renewal of conflict in Indochina stimulated lively debate, particularly in the CPT and CPP, not only on the question of international allegiances, but also on revolutionary strategy. The radical changes in China's foreign policy since the mid-1970s were disturbing to many Southeast Asian communists, who continued to view local capitalist regimes, US imperialism, and the ASEAN bloc as their principal enemies -- whereas China's first priority was opposition to the Soviet Union and its allies (notably Vietnam). To this end, Beijing had pursued friendly relations with Washington, the ASEAN governments, and publically approved of ASEAN itself. Paradoxically, questioning within Southeast Asian communist parties of the relevance of Maoist revolutionary
doctrines to local conditions was assisted by the concurrent Chinese moves away from Maoism. But the general tendency after the crises of 1978-79 was for communist parties in the ASEAN countries to concentrate more on issues of local or national importance and become less committed to international allegiances.

There was some evidence after the events of 1978-79 of the emergence -- particularly as a result of infighting in the CPT and CPP -- of "pro-Vietnamese" splinter groups of expellees and renegades, and "Hanoi-liner" factions within the parties' leaderships. But there was no evidence that, in the then prevailing circumstances, Vietnam was willing to further tarnish its image in the region by lending substantial support to these factions. Hanoi possibly would move to support ideologically sympathetic insurgent or subversive groups once the supposed legitimacy of its role in Cambodia had been recognized by ASEAN and the world, but in the meantime, significant Vietnamese assistance for such groups did not, objectively, appear likely. In any case, neither the TNLP (in the case of Thailand) or the PLM (in the case of the Philippines) appeared to command support from a mass base, which would be vital if they were to pose serious security threats to Bangkok and Manila.

In 1977, a secret joint report on Indochina was reportedly prepared by the five foreign ministers of the ASEAN states for circulation at the second summit meeting of ASEAN's heads of government in Kuala Lumpur in August of that year. While

acknowledging Vietnam's preoccupation with reconstruction and political consolidation, the report stressed Hanoi's strong ideological support for regional revolutionary movements, its huge weapons stocks, and the ease with which insurgency in the ASEAN countries could be supported from outside. None of these points can be refuted, but at the same time they did serve to stress that, with the important exception of Hanoi's links with the CPT, the relationship between Vietnam and regional insurgency was very much potential rather than actual. Nevertheless, it did appear reasonable that the ASEAN governments should be concerned over this potential for mischief.

Pham Van Dong's promises in September and October 1978 not to interfere in regional countries' internal affairs may have appeared less than convincing to observers in the ASEAN countries following Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia and the installation of a client regime there at the end of the year. Moreover, the Vietnamese were now physically in an excellent position to support insurgency in Thailand across the entire length of that country's eastern border.

After the crises of 1978-79 and the accompanying transformation of Hanoi's attitude towards ASEAN and its members, influential voices

172 Some Vietnamese representatives went out of their way to stress the qualitative difference between Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia and assistance to subversion in the ASEAN region. See, for example, the statement given to the Antara news agency and the weekly magazine, Tempo, by Tran My, the Vietnamese ambassador in Jakarta. Antara in English, 0712 gmt, 9 January 1979 (SWB FE/6012/A3/13, 10 January 1979). Indeed, the Vietnamese equated the Khmer Rouge with "anti-government armed rebel Maoist groups" in the ASEAN states. Memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam: Part I -- "Where does the threat to the security of Thailand and to peace and stability in Southeast Asia come from?", Vietnam News Bulletin, No. 07/80, p. 9.
in the ASEAN countries continued to warn of the danger that Vietnam might attempt to destabilize regional countries through support for communist insurgencies. But these claims were seldom based on any realistic rationale or tangible evidence. In the 1975-78 period, Thailand (and to a very limited extent, Malaysia) could claim that Hanoi was exacerbating the domestic communist insurgency problem. But after the events of 1978-79, official talk in the ASEAN countries of the possibility of Vietnamese support for local communist insurgencies seems to have been motivated largely by a wish to win support for the regimes in power in the ASEAN region both domestically and internationally.

Although some politicians, officials and military leaders in the ASEAN countries were undoubtedly and not altogether surprisingly sometimes truly alarmed by the "Vietnamese threat" (whether this was seen in terms of possible direct military action, or support for local revolutionary movements), it is also true that at other times -- and even at the same time -- the spectre of such a threat was manipulated to enhance regime rather than national security. Bearing in mind that these two types of security seemed frequently to be confused -- or viewed as identical -- by ASEAN leaders, this process of manipulation could take place unconsciously, without any conspiracy to deceive either the populace or outside observers.

In fact, the Third Indochina War gave the ASEAN states, and Thailand in particular, an almost total respite from external support for their domestic insurgencies. Although there was a marked decline in CPT operations from across the Cambodian border in the last few months of 1978 as the Khmer Rouge attempted to improve their relations
with Thailand (in view of the imminence of an all-out conflict with Vietnam), the Thai-Cambodian border accounted for 42 per cent of all armed incidents involving the CPT in 1978. The Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia removed the CPT problem on the Cambodian border altogether -- a fact that was not mentioned in official Thai commentaries.

The Third Indochina War effectively provided an interlude during which the ASEAN governments could tackle their communist insurgencies in a vacuum -- that is, while the communists were essentially cut off from external support. If official claims are to be believed, at least the Thai government was highly successful in its counter-insurgency drives in the 1979-82 period. But any conclusive victory over the communists remained unlikely in the extreme. As well as the physical problems involved in counter-insurgency in the difficult terrain of the ASEAN states' peripheral regions, basic socioeconomic and political inequities remained deeply entrenched throughout the ASEAN region. There also seemed little chance that the ASEAN countries could escape unscathed as the global economy entered its deepest recession for fifty years. The morale of regional communist parties had been weakened by bitter internecine ideological conflict, but this did seem to have the result of forcing the evolution of revolutionary doctrines more attuned to the needs of the Southeast Asian societies in question.

173 John McBeth, FEER, 8 June 1979, p. 19.
From 1975 a wide range of policy-makers in the ASEAN countries perceived as emanating from Indochina a security threat that was quite distinct from, although perhaps related to, the alleged dangers of invasion and insurgency. The declarations and policies of the ASEAN governments reflected an enduring concern with the security implications of the multitudes who fled Indochina after the fall of the non-communist regimes there. The "security threat" posed by the refugees was perceived in the ASEAN region as having several distinct aspects: these may be summarized as the impact of the influx on relations with the Indochinese countries; the danger of subversion; and the socioeconomic burden, which included a particularly strong ethnic dimension.

**Effect on Relations with Indochina**

The first wave of refugees to leave Indochina after the communist victories consisted principally of people who had been closely connected with the ousted regimes or the US military. Like the continued US military presence in Thailand, this initial outflow was seen in the ASEAN region (where most of the refugees sought asylum in the first instance) as an embarrassment threatening the post-war normalization of relations with communist Indochina rather than a security threat as such. But the ASEAN governments undoubtedly
thought that the establishment of working relationships with the communist regime in Indochina would minimize the security threat from that direction. In particular, Bangkok probably saw the establishment of cordial links with Laos and Cambodia as a means of counteracting Hanoi's influence in this historical area of rivalry between Thais and Vietnamese. Moreover, accommodation within the region between communist and non-communist Indochina remained a cornerstone of most ASEAN politicians' hopes for the region's future. While the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality proposal (which was officially ASEAN's blueprint for the future of the region's international relations) did not receive unanimous support within the ASEAN states, it was widely regarded as a preferable, if probably unattainable, ideal to the division of the region into two mutually antagonistic blocs.

For this reason the ASEAN governments were circumspect in their treatment of the first waves of refugees to leave Indochina, between 1975 and 1978. In May 1975, Manila imposed a 72-hour limit on the presence of Vietnamese in transit at US bases in the Philippines. Lee Kuan Yew similarly made it clear that Singapore could only be regarded as a transit point.¹ Many of the refugees leaving Vietnam and Cambodia in May 1975 had fled (especially to Thailand) in ships and aircraft that had been supplied by the United States to the former regimes but which were now claimed by the victorious communists.² At first, the Thai government did its best to propitiate the new

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Indochinese regimes on this issue. Foreign Minister Chatchai Choonhavan promised that his government would hand over to the new Cambodian authorities the weapons, aircraft and ships that fleeing troops of the Lon Nol regime had brought to Thailand. A similar promise was made to Vietnam, but it soon became clear that Bangkok had little practical control over the US bases where most of the aircraft had landed: within days the Americans had removed the more modern and valuable aircraft. This episode certainly complicated Bangkok's relations with the Vietnamese and Cambodian communist regimes.

At a later stage it was reported that, at least in Malaysia's case, the government became anxious to avoid giving "first asylum" to large numbers of Vietnamese seaborne refugees as this might provide fuel for the anti-communist lobby which wished to thwart the government's ambition of better relations with Hanoi.

Thailand's long borders and ethnic links with Laos and Cambodia provided another aspect of Bangkok's concern over the implications of the Indochinese refugees for Thailand's relations with these two countries. In 1975 the Thai government was concerned to avoid a Palestinian-type situation in which refugees would launch military operations from Thai territory against communist Indochina. Chatchai asserted that "Thailand would not allow Cambodians and Vietnamese refugees to take permanent refuge for fear that they might take action

5 Peter Weintraub, FEER, 16 December 1977, pp. 31-32.
against Thailand's neighbours. Bangkok's "clear-cut position" was that "it would not allow other nationalities to set up armed forces within Thailand to fight their own governments as they had done in the past." But within months Bangkok was to face Vietnamese accusations that Thailand was sheltering "reactionary henchmen" amongst the refugees it had taken in, and that the United States was involved in the military training of Laotian refugees in the Thai northeast.

Some of these Vietnamese allegations probably had a basis in fact. In contrast to the preponderant view in the central Thai government (and particularly the Foreign Ministry at this time) that the country's interest would be best served by eschewing involvement with anti-communist resistance groups in Laos and Cambodia, it seems that at a local level official Thai support was indeed given to such forces after the communist victories. During the Second Indochina War, the Thai military had supported and sponsored anti-communist forces in both Laos and Cambodia, and it appeared that such activity was still seen by some military officers (particularly in the Internal Security Operations Command) and local officials as legitimate. It seems unlikely that these Thais really hoped to overthrow the Pathet

6 Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 1 May 1975 (SWB FE/4894/A3/19, 3 May 1975).
7 Ibid., 1315 gmt, 17 April 1975 (SWB FE/4882/A3/6, 19 April 1975). See also Norman Peagam, FEER, 20 June 1975, p. 21.
8 Michael Richardson, Age, 28 October 1975.
Lao and Khmer Rouge regimes. Rather, support for the anti-communist resistance had become a habit that was difficult to abandon, particularly as it may have been connected with involvement in lucrative cross-border smuggling. Moreover, some military elements were interested in using the resistance groups for gathering intelligence and as a form of buffer (or perhaps as potential bargaining chips) against cross-border infiltration by Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) insurgents from Laos and Cambodia.

For these reasons, efforts were made by Thai military elements to use some of the more than 200,000 Indochinese refugees who fled to Thailand between 1975 and 1978 as a resource base for supporting the activities of Lao and Cambodian resistance groups. The overwhelming majority of Indochinese refugees reaching Thailand before 1979 came from Laos, consisting of both lowland Lao (who had very close ethnic affinity with many of the inhabitants of northeast Thailand), and Hmong and other upland people. Many of these refugees had fought, under Thai and US sponsorship, against the Pathet Lao before 1975. By the end of 1975 it was apparent that armed groups of Laotian refugees were filtering back across the Mekong into their homeland to undertake guerilla operations against Pathet Lao military posts and transport facilities. Exiled rightist Lao politicians and officers (presumably

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10 Norman Peagam, FEER, 11 February 1977, p. 10.


12 Figure extracted from Table 2-A in Operation Centre for Displaced Persons, Thai Ministry of Interior, Too Long to Wait: Displaced Persons from Indochina in Thailand (Bangkok: Thai Government, 1980), p. 21.
with the acquiescence of the local Thai security forces) were reported to keep tight control over their fellow refugees in the Nong Khai refugee camp, acting as recruiting officers for a resistance group known as the "21/18" Front. Similar activity was reported on the Thai-Cambodian border, where up to 2000 Khmer Serei guerillas -- largely recruited from the refugee population in Thailand -- operated.

During the year-long period of rule by the extreme anti-communist Thanin regime, from October 1976 to October 1977, there was evidently greater harmony between the attitudes of the central Thai government and local military authorities towards the sponsoring of armed interference in Laos and Cambodia. Thai manipulation of the refugee population at this time may have contributed to a deterioration in relations with the two eastern neighbours. According to the deputy commander-in-chief of the Thai army, Khmer Rouge displeasure at the large number of refugees fleeing to Thailand was one reason for the frequent border incidents. When a US Presidential Commission visited Vientiane in March 1977, the Laotians complained about Thai aid to the anti-government resistance. But Thanin and his more right-wing colleagues did not appear excessively

14 Norman Peagam, FEER, 11 February 1977, p. 10; Richard Nations, FEER, 10 February 1978, p.10
concerned at the prospect of deteriorating relations with Indochina, although the more moderate Supreme Commander, General Kriangsak Chomanan, attempted to restrain the regime's policies.

After Kriangsak seized power in October 1977, relations with Laos improved, partly due to stricter Thai control over the activities of Laotian resistance groups operating amongst the refugees in Thailand. But the situation on the border with Cambodia was more complicated, and the Thai military appeared unable -- and perhaps, especially in view of the evidence of cooperation between the Khmer Rouge and the CPT, unwilling -- to control the Khmer Serei.\footnote{See section on "The Khmer Rouge and the CPT, 1975-78" in Chapter 6, pp. 213-14 above.} One report claimed that in the latter part of 1978, Cambodian refugees were also being "dragooned into service" for use as soldiers, guides and intelligence-gatherers by Thai Special Forces units in the border area, for operations against the Khmer Rouge and CPT.\footnote{Brian Eads, \textit{Age}, 10 January 1979.}

### Thailand, the Cambodian Refugees and the Cambodian Resistance, 1979-81

The Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia profoundly changed the interests underlying Thai attitudes towards the security implications of providing sanctuary for Cambodian refugees. Officially, Thailand maintained a policy of neutrality on the Cambodian issue and denied aiding the anti-Vietnamese resistance through the refugee presence. According to the Ministry of the Interior:
The granting of refuge to large numbers of political refugees has created the impression to our neighbours that we are interfering in their internal affairs. The fact that we are accused of giving sanctuary to resistance forces and supports [sic] through the displaced persons' program means that our humanitarian effort [sic] are causing us to lose trust and credibility with our neighbours.

But such denials could not disguise the fact that Bangkok nevertheless strove to ensure the continued existence of armed opposition to the new regime, in accordance with what was generally assessed in official Thai circles as a basic national interest in keeping Cambodia free (or at least substantially autonomous) of Vietnamese domination. The problem lay in reconciling this desire to maintain the Cambodian resistance as a fighting force -- which could be accomplished to a large extent by allowing Khmer Rouge forces and civilians controlled by them to use Thai territory for sanctuary, transit and resupply purposes -- with an equally strong wish to avoid the development of a Palestinian-type situation in which more or less permanent encampments of Cambodian refugees would represent legitimate targets for strikes into Thailand by Vietnamese and Cambodian government (Heng Samrin) forces, perhaps precipitating a full-scale Thai-Vietnamese war. Even in the short term, the Thai military was concerned at the danger posed to security in the border areas by large scale population movements and armed activity by the Cambodian resistance.

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19 Too Long to Wait..., p. 11.

The dilemma in which the Cambodian refugee situation placed Thailand was reflected in disagreement within the Thai government over how best to deal with the problem. There was no single, cohesive "official Thai attitude" towards the issue, which was used as an instrument in competition within the political and bureaucratic elite. Although there was quite wide official acceptance of Kriangsak's attitude that it was in Thailand's interest to give temporary refuge to "displaced" Cambodians, as they provided a "buffer" against the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, his government's relatively liberal first asylum policy was criticized by a group of politicians led by Thanat Khoman (the Democratic Party leader and former Foreign Minister) who urged in a July 1979 National Assembly report that all the Cambodians should be repatriated immediately. In the view of some informed observers, Kriangsak's refugee policies may have been a factor contributing to his fall from power in February 1980. By 1981 the Secretary General of the National Security Council, Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, was also calling for large-scale repatriation to the border. Some high-ranking army officers criticized Air Marshal Siddhi Savetsila, who was retained as Foreign Minister in Prem Tinsulanond's governments, for being too "pro-American" (that is, overly influenced by humanitarian considerations) on the refugee issue. In fact, under both Kriangsak and Prem, Siddhi consistently

21 Suhrke, Pasuk and Zakaria, p. 30.
22 Ibid., loc. cit.
24 Suhrke, Pasuk and Zakaria, p. 30.
fostered an approach under which Cambodian refugees were allowed sanctuary when this helped to increase Bangkok's leverage over the political and military situation across the border by bolstering the Cambodian resistance: at times this policy coincided with humanitarian considerations.

Soon after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia it became evident that the Thai authorities were assisting, or at least acquiescing in, the resupply of the Khmer Rouge resistance by China. But, at this early stage the Thai government was profoundly reluctant to allow Khmer Rouge troops and civilians to enter Thailand, even temporarily. But by late April 1979 the Khmer Rouge was in a critical position, with Vietnamese forces aiming effectively to destroy the resistance before the onset of the wet season made this impossible. For the Khmer Rouge, the use of Thai territory to reach safe base areas in mountainous southwest Cambodia was vital to avoid a disastrous defeat. Ultimately, it was not clear whether the fact that about 80,000 people under Khmer Rouge control (including 50,000 civilians who appeared to be prisoners of, rather than willing participants in, the resistance) were allowed to pass through Thailand on their way to the Kao Loeng mountains between 22 and 26 April was the result of a definite Thai decision or the sheer weight of numbers involved.

Less than a week before the evacuation occurred, Kriangsak and Prem had issued apparently contradictory statements on the Cambodian refugee issue with the Prime Minister asserting that Thai policy was

still not to push refugees back into Cambodia against their will and his Commander-in-Chief warning the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that Thailand would not be pressured into accepting refugees against its will and that the Cabinet had approved a tougher policy. At the same time, the Supreme Command ordered the army to prevent any Cambodians entering Thailand. Five or six thousand civilians under Khmer Rouge control who entered Thailand were forced out of the country by the Thai army. It seems likely that the sheer size of the main Khmer Rouge contingent compelled the Thais to change their attitude towards the provision of safe transit facilities. A bargain was probably struck with the Khmer Rouge by the Thai authorities -- that the refugee "army" would be allowed onto Thai soil only on condition that they left at another point on the border as soon as possible. To speed up the process, the Thai army even transported 6000 Cambodians by truck through Thailand.

If the Thais had not accepted such a compromise, it is possible that the Cambodians would have forced their way into Thailand regardless (perhaps carving out permanent sanctuaries, according to

26 This was despite one recent report which alleged that Cambodian refugees arriving in Thailand on an independent basis (that is, not under Khmer Rouge control) had been shot or turned back. William Shawcross, AWSJ, 25 March 1979.

27 Acje, 23 April 1979.

28 International Herald Tribune (cited hereafter as IHT), 21-22 April 1979. Richard Nations, FEER, 4 May 1979, pp. IO-11. This action was apparently coordinated with the tough stance that Thailand was simultaneously adopting with regard to seaborne refugees from Vietnam.

29 Bangkok Post, 1 May 1979.
one Thai official): this would probably have been possible, bearing in mind the weakness of the Thai army's order of battle (two battalions) in the Aranyaprathet sector of the border at this time. The Thais could have reinforced their military presence on the border, but this might have provoked a strong political (and perhaps military) response from Hanoi. In any case, if the Thais had repulsed the influx of Cambodians they might have condemned them to annihilation at the hands of the Vietnamese. Such an outcome would effectively have ended any hope of keeping alive a substantial guerilla opposition to Vietnamese domination of Cambodia. One longer term consequence of this attempt to manage the refugee situation in the interest of Thailand's security was that there may have been an increased risk of "hot pursuit" by Vietnamese troops attempting to neutralize the Khmer Rouge threat before the guerillas reached safer havens in the Cambodian southwest. This led Kriangsak to warn that Thailand would respond militarily to any intrusion by foreign forces. But, like much of the rhetoric uttered by Thai (and other ASEAN) politicians regarding security aspects of the refugee situation, this declaration may have been aimed as much at convincing a domestic audience that the government was in control as at deterring Vietnamese aggression.

As it became evident to Thai policy-makers that sanctuary (rather than just transit facilities) in Thailand was vital for the continued existence of the Cambodian resistance as a fighting force, so it

30 IHT, 27 April 1979; Richard Nations, FEER, 4 May 1979, pp. 10-11.
31 Bangkok Post, 27 April 1979.
became increasingly clear that this factor would henceforth be the principal determinant of Bangkok's policy on the issue, despite the risk of Vietnamese military incursions. At the beginning of May the International Committee of the Red Cross agreed to provide food and medical assistance to Cambodians crossing into Thailand (thereby relieving Bangkok of a large part of the socioeconomic burden of the exercise) providing none of the refugees would subsequently be forcibly repatriated. As a result of this agreement, Bangkok almost immediately allowed large numbers of two main classes of refugees to enter Thailand. 40,000 Khmer Rouge troops and civilians were permitted to stay in Thailand, 27,000 of them keeping their weapons and later returning to Cambodia when the Vietnamese threat had subsided with the onset of the rainy season. But 40,000 or more largely ethnic Chinese civilians who arrived in Thailand at the same time were not so fortunate. The Thai authorities clearly feared that if these refugees, who were termed "illegal immigrants" by Bangkok to underline the fact that it saw no moral obligation to provide sanctuary for them, were allowed to remain in Thailand this would encourage the movement across the border of very large numbers of Cambodians not under Khmer Rouge control and therefore constituting a burden that would be of no use in the fight against the Vietnamese. The fact that the ASEAN countries were at this time adopting very harsh attitudes towards seaborne Vietnamese refugees may have made it easier for Bangkok to adopt an equally tough position on the Sino-

Cambodians. In early June they were forcibly repatriated; an unknown, but probably large, number died as they were pushed down the cliff path at Preah Vihear -- the area was heavily mined. According to UNHCR officials, this was the "worst case of forcible repatriation" in the thirty year existence of the body.\textsuperscript{33} A widespread international outcry ensured that this was the last time that the Thai authorities would forcibly repatriate Cambodian refugees.

Although other factors (including a sincere humanitarian impulse as famine ravaged Cambodia, and a desire to avoid the type of international criticism that had followed the June repatriation) may have influenced Kriangsak's announcement in October 1979\textsuperscript{34} of an "open door" policy towards Cambodian refugees, this decision only came when 70,000 Khmer Rouge personnel were grievously threatened by Vietnamese forces at the beginning of the dry season.\textsuperscript{35} Immediately, 30,000 civilians controlled by the Khmer Rouge were allowed into Thailand, and were very quickly transferred to a "holding centre" at Sa Kaeo, 60 km from the border.\textsuperscript{36} According to one observer, Sa Kaeo "played a major part in the rehabilitation of the Khmer Rouge's fighting ability".\textsuperscript{37} These civilians were quickly followed by about 40,000


\textsuperscript{34} Bangkok Post, 20 October 1979.

\textsuperscript{35} Bangkok Post, 11 September 1979.

\textsuperscript{36} Barry Wain, AWSJ, 14 November 1979.

Khmer Rouge troops, who later re-entered Cambodia further south on the border.\textsuperscript{38}

The Thai authorities used their refugee policies not only to help the Khmer Rouge to survive, but also to build up the strength of non-communist Cambodian opposition groups. In this way Bangkok hoped to increase the credibility of the anti-Vietnamese resistance both amongst the Cambodian people and internationally. Bearing in mind Thailand's problems with the Democratic Kampuchea regime (particularly in terms of the latter's cooperation with the CPT) during the 1975-78 period, it was also in Thailand's interests to provide the potential basis for a future coalition regime in Cambodia, in which non-communist elements might exert a moderating influence. Thailand's role in bolstering the Khmer Serei (as these non-communist groups were still collectively referred to in the first months after the Vietnamese invasion) was facilitated by the links that the Thai military had developed with various Cambodian anti-communist factions on the border over the years, particularly since 1975. The first substantive evidence of continuing cooperation after the invasion came in early April 1979 when 1700 Cambodian refugees, who had entered Thailand independently of the Khmer Rouge, were handed over to Khmer Serei control.\textsuperscript{39}

From early 1979, the Thai authorities allowed black market trade to develop across the border, as a means of wresting some of the

\textsuperscript{38} Bangkok Post, 25 October 1979.

\textsuperscript{39} IHT, 26 April 1979.
Cambodian population away from the control of the Heng Samrin regime. As the famine in Cambodia worsened from mid-1979, the Khmer Serei extended their political influence by attaching themselves to the refugee agglomerations that grew up on the border in response to the distribution of international food aid at the Nong Chan "land bridge". From this position, the Khmer Serei factions were able to control the trade of relief and black market goods with the interior.

By November 1979, perhaps as many as 700,000 refugees (more than 10% of the surviving Cambodian population) were living in the border agglomerations, under the control of neither the Heng Samrin regime nor the Khmer Rouge. This border population represented a potentially extremely valuable resource in the struggle for influence in Cambodia, particularly as it included a disproportionately large number of the country's surviving bourgeoisie, whose education and skills would be highly important in rebuilding their homeland. But by this time the Thai Supreme Command was becoming alarmed at the corruption (and hence loss of morale) that the black market was causing amongst local Thai officials and army officers. The various Khmer Serei groups fought against each other, and against the Thai military when it tried to restore order. Khmer Serei groups led by "Prince" Norodom Soriavong, Van Saren, In Sakhan and Moon Seri rapidly fell out of favour with the


41 A preliminary survey by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in January 1980 of refugees who had been evacuated from these Khmer Serei dominated areas to the Khao-I-Dang holding centre found that 14% of the sample were students, 6% businessmen, 17% professionals or military officers and 11% clerks, technicians or military non-commissioned officers. Osborne, "The Indochinese Refugee Situation...", p. 40.
Thai military, leaving only the group led by Son Sann and Dien Del as reliable in Bangkok's view.42

Faced with a border security situation that was rapidly getting out of hand, and which might provoke a Vietnamese military strike, the Supreme Command urged refugees to move from the Khmer Serei dominated border area north of Aranyaprathet to a holding centre at Khao-I-Dang, 11 km inside Thailand. This evacuation was opposed by some Khmer Serei leaders who saw it as an attempt to undermine their political base.43 Nevertheless, the Thais had concentrated 120,000 Cambodians in Khao-I-Dang by early 1980. The Thai military then attempted to use this virtually captive population to bolster "reliable" non-communist resistance groups. For example, an effort was made to encourage former Lon Nol troops to leave Khao-I-Dang and link up with KPNLF (Son Sann-Dien Del) forces at Ban Sa Ngae,44 very close to the Cambodian border -- but this tactic was only partially successful.

Having achieved its most important objectives, the "open door" was closed in February 1980: Thai policy was then directed towards moving Cambodians from holding centres to the border agglomerations.45 The Thai strategy of manipulating the refugee situation to strengthen the Cambodian resistance carried with it a continuing risk of cross-

43 Ibid., pp. 15-16; IHT, 4 December 1979.
border attacks by Vietnamese forces. Although it was impossible for
Bangkok to secure the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force on the
border (as this would have required a Security Council vote, which
would certainly have been vetoed by the USSR), the Thais encouraged a
build-up of the UN's civilian presence (that is, UNHCR and UNICEF
representation) as a deterrent against Vietnamese attack. The Thais
also strengthened their in-place border defences but only to the
extent of serving as a "tripwire" against accidental incursions: there was no desire to engage in a full-blown military encounter with
the Vietnamese. The specific reasons for the Vietnamese incursion
into Thailand in June 1980 remain unclear. But it seems likely that
it was triggered by the repatriation of refugees from Thai holding
centres to the control of resistance groups across the border, against a background of accumulated Vietnamese frustration with
Thailand's attempts to undermine Phnom Penh's influence over a
significant proportion of the Cambodian population through the Nong
Chan "land bridge", and the succour given to both communist and non-
communist resistance groups.

Although Hanoi emphasized the peril posed to Thai security by the
possibility of a repetition of the June incursion, the Vietnamese
military action had confirmed Thai fears concerning the dangers of
Hanoi's role in Cambodia, so there was no end to the practice of
repatriating refugees from holding centres to border agglomerations

46 Ibid., pp. 247, 252.
47 This repatriation by the Thai military had begun in March 1980.
controlled by the Khmer Rouge or the KPNLF. Between October 1980 and
June 1981 about 9000 Cambodians were transported by the Thai army,
under UNHCR auspices, to the border. It might be argued that for a
broad range of reasons, Bangkok could not continue to support a
large refugee presence on Thai soil, and that voluntary repatriation
to the border was the most satisfactory solution for both the refugees
and Thailand. But there were other options, although these were not
so satisfactory from Bangkok's viewpoint. Resettlement in third
countries of "new Khmers" (Cambodians who had fled their homeland
since the Vietnamese invasion) was generally opposed by the Thai
authorities for several reasons, although it did take place on a small
scale from mid-1980 when it became clear that only a minor proportion
of the Cambodians wished to return to their homeland in the prevailing
circumstances. There was concern in Bangkok that the resettlement in
third countries of some Cambodians would discourage others, also
hoping for such resettlement, from returning to their homeland -- or
at least the border -- under Khmer Rouge or KPNLF control. Secondly,
the Thai authorities thought that other classes of Indochinese
refugees should be resettled first, as these were less likely than the
"new Khmers" to return home. From a security viewpoint, the most
important reason was that the large proportion of skilled and educated
Cambodians in the refugee camps constituted one of Cambodia's most

22 and 12 June 1981, pp. 12-13; Osborne, "Kampuchean
Refugees...", pp. 17-18. However, many of these refugees may
later have returned to the Cambodian interior.

300-3 below.
important resources and was thus vital for the country's long-term survival as an independent entity, which was Bangkok's central concern.  

Another option for Thailand would have been to arrange a major repatriation directly to the Cambodian interior. Although the Thai government was concerned that this would have implied recognition of the Heng Samrin regime as Cambodia's legitimate government, it was still an alternative which would probably have resulted in a more relaxed situation on the border. Thus the continuing danger of Vietnamese military action across the border was principally the result of the Thai government's decision to continue its support for armed resistance to the Vietnamese-imposed status quo in Cambodia. This may well have been a sensible strategic decision, but it was highly misleading for Bangkok to assert that the refugee presence in itself was sufficient to precipitate a Vietnamese attack.

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53 Typical of official Thai misrepresentation of the issue was this claim: "because senior military and civil service officials have claimed "political" asylum in our country there is the possibility that forces from a neighbouring country might violate our sovereignty in order to take back these people". Too Long to Wait..., p. 12.
Thailand, the Laotian Refugees and Resistance, 1979-81

The Thai manipulation of the refugee situation on the Cambodian border after the Vietnamese military intervention was not paralleled by similar policies on the Thai-Laotian border, where 150,000 Laotians were accommodated in Thai refugee camps by August 1979. Although anti-communist groups had been supported for many years across the Mekong, this assistance was perhaps surprisingly not intensified from 1979. The improvement in Thai-Vietnamese relations that had been evident in 1978 was reversed by the invasion of Cambodia. But the amelioration in Thai-Laotian relations climaxed in early 1979, with Prime Ministers Kriangsak and Kaysone exchanging visits. Probably the most significant result of these diplomatic moves was the two sides' agreement not to support cross-border subversion -- and, indeed, to take positive action to suppress such activity.

Even before the Thai-Laotian accords of 1979, Thai support for the Laotian resistance had been less than wholehearted, particularly after Kriangsak seized power in Bangkok in October 1977. The Thai strategy appeared to be one of placing strict limits on the weapons, ammunition and sanctuaries allowed to the guerillas. In this way, the Thai government probably hoped to maintain the resistance as an irritant for trading-off against Vientiane's support for insurgency.

in Thailand. At the same time, the Thais did not wish the resistance to be so successful as to precipitate an increase in the Vietnamese military presence and activity in Laos, perhaps to the extent of cross-border raids against Laotian refugee camps. Although Bangkok used its economic relationship with Laos as an instrument for maintaining its influence, there was no official Thai interest in overthrowing the Pathet Lao regime by force. Unlike the Heng Samrin administration, the Pathet Lao government had not been imposed by Vietnamese force of arms. This made for a significant difference between Thailand's attitudes to the political status quo in the two countries.

The Laotian resistance probably gained strength during the 1978-81 period. But this was not due to Thai assistance. The Laotian expulsion of the CPT's Northeast regional command and subsequent moves against Thai communists remaining in the border area was matched by a marked decline in activity by Thai-based Laotian insurgents. But at least one notable resistance faction was allowed to maintain its headquarters in the Nong Khai refugee camp -- this was the Pak Lao Ku Sa (National Salvation Party -- NSP).

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56 For example, in August 1979 a senior Lao communist defector estimated that 2-3000 Pathet Lao troops had defected to Thailand or the resistance (over an unspecified time period). This claim was supported by "Thai-based intelligence agencies". John McBeth, FEER, 24 August 1979, pp. 10-11.


58 Marcel Barang, FEER, 7 November 1980, p. 37.
In June 1980 the Thai authorities closed the border after a shooting incident. Vientiane alleged that this move was part of a wider Thai attempt, including the repatriation of Cambodian refugees, to destabilize Indochina. As well as closing the border, in the following months the Thais appeared to give greater rein to the Lao resistance. The NSP's Nong Khai-based radio broadcast an appeal to Laotians to cross into Thailand. An apparently typical cross-border foray was executed in late September, when 30-40 guerillas crossed from Thailand to attack a Pathet Lao troop encampment.

Although Prem seemed to have reversed Kriangsak's policy of trying to minimize Laotian involvement in the wider regional conflict, Bangkok had not totally abandoned caution. The Thai government probably had two main aims in closing the border: to signal Vietnam its displeasure over the incursion across the Cambodian border; and to attempt to force Laos into reassessing its close relationship with Vietnam. There was no desire to exacerbate the border security situation: the Cambodian border was causing problems enough. Thus the general pattern of only very limited Thai support for the Laotian resistance continued: the guerillas had increasingly to look to China for assistance.

60 Barang, loc. cit.
61 In fact, closing the border for an extended period probably forced the Laotians to lessen their economic dependence on Thailand, and to intensify their links with Vietnam.
62 At the end of 1980 it was reported that China had trained and armed up to 5000 anti-government guerillas in northern Laos, and was channelling supplies to the resistance in southern Laos by way of the Khmer Rouge. See John McBeth, FEER, 19 December 1980, p. 9.
The Indochinese Refugees and Subversion

Apart from concern over the possible impact of providing sanctuary for Indochinese refugees on relations with the Indochinese countries, there were widely-expressed fears in the ASEAN region over the subversive potential of the refugees themselves. Although it was clear that the overwhelming majority of the refugees were fleeing communism rather than acting as communist agents, against a background of local communist activity or insurgency many politicians and officials in the ASEAN countries believed or purported to believe that the Indochinese states (particularly Vietnam) were placing agents amongst the refugees. To a limited extent these fears were understandable, particularly in view of the lack of information available concerning the backgrounds of the refugees and the presence of increasing numbers of communist cadres (who claimed disillusionment with the socialist regimes in Indochina) in the influx. Moreover, such fears were not confined to the ASEAN leadership: at the height of the seaborne refugee exodus from Vietnam in May 1979, Robert Oakley, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of East Asian Affairs claimed that Vietnam wanted to build up a "fifth column" in other countries by way of the refugees. The screening measures employed by Western countries in which Indochinese

63 According to the Malaysian Prime Minster (Hussein Onn), "we don't know exactly who is coming in...". Michael Richardson, FEER, 26 May 1978, p. 22.

64 Straits Times, 5 July 1979.

65 Ibid., 17 July 1979.
Refugees were resettled gave some degree of security against the infiltration of undesirable elements: the ASEAN countries, in providing "first asylum" for the refugees, were not allowed the luxury of such choices. There was inevitably a fear that they might be left with not only those refugees who were of no interest to the West because of their social or economic deficiencies (such as lack of skills or relatives already in the proposed resettlement country), but also those who were security risks. 66

Refugees from the First Indochina War in Thailand

The refugees reaching Thailand after 1975 were the latest of several waves to flee Indochina over the preceding several hundred years. In the early stages of the first Indochina War a succession of leftist civilian governments in Bangkok allowed 50,000 or so ethnic Vietnamese, who had fled across the border into the northeast from Laos and Cambodia in 1946, to stay in Thailand and organize support for the Viet Minh. 67 For both pragmatic and ideological reasons, Thai elder statesman Pridi Phanomyong and his governments were anxious to see French colonial power removed from Indochina.

66 For example, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) would not consider for resettlement anyone who had fought against the United States. Other communist officials who had sought "the violent overthrow of the US government" were also usually rejected by the INS. John McBeth and Paisal Sricharatchanya, FEER, 24 July 1981, p.19.

The ousting of civilian rule by a military coup in November 1947 set Thailand's foreign and domestic policies firmly on an anti-communist course. In line with this new approach, the Vietnamese refugees were increasingly seen as a security risk because of their strong links with the Viet Minh. Despite the fact that the refugees' revolutionary enthusiasm had been directed entirely towards changing the political situation in their homeland, with no evidence that they were involved in revolutionary actions against the Thai state, Bangkok's attitude was that the refugees -- because of their potential to act as a "fifth column" -- should be repatriated to Vietnam as soon as possible.

An agreement was reached between Hanoi and Bangkok in 1959, and about half of the total number of refugees (whose numbers had increased to 70-80,000) had been resettled in North Vietnam by mid-1964, when the repatriation programme was ended by the escalation of the Vietnam war.  

Thereafter, the Vietnamese refugees remaining in Thailand existed in limbo: neither Hanoi nor Saigon would accept them for resettlement, and the Thai authorities claimed that they were too vulnerable to communist influence to be assimilated into Thai society. Although Flood's work on the subject does not claim to be an impartial account, he makes some valid criticisms of the conventional view of the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand as a fifth column or communist hot-bed.

68 Poole, pp. 65-66; Flood, pp. 38, 45.
69 Poole, pp. 65-66; Flood, pp. 38, 45.
70 See, for example, Poole, pp. 122-27.
The alleged "clannishness" and apparent unwillingness of the Vietnamese refugees to integrate into wider Thai society may at least partially be explained by the many restrictions imposed on them from the time of the military takeover in 1947, the particularly after 1947 when General Sarit seized power. The refugees were restricted to residence in nine provinces of northeast Thailand, needed 30 days prior permission before moving from their residential district, and were usually denied permission to marry Thais. Like their parents, children born of refugees in Thailand were denied Thai citizenship and entry to Thai schools.\textsuperscript{71}

There is evidence that in the period between the fall of non-communist Indochina in 1975 and the ending of Thailand's short-lived period of democratic rule (which had begun in October 1973) in October 1976, the Vietnamese refugee issue was manipulated by elements within the Thai establishment which were opposed to the Foreign Ministry's policy of attempting reconciliation with Vietnam. To this end, some right-wing politicians, bureaucrats and military officers exaggerated the "Vietnamese threat", working through the Thai media and with some assistance from US military sources, who were concerned at the threat posed by the new regime's policies to the continued presence of US military facilities -- particularly those with an intelligence-gathering role.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71} Flood, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{72} For example, a secret study prepared by the intelligence staff of the US Army Pacific Command entitled "External Support to the Thai Insurgency -- the 35 PL/NVA Combined Command" was "leaked" to the Bangkok Post. Personal correspondence in October 1982 with a person involved in the leak confirmed these details.
Nawaphon, a right-wing political organization linked to the Thai Internal Security Operations Command, may have instigated demonstrations demanding the expulsion of Vietnamese residents in Sakon Nakhon province in May 1975; this was admitted by Pramarn Adireksan, the Defence Minister, even though he had himself made anti-Vietnamese statements.\(^7\) The centrepiece of the campaign against the Vietnamese was an attempt by Thai rightists to portray their presence in border provinces (where they were confined by the Thai authorities) as a vanguard for Hanoi's allegedly planned invasion of northeast Thailand.\(^4\) There were more riots against the Vietnamese in November 1975, \(^5\) soon after it was reported that two Vietnamese residents had been arrested on espionage charges.\(^6\) In February 1976 military spokesmen claimed that several groups of Vietnamese residents had been trained in sabotage in North Vietnam and had infiltrated back into Thailand. Rather absurdly, the army commander-in-chief attempted to blame these Vietnamese "sappers" for the "unusually high number of fires in Bangkok and elsewhere recently".\(^7\)

The visit by Hanoi's deputy foreign minister to Bangkok in July 1976 appeared to galvanize the opponents of normalized Thai-Vietnamese relations, inspired by Vice-Minister of the Interior Samak

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\(^4\) Flood, pp. 39-40. The \textit{Bangkok Post} of 4 July 1975 alleged that the Vietnamese refugees were "being watched closely" as they might be used by Hanoi as a "fifth column".

\(^5\) \textit{Age}, 26 November 1975.

\(^6\) \textit{Bangkok Post}, 21 November 1975.

\(^7\) \textit{Bangkok Post}, 19, 20 and 21 February 1976.
Sundaravej, into intensified activity. There were violent attacks by right-wing Thai groups on Vietnamese settlements in the northeast, and 16,000 Vietnamese (including recently-arrived refugees) were arrested without charge. The apparent manipulation of the Vietnamese refugees climaxed immediately before the 6 October 1976 military coup. For example, the assistant police chief claimed that "illicit activities of Vietnamese refugees living in this country are directly threatening the country's security". In the aftermath of the coup, which had been justified partly on the grounds that Thailand was threatened by Vietnamese-backed revolution, many Vietnamese residents were arrested. Statements by some senior provincial officials and police officers undermined the credibility of many of the claims made against the long-established Vietnamese refugees in the 1975-76 period, however.

The Thai right-wing's hostility towards the Vietnamese refugees continued after the October 1976 coup, and even after the toppling of

78 Bangkok Post, 3 October 1976.
79 Bangkok home service, 0001 gmt, 16 October 1976 (SWB FE/5343/B/2, 21 October 1976); 0001 gmt, 28 October 1976 (SWB FE/5353/B/7, 2 November 1976); 0035 gmt, 30 October 1976 (SWB FE/5357/B/6, 6 November 1976).
80 For example, in September 1976 the deputy governors of Sakon Nakhon and Udon Thani provinces (both areas with a large number of Vietnamese residents) accused certain Bangkok political factions of inciting riots against the Vietnamese, and expressed scepticism over ISOC claims regarding Vietnamese invasion plans. While Samak was making inflammatory charges against the Vietnamese residents in 1976, senior police officers (who came under Samak's ministry) were denying the same allegations. When Samak became Minister of the Interior after the coup he purged the ministry and the police department of some of those who had not supported his anti-Vietnamese campaign. Flood, pp. 40-42.
Thanin a year later.\textsuperscript{81} With reference to the arrest of Vietnamese refugees at the time of talks between Thai, Vietnamese and Lao delegates on reviving the Mekong Committee in May 1977, one observer noted that this happened "every time a move is made by the Foreign Ministry to settle differences with Vietnam".\textsuperscript{82} When Thailand widened its alien labour laws to regulate the employment of Indochinese refugees (in general) in 1978, it became necessary for the first time for the long-established Vietnamese refugees to apply for work permits. The hotchpotch nature of the Thai establishment's allegations was displayed in a \textit{Bangkok Post} editorial which not only repeated military claims that the refugees were under communist control, but also alleged that they were a threat because of their business competition with Thais.\textsuperscript{83}

Official hostility towards the Vietnamese refugees intensified after the Vietnamese onslaught against Cambodia at the end of 1978. Certainly, there may have been some genuine concern that an internal "Vietnamese threat" could now somehow be linked up with the threat

\textsuperscript{81} The removal of the Thanin regime did, in 1978, permit a resumption of negotiations with Hanoi on the issue of repatriation. But Vietnam was apparently reluctant to accept the "refugees", who now numbered about 40,000. Vietnam's already formidable economic and social problems (deriving from national reunification, post-war reconstruction, natural disasters, deteriorating relations with China, and the absence of Western economic aid) presumably would not have been ameliorated by the addition of almost 1% to the country's already rapidly increasing population. Moreover, Hanoi may have feared (probably without good grounds) that the repatriated refugees would, after over thirty years' existence as a community in Thailand, pose a security threat. \textit{Bangkok Post}, 13, 15-17, 23-26, 28 October 1978.


\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Bangkok Post}, 16 October 1978.
seen to be posed by Hanoi's military presence in Cambodia. But it seems more likely that Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia provided a justification for the continuing use of the Vietnamese refugees as popular scapegoats for an internal security problem that was rooted in local socioeconomic deficiencies rather than an externally-based conspiracy aided by a domestic "fifth column". The Bangkok Post urged that the refugees' "privileges" be withdrawn and that they again be strictly concentrated in the nine northeastern provinces to which they were originally restricted. In March 1981 the Thai military conducted a seminar "to formulate proper measures for controlling Vietnamese refugees in Thailand for the sake of national security".

Post-1975 Refugees and Subversion: The Thai View

To a large degree, prevailing official Thai attitudes towards the Vietnamese refugees from the First Indochina War carried over to Bangkok's view of those Indochinese refugees who arrived after 1975. In March 1975 the Thai Prime Minister (Kukrit) insisted that Cambodian refugees entering Thailand would be allowed to stay only until the danger to them had passed, as the Thai government "wished to avoid the trouble caused in a similar situation by Vietnamese refugees who had

84 Ibid., 29 January 1979.

refused to leave Thailand once they had entered. The Thai authorities sometimes adopted a similar attitude towards the Laotian refugees: according to an army spokesman in early 1976, there was a danger that they might cause "serious problems to national security... similar to those caused by the Vietnamese refugees in several northeastern provinces."

This suspicion that agents might have infiltrated Thailand with the refugees may not have been without foundation, bearing in mind the evidence regarding cooperation between the CPT and Thailand's Indochinese neighbours. But although the flow of refugees across the border into Thailand provided a useful opportunity for the placing of agents, there was little convincing evidence that this was happening on a significant scale. Indeed, Thai claims regarding the subversive potential of the refugees frequently seemed far-fetched, particularly during the Thanin period. In 1977, it was claimed that Pathet Lao personnel were infiltrating refugee camps in the northeast and then attempting to "indoctrinate" people in nearby villages. At the same time, the situation on the Cambodian border had become so tense under the influence of the Thanin regime's paranoia that Thai forces were reported at times to have killed anybody coming across the border,

86 Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 27 March 1975 (SWB FE/4866/A3/2, 1 April 1975).
87 According to Colonel Ralong Ratanasithi, Third Army Deputy Chief of Staff, Bangkok Post, 18 January 1976.
88 Bangkok Post, 18 January 1977.
89 Statement by Lieutenant-Colonel Thanit Wasaphuti, Deputy Chief of Intelligence, 2nd Army Region, Bangkok domestic service, 1300 gmt, 23 August 1977 (FBIS-APA-77-165, 25 August 1977).
regardless of whether they were Khmer Rouge troops, CPT guerillas, bandits -- or refugees. 90

After the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia, a senior Thai military leader claimed that the Indochinese refugees posed "a serious and immediate national security problem to Thailand". He alleged that the refugees could easily become a "sixth column" of political, economic and social liability for Thailand, giving cover to a "fifth column" and potentially providing a pretext for a hostile country (presumably Vietnam) to invade Thailand. His claim that there was "firm evidence of communist spies and agents operating inside and out of refugee camps", 91 was endorsed in 1980 by what appeared to be the most definitive official statement on the issue: the Interior Ministry claimed that because of limited manpower it was impossible to supervise the refugees closely enough to prevent them from spying or spreading subversive propaganda. It was further alleged that there was "no doubt that an agent network connects all the camps throughout the country". 92

Unlike their Laotian and Cambodian counterparts, for geographical reasons the Vietnamese refugees who reached Thailand from 1975 could not be expected to operate as a resistance force against the communist regime that was now ensconced throughout their homeland. In this respect, they therefore did not present a security concern for Thailand's government. But neither did they provide any opportunities

90 D Wise, FEER, 23 September 1977, p.32-33.
for certain Thai military and other official elements who wished to promote such resistance. This factor, reinforced by the lack of ethnic closeness between Thais and Vietnamese\textsuperscript{93} and the well-established and continuing official Thai habit of repressing and manipulating the 40,000 Vietnamese "refugees" from the First Indochina War, formed the background to Bangkok's harsh attitude, throughout the 1975-81 period, towards the relatively small numbers\textsuperscript{94} of Vietnamese who fled to Thailand. By mid-1979 (if not before), the 3400 Vietnamese in Thai refugee camps were reportedly subject to "extortion and mistreatment" by the Thai military authorities,\textsuperscript{95} amidst allegations that Hanoi was attempting to infiltrate agents into Thailand with the refugees,\textsuperscript{96} possibly in connection with the CPT insurgency.\textsuperscript{97}

Thailand's harsh policy towards Vietnamese refugees apparently included official negligence towards the activities in the Gulf of

\textsuperscript{93} In saying this, one would not wish to imply that there is any tangible evidence to support the frequent assertions made concerning the "historic ethnic antipathy" between Thais and Vietnamese; political considerations rather than atavistic racial hatred were the dominant factor determining relations between the two peoples.

\textsuperscript{94} Between 1975 and August 1980 54,105 Vietnamese refugees reached Thailand, out of a total Indochinese refugee influx of 359,932 but the latter total did not include Cambodian "illegal immigrants" in border areas. \textit{Too Long to Wait...}, p. 21.


\textsuperscript{96} Statement by Lieutenant-Colonel Thanit Wasaphuti, Deputy Chief of Intelligence, 2nd Army Region, Bangkok domestic service, 1300 gmt, 23 August 1977 (FBIS-APA-77-165, 25 August 1977).

Thailand of pirates based in the south of the country. In the early stages of the seaborne refugee flow from southern Vietnam, most boats headed towards southern Thailand, which was the nearest landfall. But this pattern changed after Thai pirates began to attack and rob refugee vessels, killing and raping many Vietnamese in the process, so that by mid-1977 most "boat people" were heading for Malaysia rather than Thailand. 98

Whether or not the Thai authorities, through not taking any effective measures against piracy, gave the pirates licence to act as a deterrent to the seaborne refugees is a moot point. Virtually all of the pirates involved were fishermen, often operating from remote villages on the southern Thai coast, in an area where piracy was endemic. It would have been difficult for the Thai government to detect and suppress this "part-time" piracy in the 15,000 vessel fishing fleet. But it would have been possible for Bangkok to have done more than it actually did, if it had possessed the political will to do so. The will, however, was lacking: Bangkok's perceived interest was to prevent landings by Vietnamese refugees. Although a US financed anti-piracy programme (costing US$2m) operated from February to September 1981 99 and the Thai Cabinet approved in March 1981 a six point plan aimed at improving the effectiveness of anti-piracy operations, 100 it seemed that Bangkok was still unwilling to

100 Bangkok Post, 4 March 1981.
clamp down on the pirates. For example, the registration numbers of many fishing vessels engaged in piracy were reported to the Thai authorities by the West German refugee rescue ship, Cap Anamur, but there was no sign of punitive action against the offenders. Between 1975 and May 1982 less than forty pirates were apprehended by the authorities. At times it seemed that there was more official Thai concern over the considerably less prevalent problem of attacks by "boat people" on Thai fishing vessels.

In the 1975-78 period, all the Vietnamese reaching Thailand arrived either by sea or by way of Laos. After Hanoi's intervention against the Khmer Rouge, refugees from southern Vietnam (including ethnic Chinese, Khmer Krom and "Amerasians") began arriving in Thailand by way of Cambodia. Before long, these refugees were followed by hundreds of deserters from the Vietnamese army, including

101 Norm Aisbett, Canberra Times, 3 October 1981.

102 In approximate terms this meant that there was "one conviction per 3000 murders and 5000 rapes by pirates since 1975". Economist, 29 May 1982.

103 This may have been a reaction to sustained international criticism of Bangkok's inaction against the piracy problem. Official Thai publicity concerning refugee attacks on fishing vessels reached a peak in early 1981. See, for example, Bangkok Post, 22 January 1981; The Times, 13 February 1981; Bangkok Post, 16 February 1981.

104 According to an official Thai source, in the 1975-78 period about 23,000 Vietnamese reached Thailand: this was just over 10% of the total refugee arrivals. Too Long to Wait..., p. 21.

105 The Khmer Krom are ethnic Khmers (Cambodians) living in southern Vietnam.

106 Barry Wain, AWSJ, 8 July 1982.
both northern cadres and southern conscripts.\textsuperscript{107} Moreover, the flow of Vietnamese "boat people" increased with the quickening of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict; without any apparent evidence, the Secretary-General of the Thai National Security Council claimed that up to 10\% of these seaborne refugees were agents planted by Hanoi.\textsuperscript{108} When international pressure led Hanoi to place stricter controls on seaborne departures, escape from Vietnam by the land route through Cambodia became even more popular.\textsuperscript{109} This influx, though still small compared to the size of the Laotian and Cambodian refugee populations,\textsuperscript{110} contained a considerably increased potential for infiltration and subversion from the point of view of the Thai authorities.

There is substantial evidence that the Vietnamese refugees reaching Thailand from 1979 were treated even less humanely than their Cambodian and Laotian counterparts. Even if the Thai government did not sincerely believe that the Vietnamese posed a greater security risk than other refugees, important sectors of public opinion (after three decades of conditioning, and in the face of continuing manipulation by right-wing politicians such as Samak Sundaravej)\textsuperscript{111}


\textsuperscript{108} Wain, The Refused..., p. 134.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p. 244.

\textsuperscript{110} From January 1979 to August 1980 alone, over 31,000 Vietnamese arrived in Thailand, constituting 22\% of the total refugee influx. Too Long to Wait..., p. 21.

\textsuperscript{111} For example, in August 1979 Samak claimed: "a great number of Vietnamese people who claimed to be refugees or boat people are still roaming the country, and are not in refugee camps as they should be". Bangkok Post, 30 August 1979.
might not have reacted well if the number of Vietnamese in the country had continued to increase.

To deter new arrivals -- and supposedly to enforce security -- most of the Vietnamese were held near the border in an army-supervised camp, exclusively for Vietnamese, known as Northwest Nine (NW9) and initially not allowed to apply for resettlement in third countries. By 1981 the Vietnamese from NW9 had all been resettled, but the Thais refused to allow any more Vietnamese to cross the border. This left 420 Vietnamese trapped in border encampments controlled by the Khmer Rouge and Khmer Serei, neither of which were noted for their sympathy for Vietnamese of any political persuasion: there is evidence that at least some of the Vietnamese were killed by the Khmer Rouge. In late 1981 the Thais opened a new camp, NW82, to house Vietnamese "land people". According to US officials this was "the worst camp in the history of the Indochina refugee exodus" with the inmates suffering from physical abuse, psychological stress, inadequate food and water, and rampant disease. This policy of what one refugee coordinator termed "inhumane deterrence" was reportedly coupled with a Thai programme to recruit refugees for "resistance work against the Vietnamese government". It was not clear what this work involved, but it did seem that Bangkok had found a way in which to use to its advantage the Vietnamese as well as the Cambodian and Laotian components of the refugee presence.

112 Too Long to Wait..., p. 244.
113 Ibid., p. 258.
114 Barry Wain, AWSJ, 8 July 1982.
There was a pungent irony in the fact that while the Thai authorities continued to view the Vietnamese refugee presence as a dangerous stronghold of communist subversion throughout the 1975-81 period, after the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia Bangkok tolerated -- and at times encouraged -- the presence on Thai soil of Cambodian communists who had until very recently been staging cross-border attacks into Thailand in cooperation with the CPT. Before the ouster of the Pol Pot regime the Thai authorities had expressed concern over infiltration of the then relatively small Cambodian refugee population by Khmer Rouge elements.115 But fears of the subversive potential of the Khmer Rouge were almost totally eclipsed by Bangkok's wish to use all available means short of open armed conflict between Thailand and Vietnam to wrest Cambodia from Hanoi's domination.

Refugees and Subversion: The View from the Other ASEAN Countries

The other four ASEAN countries' concern with the subversive potential of the Indochinese refugee exodus was simpler than Thailand's, as it involved only seaborne refugees from Vietnam. Moreover, the concern with infiltration began (or at least was made public) only after the Vietnamese move into Cambodia, the Sino-Vietnamese war and the intensification of the seaborne refugee flow in 1979. But even then, regional governments were cautious in their handling of the issue, as any indication that an administration was

115 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 28805 (3 February 1978).
not in complete control of the immediate security situation carried with it the risk that opposition political groups could benefit through demonstrating governmental incompetence. This was particularly the case in Indonesia and Malaysia, where the authorities also wished to maintain their relatively conciliatory policies towards Hanoi. The Malaysian authorities feared that extreme anti-communist elements (perhaps especially in the Islamic PAS party) might attempt to use the refugee issue to sabotage Kuala Lumpur's relationship with Hanoi. There was also a need to reassure foreign investors that their capital was secure.

In the archipelagic countries of Indonesia and the Philippines concern over the more directly security-related problems supposedly caused by the "boat people" was heightened by a long-standing awareness of their governments' fragile control over the two states' outer islands.

In Indonesia responsibility for managing the refugees was given in early 1979 to a national refugee task force, P3V, led by the chief of BAKIN (Military Intelligence) and under the control of the Ministry of Defence and Security. The Foreign Minister declared that this was because the refugees were a "threat to Indonesia's security". According to the Army Chief of Staff, because many of the refugees were former military personnel "... it was feared that they were sent

for certain purposes disguised as refugees". The Supreme Advisory Council deputy chairman, Djatikusumo, claimed that the refugee problem had been created "to make the region vulnerable to infiltration by... communist ideology". A particular concern in Indonesia's case was that subversives from China might slip into the country amongst the refugee boats, and even ethnic Chinese genuinely from Vietnam were regarded with suspicion by some military and Islamic elements. But speculation that the Jakarta regime was seriously concerned over the security implications of the refugees was moderated by the Minister of Defence, General Yusuf, who claimed Indonesia's "national stability" was such that the country would be able to overcome any difficulties caused by the refugees.

President Marcos of the Philippines questioned whether all of the seaborne Vietnamese "were actually refugees" after some of their vessels were found in "security areas" around Palawan Island. But Marcos's implicit accusation was clearly not to be taken at face value, as Palawan was the nearest land to the west of the southern part of the central Vietnamese coast and thus the obvious place of landing for boats coming from that area.

The Malaysian authorities came closer than any of their ASEAN partners (except perhaps Thailand) to producing evidence of the

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118 See, for example, statement by Haj Imron Rosjadi (a PPP Member of Parliament), Indonesian Times, 3 March 1979; Wain, The Refused..., p. 34; van Dijk, p. 142.

119 Indonesian Times, 3 July 1979.

120 Asiaweek, 29 July 1979, p. 16.
infiltration of Vietnamese agents into the region through the "boat people". A former Viet Cong Major (who was alleged to have been a senior security and intelligence officer until his flight from Vietnam in November 1978) claimed to fear "Vietnamese agents" who might be present in the Pulau Bidong camp where he was being held. According to another report, the Malaysian police arrested and interrogated Vietnamese agents sent with the boats by Hanoi "to monitor conditions and report back to base". Some such "agents" were reported to have stolen Malaysian fishing boats and committed acts of piracy in order to return to Vietnam. But no evidence was produced to substantiate Deputy Prime Minister Mahathir's fear that refugees "might leave the camps and join the Communist guerillas in the jungles". The Home Affairs Minister, Ghazali Shafie, was dismissive of the direct security risk posed by the refugees, pointing out that they were "...not communists but people who wish to continue life in a society where there is free enterprise".

The Socioeconomic Impact of the Refugees

One of the most contentious issues involving the Indochinese refugees concerned the extent to which they imposed economic and social burdens on first asylum countries. Certainly, the ASEAN states...

121 Straits Times, 10 January 1979; "Towing out to sea has been going on since 1975", FEER, 31 August 1979, p. 41.

122 Report of meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed in The Indochinese Refugee Situation, August 1979, p. 28.

(except Singapore) were all less developed countries which had no reason to welcome any phenomenon which might upset their growing, but fragile, economies or their tenuous social and political stability. For this reason the refugees were often seen as unwittingly constituting a threat to the region's security (in the broadest sense) and there was an almost total rejection by the ASEAN governments of any notion that Indochinese refugees might be resettled permanently in the region. There were a few exceptions to this rule: for example, Singapore resettled a token hundred or so Vietnamese fishermen and their families (from the first wave of "boat people" in 1975). Furthermore, Thailand and Malaysia provided permanent homes for rather larger numbers of refugees with ethnic or religious links to indigener populations.

Like 40 per cent of the world's states, none of the ASEAN countries were signatories to either the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees or the 1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which obliged contracting parties not to expel refugees from their territory. This phenomenon arose largely out of a desire by the region's governments to avoid open-

124 Peter Weintraub, FEER, 16 December 1977, p. 32; Wain, The Refused..., p. 124.

125 Manila, which had adopted a consistently more liberal policy towards the refugee issue (probably because it could afford to do so -- at the height of the refugee crisis in mid-1979 there were only 4500 Indochinese in the Philippines awaiting resettlement, compared to 190,000 in Thailand -- and at the same time hope to improve its image in Washington as far as "human rights" issues were concerned), ratified both the Convention and the Protocol in July 1981.
ended commitments to providing even temporary sanctuary for refugees in a part of the world where an important governmental concern was to inhibit the porosity of borders with neighbouring states. But although the Indochinese refugees were officially regarded in the region as "illegal immigrants" of "displaced persons" without the rights given to refugees in some other parts of the world, this did not mean that they were never granted temporary asylum by the ASEAN countries. It did, however, mean that the ASEAN countries were legally allowed a choice of whether or not to grant such asylum.

In the case of Cambodian refugees wishing to enter Thailand, Bangkok's policy was influenced by the shifting balance between the conflicting interests of preserving the effectiveness of the Cambodian resistance and of excluding the refugees and their attendant problems from Thai territory. Direct security interests did not play such an important role in determining Thai policy towards refugees from Laos. Here, the closer ethnic links across the Thai-Laotian border largely explained the generally greater readiness of the Thai people and authorities (particularly at the local level) to accept Laotian refugees. Indeed, between 1975 and mid-1979 an estimated 25-30,000 Laotians had crossed the border and settled, admittedly without formal official authorization, amongst their kin in north and northeast Thailand. By June 1981, almost 270,000 lowland Lao and Hmong (roughly 10% of the Laotian population) had been given temporary asylum in Thailand at some stage.

Despite the concern expressed in the ASEAN countries over the subversive potential of the seaborne Vietnamese refugees, the crux of the prevailing regional attitude to the problem was concerned with
the socioeconomic impact of the exodus. It was this aspect of the refugees' effect on national security (or perhaps, more accurately, regime security) that was the main impetus behind the wish to discourage further departures from Vietnam by seaborne refugees and to encourage the West to resettle more of them, more quickly.

The attitudes of the ASEAN countries (which had hitherto been fairly generous in their attitude towards providing "first asylum" for the boat people) hardened markedly in late 1977, by which time seaborne refugee departures from Vietnam had risen to 1500 each month (compared to a monthly average of 500 in 1976). At this stage Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia began to turn away seaborne refugees by towing incoming vessels out to sea, as Singapore had done consistently since 1975 (except in the case of refugees for whom a guarantee of resettlement had been obtained prior to their landing). But only a minority of "boat people" were apprehended

126 Emily McFarquhar, Economist, 21 July 1979, p. 24; US Embassy Bangkok, "1982 World Refugee Report to Congress: Thailand" (Telegram to all US diplomatic posts, Ref. 136905, 19 June 1982). According to this report, 8500 ethnic Thais from Cambodia also moved across the border and settled in Thailand in the 1972-82 period. In 1977, the Thanin government's Interior Minister, Samak Sundaravej, spoke of the consideration being given by the Thai authorities to the creation of border villages with mixed Thai/Lao and Thai/Cambodian populations. The intention may have been to provide a more permanent sanctuary for anti-communist Indochinese who wished to mount subversive operations into, or at least remain close to, their homeland. But with the replacement of the Thanin regime no more was heard of this plan. Henry Kamm, New York Times, 1 July 1977.

127 Figure abstracted from US Department of State, The Indochinese Refugee Situation (Report to the Secretary of State by the Special Refugee Advisory Panel, 12 August 1981), Table : "Indochinese Refugee Activity April 1975 thru June 1981".

128 Peter Weintraub, FEER, 16 December 1977, pp. 30-33.
before reaching the ASEAN countries' shores, and first asylum continued to be granted fairly freely due to American and other international pressure and the willingness of third countries to resettle the refugees. Following Hanoi's discriminatory moves against Vietnam's ethnic Chinese community from March 1978, the outflow of seaborne refugees increased dramatically. When this was combined with evidence that Hanoi was actively assisting the exodus, the ASEAN countries adopted even more stringent measures to deal with the boat people, culminating in a claim by the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia that legislation might be introduced to allow the shooting of refugees trying to land on his country's beaches.

By the standards of the Third World as a whole, the ASEAN countries were fairly wealthy. Moreover, even at the height of the refugee crisis in mid-1979 the number of Indochinese in the region

129 The number of "boat people" arriving in the ASEAN countries was as follows:

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130 See these editorials, for example; "The real culprits", Straits Times, 18 June 1979; "Vietnam must be told to stop", Bangkok Post, 18 June 1979.

131 Straits Times, 16 June 1979; IHT, 16-17 June 1979.
remained very small compared to the total population of the countries concerned -- even in Thailand the refugee population never exceeded 1.5% of the total population. All direct capital and maintenance costs imposed by the refugee presence were borne by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR) (or, to a lesser extent, by "voluntary agencies" such as the International Committee of the Red Cross). This left the host governments to cover the administrative costs associated with the refugees. The evidence suggests that the costs imposed by the refugees were often balanced by economic benefits to the host countries, and that the economic side of the refugee issue was often manipulated by regional governments to encourage the faster resettlement of the Indochinese by developed third countries.

**Thailand**

The economic consequences of the refugee presence were a highly controversial issue in Thailand, mainly because of the size of the Indochinese influx across the land border from Indochina. On the positive side of the balance, the various international organizations concerned with the refugee problem spent large sums in Thailand: for example, US$100m on the Cambodian relief programme in the six months from October 1979 to March 1980. Such expenditure provided Thailand with foreign exchange that was particularly welcome in view of a persistent balance of trade deficit and a worsening balance of payments deficit. A boom economy developed in Aranyaprathet and other

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132 Suhrke, Pasuk and Zakaria, p. 18.
provincial centres: this increased commercial activity in turn provided some additional revenue. As a result of a plea to the international community in 1980, the Thai government was able to obtain substantial sums of aid to maintain "social and economic stability" in provinces bordering Cambodia which had been affected by the refugee inflow.

But on the negative side, there was probably a net loss of government revenue to the costs of administering the refugee presence through the military and civil service. At a time of rapid inflation (largely fuelled by oil price increases) and serious drought in 1979 and 1980 Bangkok had legitimate reasons for being abnormally sensitive on the issue of government expenditure. Local inflation became rampant, with prices in Aranyaprathet doubling between October 1979 and March 1980. Other costs included the loss of agricultural production in areas accommodating refugees, and damage to forest and water resources. On balance, however, the Thai government's complaints about the economic burden imposed by the Indochinese

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133 Too Long to Wait..., p. 8; Suhrke, Pasuk and Zakaria, pp. 8, 20-5.

134 By mid-1982, international donor pledges for this "Affected Thai Program" totalled US$30m (mainly for spending on food), the project including 100,000 Thais in 115 villages. There were also plans to include up to 60 villages on the border with Laos in the project. "1982 World Refugee Report to Congress...", Section 05.

135 For example, Khmer Rouge-controlled refugees reportedly destroyed crops and houses, looted and killed in Thai border villages, leading to anti-refugee rallies. Bangkok Post, 28 May and 25 June 1979.
refugees are largely to have been a tactic aimed at securing greater international assistance with the problem.

It was the political and social implications of this economic impact, rather than an economic burden per se, which were of more concern to the Thai authorities. The economic benefits of the refugee presence were not distributed at all equally through Thai society: mostly they went to a small number of large merchants, corrupt government officials and army officers. Unequal income distribution was thus reinforced. Moreover, the border provinces providing refuge for the Indochinese were among Thailand's poorest areas. For example, in northeast Thailand (where the Laotian refugees were provided with asylum) 40% of the population lived below the level of "absolute poverty". According to an Interior Ministry publication, the standard of living of the "displaced persons" was "far better" than that of "up-country" Thais. The refugee presence highlighted Thailand's underlying social and economic injustices, focussing attention on questions of the appropriate distribution of wealth and the corruptibility of some elements of the elite. This in turn seems to have accentuated the regime's sense of vulnerability, as it was placed in the politically uncomfortable position of having to defend the fact that assistance was being given to Indochinese (who were

136 For example, as the ASEAN states hardened and orchestrated their approach to the refugee problem in May 1979, the Thai Supreme Command Chief of Staff (General Saiyud Kerdphol) spoke of the refugees adding "to the already heavy financial burden of the country". Bangkok Post, 1 June 1979.

137 Too Long to Wait..., p. 8.
often regarded with ethnic condescension by many Thais) rather than its own poor citizens.  

Malaysia

For Kuala Lumpur the socioeconomic impact of the refugees was even more politically significant, although the actual costs to the Malaysian exchequer were negligible. The local economic impact was similar to that in Thailand. Like northeast Thailand, the east coast of peninsular Malaysia (where the overwhelming majority of seaborne Vietnamese reaching Malaysia landed) was the poorest part of the country. As in Thailand, the local economic boom caused by the refugee presence did not result in benefits for all -- or even a large number of -- local residents. Indeed, the effect on most of the local Malay population was largely negative, being characterized by rising food prices, black market corruption with attendant gangster profiteering, the pollution of padi fields by camp drainage, the threat of epidemics and the tainting of staple sea food (which had allegedly fed on refugees' corpses).  

138 When interviewed by a visiting US House of Representatives Study Mission in August 179, both Air Marshal Sitthi Savetsila (then Secretary-General of the National Security Council) and Kriangsak stressed such domestic political pressures. The Indochinese Refugee Situation, August 1979, pp. 14-15.

139 J Clementson, "Malaysia in the Seventies: Communist Resurgence and Government Response", Journal of the Royal United Services Institute, Vol. 124, No. 4 (December 1979), p. 56; Straits Times, 6 December 1978 and 26 June 1979. In January 1979 it was reported that the National Investigation Board was looking into "malpractices" in the supply of goods to refugees in Trengganu state. Straits Times, 26 January 1979.
But in Malaysia an important ethnic dimension was injected into the resentment that was apparent (or at least feared by the authorities). Not only were the majority of the seaborne Vietnamese refugees reaching the east coast ethnic Chinese, but the benefits of refugee-related expenditure by international organizations and the Malaysian government accrued primarily to local ethnic Chinese merchants. These factors were of particular concern to the government as the east coast was the heartland of conservative, Islamic-orientated Malay nationalism.

The core of the government's concern appeared to have been that opposition Malay groups could use the ethnic dimension of the refugee crisis -- by asserting that it threatened the rights of Malays -- as a lever with which to exert political pressure on the multiracial ruling coalition. There were also fear that the ethnic issue might upset the country's delicate racial balance (and hence its whole social, economic and political stability) particularly if local Malay grievances against incoming ethnic Chinese refugees were exaggerated and exploited by Malay political groups in a manner comparable to the events of May 1969.

140 At least 60% of the "boat people" arriving in Malaysia were ethnic Chinese. Milton Osborne, "The Indochinese Refugees: Cause and Effects", International Affairs, Vol. 56, No. 1 (January 1980), pp. 42, 48.

141 Suhrke, Pasuk and Zakaria, pp. 31-32.

142 In 1969, electoral successes by the "Chinese" Democratic Action Party were used by extremist Malay politicians to incite violence against non-Malay communities. Home Affairs Minister Ghazali emphasized this precedent for a breakdown of communal relations in a meeting with the US House of Representatives Study Mission. The Indochinese Refugee Situation, August 1979, p. 24.
The key role of ethnicity in producing the hard line official Malaysian response to the Vietnamese refugee problem becomes particularly clear when a comparison is made with the government's contemporaneous treatment of other refugee and immigrant groups. In the second half of the 1970s Malaysia resettled more refugees per head of its own population (1 to every 137) than any other country in the world except Israel.\textsuperscript{143} Almost all the 105,700\textsuperscript{144} refugees resettled in Malaysia on a semi-permanent basis between 1975 and 1980 were Philippine Muslims who fled to Sabah from late 1972 to escape the conflict between the Manila government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). It seems clear that the influx of Philippine Muslims was at least initially (that is, in the 1972-76 period) encouraged by the Sabah state government under Chief Minister Mustapha bin Harun. Mustapha allegedly harboured ambitious secessionist plans to detach Sabah from Malaysia and the Sulu archipelago, Mindanao and Palawan from the Philippines to form a new country. Apart from seeing the Philippine refugees as a useful resource base for supporting the MNLF, they also increased the size of the Muslim "Malay" minority (the power base of Mustapha's United Sabah National Organization) in a state where most of the population were Christians or animists.\textsuperscript{145}

After the electoral ouster of Mustapha in April 1976, the continuing flow of Philippine refugees into Sabah was met with

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Henry Kamm, IHT, 8 March 1979; Straits Times, 22 January 1979.
benevolent indifference by local and federal authorities. The refugees were by this stage making an important contribution to the labour-starved local economy, and there was apparently some fear of the possible reaction of the Arab countries if they were returned to the Philippines. Although there was some discontent amongst the local population in Sabah at the refugee presence (particularly because of its effect on wage levels), the threat that this posed to the credibility of the state and federal governments was outweighed by the political dividends accruing from maintaining or increasing the size of the "Malay" component in the population.\footnote{Straits Times, 22 January 1979; New Straits Times, 20 November 1979; Asiaweek, 3 December 1982, p. 28.} Federal Home Affairs Minister Ghazali made explicit the difference between official attitudes towards Philippine and Vietnamese refugees when he told Parliament:

Filipinos who come to Sabah to seek sanctuary are given refugee status because their presence will not have adverse effects on the peace and order of the country... illegal immigrants from Vietnam could not be given similar status... [and] ... protection because the Government felt that their presence could have adverse consequences on the country.\footnote{Daily Express (Manila), 24 November 1979.}

As well as the Philippine refugees, the Malaysian authorities tolerated the presence of perhaps as many as 100,000 Indonesian illegal immigrants in the late 1970s. According to critics of the government this presence was condoned not just because it helped to resolve a chronic shortage of plantation and construction labour but...
also because it helped "to swell the ranks of the... Malay population".148

On a smaller scale, but nevertheless extremely pertinent to a consideration of Kuala Lumpur's differential treatment of various refugee groups, was the resettlement in Malaysia of Cambodian Muslims. About 1500 of these refugees came directly from Cambodia by boat in the 1975-77 period, heading for a village on the Malaysian coast with which they had had family and religious links for four hundred years.149 Over 3000 others were selected from refugee camps in Thailand for resettlement in Thailand. The refugees were given Malaysian citizenship and instruction in Bahasa Malaysia, and were quickly integrated into Malay society.150

The salience of the Vietnamese refugees' ethnicity in the Malaysian government's response to the problem was emphasized three years after the height of the refugee crisis when Mahathir Mohamed (by then Prime Minister) advocated that Malaysia should create its own market for manufactured goods by increasing its population by up to


149 Kuala Lumpur home service in English, 1100 gmt, 18 April 1975 (SWB FE/4883/A3/13, 21 April 1975); Peter Weintraub, FEER, 16 December 1977, p. 32.

150 Too Long to Wait..., p. 22; Straits Times, 13 June 1979. Ironically, some of these Cambodian Muslims proved to be a security threat, as they became involved with violent Islamic fundamentalist groups. The raid by Muslim fanatics on the police station at Batu Pahat in Johor in October 1980, in which eight attackers died and 23 policemen and civilians were wounded, was led by a Cambodian refugee who had arrived in Kelantan in 1975. K Das, FEER, 24 October 1980, p. 10.
400% (that is, to 70 million).\textsuperscript{151} This pronouncement cast profound doubt on the veracity of earlier Malaysian government declarations to the effect that the country could not bear the \textit{economic} burden of the refugees (or the residue of the refugees after most had been resettled).\textsuperscript{152} As Ghazali said, the Vietnamese were fleeing to the world of free enterprise from communism: if not for their ethnic characteristics they could presumably have played a valuable role in Malaysia's expanding economy. But it was the ethnic factor (and its political implications), rather than economic considerations, which played the preponderant role in deciding Kuala Lumpur's policy on the matter.

The extent of east coast Malays' hostility towards the Vietnamese refugees was not clear. There were certainly some ugly and violent incidents on the beaches in late 1978 and early 1979: for example, a police officer helping refugees ashore was stoned by local people, and 150 refugees were drowned when their boat sank soon after being pushed

\textsuperscript{151} Raphael Pura, "Mahathir says a Baby Boom would be Good", AWSJ, 22 November 1982.

\textsuperscript{152} For example, with reference to the boat people, the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs claimed: "As a small developing country, Malaysia cannot afford to bear the burden of sheltering them particularly as there is no guarantee that they will be accepted for resettlement elsewhere". Statement by H E Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia at the opening session of the Twelfth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Bali, 28 June 1979, ASEAN Digest, No. 4/79 (August 1979), p. 82. According to one senior Malaysian diplomat, "Malaysia has come to the limit of her capacity to accept these people". Statement by Z A Mochtar (Malaysian Deputy High Commissioner in Canberra) at Seminar on Indochinese Refugees, Australian National University, Canberra, 30-31 July 1979, p.1.
away from a beach by villagers. On the other hand, there were numerous examples of spontaneous humanitarianism in the Malays' reaction to the arrival of the refugees. The truth of the matter seems to be that there was a real element of unease amongst the local population, but that this was manipulated by both opposition Malay groups and the government.

Kuala Lumpur's increasingly hard line approach to the refugee issue in the first half of 1979 was aimed as much at meeting domestic political challenges as at focusing international attention on the problem. The domestic political threat was essentially two-pronged, emanating from the main Malay opposition party, Parti Islam (PAS), and from within the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) (which dominated not only Malay politics but also the ruling National Front Coalition), particularly on the east coast and in the UMNO Youth Organization. The threat from within UMNO was particularly worrying for the government as the July 1979 party conference approached, with internal party elections -- which were arguably as important as a general election in a Malaysian context -- looming in 1980. In

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154 See, for example, the photograph of local people helping a Vietnamese woman ashore, Newsweek, 1 January 1979, p. 32. A Malay crew, ordered to tow back out to sea a boatload of refugees, was reported to have knelt and prayed for their Captain's soul. Emily MacFarquhar, Economist, 21 July 1979, p. 20.

155 The fact that "local people are starting to complain" was noted by Hussein Onn, the Malaysian Prime Minister, as early as May 1978. Michael Richardson, FEER, 26 May 1978, p. 22.

156 Suhrke, Pasuk and Zakaria, p. 33.
this way, the Vietnamese refugees reaching Malaysia became victims of the dynamics of Malay politics. As Malay politicians outside the government fanned rumours that the refugees included fifth columnists, gangsters and drug smugglers, and called for firm government action, UMNO leaders were provided with what was effectively a low-cost opportunity "to demonstrate their credentials as defenders of Malay rights". So although the government often urged "patience" and restraint in the face of the refugee influx, it was itself often guilty of lack of restraint in the measures that it took to discourage (or at least to show that it was intent on discouraging) refugee landings. The use of the term "illegal immigrants" for the refugees from November 1977 encouraged an alarmist view of the problem. Vessels carrying 41,000 Vietnamese were towed out to sea in the first half of 1979, with tragic results on occasion: one boat capsized under tow in circumstances which led the UNHCR to lay the blame for the subsequent loss of 104 lives on the Royal Malaysian Navy. In January 1979 the government called on the militia to stop the refugees from landing, and in June 1979 Deputy Prime Minister

158 Suhrke, Pasuk and Zakaria, p. 33.
159 Indonesian Times, 18 January 1979.
161 IHT, 3 and 11 April 1979; Asiaweek, 20 April 1979, pp. 28-29. One source (Indonesian Times, 4 April 1979) alleged that over 500 Vietnamese had died off Malaysia in similar incidents "in recent months".
Mahathir was widely reported as warning that Vietnamese attempting to land might be shot.\footnote{163}

Ultimately, the Malaysian government (or more accurately, the UMNO leadership) was successful in managing the refugee problem to yield maximal political benefits, both domestically and internationally. It seems that the Malay electorate was impressed by the UMNO leaders' defence of Malay rights in the face of what was being portrayed by politicians as effectively a Chinese invasion.\footnote{164}

Mahathir's "shoot on sight" warning of June 1979 was the culmination of a series of measures (aimed at reducing the refugee influx and speeding resettlement in third countries) that proved highly popular in some parts of the Malay community, and effectively forestalled criticism of the UMNO leadership at the party conference in July.\footnote{165}

An UMNO by-election victory over PAS in an east coast constituency was further proof of the government's success in handling the issue.\footnote{166}

At the same time, the Malaysian authorities were largely able to avoid international condemnation for their tough stand, while securing

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\footnote{163} Mahathir later claimed, in a meeting with the US House of Representatives Study Mission, that his comment had been misunderstood and that he had actually said "we will do everything short of shooting them, for which we would need the approval of Parliament..." The Indochinese Refugee Situation, August 1979, p. 28.

\footnote{164} About 50% of refugees reaching Malaysia from Vietnam were ethnic Vietnamese in 1979 (whereas they had been predominantly ethnic Chinese in 1978). Straits Times, 15 May 1979. But "Vietnamese" refugees were generally seen by east coast Malays as "Chinese" whatever their ethnic background.

\footnote{165} K Das, FEER, 20 July 1979, p. 12.

\footnote{166} "Setting limits on contest mobility", FEER, 31 August 1979, pp. 32, 37.
a new urgency in Western countries' policies towards third country resettlement of the boat people. The Prime Minister moved quickly to allay the alarm that had been expressed internationally over Mahathir's threat to have refugees shot if they attempted to land.\textsuperscript{167} But Mahathir's statement and the other Malaysian moves against the refugee influx had the desired effect on the West: at the July 1979 UN Conference on Indochinese Refugees in Geneva the number of resettlement places offered by third countries was increased from 125,000 to 250,000 and US$190m in cash and kind was pledged to help deal with the problem.\textsuperscript{168} In return for this increased resettlement, the Malaysian authorities were more liberal in granting first asylum to incoming refugees.\textsuperscript{169}

\textbf{Indonesia}

Indonesia's refugee problem was on a much smaller scale than Malaysia's (except in the first half of 1979 when Kuala Lumpur's policy of denying first asylum to seaborne refugees created a large scale influx into Indonesia), but the general nature of governmental concern over the socioeconomic and domestic political implications of the influx was much the same in both countries. As in Malaysia, there were many local economic problems.\textsuperscript{170} But General Yusuf, the Defence

\textsuperscript{167} Straits Times, 19 June 1979; Age, 19 June 1979.
\textsuperscript{168} Wain, The Refused..., p. 224.
\textsuperscript{169} See, for example, "The Week", FEER, 24 August 1979, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{170} These problems included the cutting down of clove trees by refugees who were unaware of their economic importance, supply shortages and inflation. Indonesian Times, 13 June 1979 and 7 July 1979; Straits Times, 9 July 1979.
and Security Minister, was being melodramatic -- probably in an attempt to draw international attention to Indonesia's plight -- when he asserted in March 1979 that the refugee problem should not be allowed to hamper the implementation of Indonesia's Third Pelita (Five-Year Plan). 171

Jakarta's real concern, however, was with the domestic political implications of the refugees. 172 As in Malaysia, the problem presented critics of the government (who were considerably more circumscribed in Indonesia) with a chance to go onto the offensive politically. In Indonesia the PPP (Development Unity Party) -- which had been formed when the government forced the merger of three opposition Islamic parties in 1973 -- was the only political organization retaining any effective autonomy, and it was principally this grouping which questioned Jakarta's refugee policies. As well as the supposed risk that the seaborne refugees included Vietnamese spies, in the first half of 1979 PPP politicians emphasized the financial burden of providing first asylum. But the most dangerous aspect of the PPP's criticism from the government's viewpoint was probably typified in assertions by MPs Imron Rosjadi and Chalid Mawardi that the many ethnic Chinese refugees amongst the boat people had been effectively expelled by Vietnam because they would always be loyal to China. Imron warned that the influx of refugees was a

171 Indonesian Times, 3 March 1979.

172 This was stressed by Vice President Adam Malik when he met the US House of Representatives Study Mission in August 1979. The Indochinese Refugee Situation, August 1979, pp. 19-20.
"refined invasion" by Chinese whose economic power was detrimental to Indonesia's security.\textsuperscript{173}

Relations between the local ethnic Chinese community and the indigenous population were as sensitive an issue in Indonesia as in Malaysia. While the relatively small size of Indonesia's Chinese community meant that continued national integrity did not depend on inter-ethnic cooperation to the same extent as in Malaysia, the military leadership's allegedly close links with the Sino-Indonesian business community implied that the Indonesian government could not afford to show complacency regarding the issue, for fear that it might be implicated by the opposition in Chinese schemes to subvert Indonesia. To maintain its credibility the Jakarta administration had to counter the implicit allegation that it was allowing into Indonesia ethnic Chinese who had already proved not to be trustworthy citizens of another Southeast Asian country. At the same time there may have been genuine concern in the government that the refugees might create ethnic tension in the areas where they landed.

For a number of reasons, Jakarta's response to the refugee influx was more restrained than that of Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, despite a recognition of the importance of ASEAN solidarity. The fact that the refugees landed largely on outlying and sparsely populated islands -- in particular, the Anambas -- meant both that there was objectively little threat to communal relations and that there was

little that the political opposition could do to arouse local sentiment against the "illegal immigrants". The refugee influx to Indonesia was so small that the government might have damaged its international credibility if it had over-reacted. In particular, Indonesia's efforts to follow a relatively humane policy towards the refugees (by allowing to land boats which had been turned away by Malaysia, for example) reflected a wish for good relations with the United States. The Indonesian government's economic strategy and political legitimacy were highly dependent on continuing American economic and military assistance, and it was therefore important not to offend Washington's sensibilities on human rights issues at a time when these (including refugee questions) were at the forefront of American foreign policy under President Carter. But at the height of the crisis in June 1979, the Thai and Malaysian announcements rejecting any more first asylum refugees, coupled with an unprecedented refugee influx to Indonesia, prompted Jakarta to announce that it would act in concert with its ASEAN partners by mounting a naval blockade to turn away refugee boats.175

174 Wain, The Refused..., p. 209; Asiaweek (29 June 1979, p. 19) reported that refugees harassed by Thai pirates and turned away by Malaysia and Singapore were well looked after in Indonesia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees later praised the assistance that Indonesia gave to the Vietnamese who sought asylum there in 1979, claiming that "in many ways the Indonesian experience had been a model in how a refugee influx can be handled in a truly humanitarian way". Sydney Morning Herald, 25 February 1980.

The Philippines

The socioeconomic impact of the Indochinese refugees was less in the Philippines than in any of the other ASEAN members which provided first asylum. The dangerous weather conditions and relative difficulty in attracting the attention of international shipping in the 1500 km crossing between Vietnam and the Philippines was apparently a strong deterrent to the overwhelming majority of refugees from taking this route: at the height of the seaborne exodus in 1979 less than 8000 boat people reached the Philippines, compared with nearly 54,000 arriving in Malaysia.

On the island of Palawan, where the majority of Vietnamese reaching the Philippines was concentrated, the refugee presence boosted the local economy. But according to the Philippines' Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlos Romulo, "... those in the slums are asking us, 'If you are feeding these people, why not us'? It's a hot potato, and there are limits to humanitarianism". It is

176 Bruce Grant, et. al. The Boat People: An "Age" Investigation with Bruce Grant (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 54.


178 Sheilah Ocampo, FEER, 18 December 1981, p. 10. But spending by international agencies on refugees in the Philippines was smaller than in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, reflecting the small size of the refugee population itself. In 1979, the UNHCR spent US$1.7m in the Philippines, compared with US$35m in Malaysia, US$32m in Thailand and US$13m in Indonesia. Wain, The Refused..., p. 132.

179 Asiaweek, 13 April 1979, pp. 15-16.
doubtful that the Philippines' poor really were exerting pressure on
the government, let alone that the government would be sensitive to
such pressure. But there may have been a fear in official circles
that the political opposition would use the small refugee presence as
an issue with which to challenge the government's credibility. In
contrast to the situations in Malaysia and Indonesia, however, in the
Philippines there was no attempt to exploit as an issue the Chinese
ethnicity of many of the refugees. This reflected the relatively
relaxed relationship between ethnic Chinese and the indigenous
population, as well as the relatively smaller number of incoming
refugees.

The first significant change in Manila's policy towards the
refugees came in December 1978 when a vessel carrying 2300 Vietnamese
supposedly rescued at sea was refused permission to land (although it
was allowed to anchor in Manila Bay). In February and again in
June 1979 the Philippine authorities moved physically to prevent
refugee boats from landing. Although this was initially justified in
terms of the need to prevent the Philippines from becoming "the
wastebasket" of Asia, it seems that these hard line actions sprang
more from a desire to keep in step with the policies of the other
ASEAN states rather than from concern over the impact of the refugees
in the Philippines. The Philippines' international identity was
increasingly a function of its membership of ASEAN: it was thus

181 Philippine Times, 10-16 February 1979.
182 Straits Times, 21 June 1979; Asiaweek, 29 June 1979, p. 16.
183 Philippine Times, 10-16 February 1979.
important to project a sympathetic view of the other ASEAN countries' problems in coping with the refugee influx. President Marcos emphasized this point in June 1979 when he claimed that it was "necessary for ASEAN to adopt a single, unified policy" on the refugee issue.

While the Philippine government was willing to adopt a tougher posture on the refugee issue for the sake of ASEAN solidarity, like its Indonesian counterpart it was anxious not to offend the Carter administration unnecessarily on a human rights issue. For this reason, after the ASEAN countries had been successful in their collective efforts in mid-1979 to exert pressure on the West (and particularly the United States) to accept considerably greater numbers of Indochinese for resettlement, Manila (like Jakarta) was quick to indicate that it would probably continue to provide first asylum to seaborne refugees and offered facilities for a Processing Centre for refugees who would be resettled elsewhere.

Singapore and the Conspiracy Theory

Singapore refused to provide temporary asylum to Indochinese refugees, except for a limited period for small numbers who had

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184 According to the Philippines' Ambassador to Australia, the refugees were "... exacerbating racial conflict in some ASEAN countries; pressing upon their limited resources and threatening to disturb the political stability of developing countries of Southeast Asia". See Leticia R Shahani, "Indochina Refugees: A Philippine Perspective" (Paper presented to Seminar on Indochinese Refugees, Australian National University, Canberra, 30-31 July 1979), p. 8.


186 Wain, The Refused..., p. 218.
already been guaranteed resettlement in third countries. The Singaporean authorities and people were therefore hardly affected by any socioeconomic impact related to the refugees. But the Singaporean leadership was outspoken in emphasizing the problems caused for the other ASEAN countries by the refugee outflow, and in blaming Hanoi for deliberately causing these problems.

The essence of the Singaporean thesis, which was propounded most forcefully by Foreign Minister Rajaratnam during the 12th Annual ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Conference in Bali at the height of the refugee crisis in June 1979, was that Hanoi was expelling a large part of its ethnic Chinese population with the intention of exacerbating racial sensitivities (perhaps leading to racial warfare in the longer term) in the ASEAN countries, which already had "delicate problems" with their ethnic Chinese minorities. According to Rajaratnam, the

187 Between April 1975 and June 1981, Singapore provided short-term temporary asylum for 23,832 Indochinese. The average length of stay was three months. See US Department of State, The Indochinese Refugee Situation, Table: "Indochinese Refugee Activity April 1975 thru June 1981".

188 The official Singaporean view was that the island republic physically had no room for, and could not afford the burden of, Indochinese refugees seeking temporary asylum. See, for example, address by C M See (Singaporean High Commissioner in Australia) at Seminar on Indochinese Refugees, Australian National University, Canberra, 30-31 July 1979, p. 1. But Hong Kong, with a denser, faster-growing population enjoying a lower standard of living in 1979 provided first asylum for more seaborne Indochinese refugees (72,000) than any other country. The effective absence of any democratic institutions in Hong Kong, however, meant that the British colonial authorities there had even less reason than the Singaporean authorities to fear that opposition political groups might inspire a popular backlash against the refugee presence. Moreover, Hong Kong's only neighbour, China, did not object to the colony's provision of first asylum for the boat people.

189 Straits Times, 29 June 1979.
refugees were being used as "bombs" by Vietnam to soften the ground -- in other words, to destabilize non-communist Southeast Asia as the prelude to an invasion of the region.\footnote{190} Lee Kuan Yew emphasized the pressure that the refugees were placing on the ASEAN region's "social infrastructure and... political fabric".\footnote{191}

This reaction to the refugee crisis was not aimed solely at demonstrating solidarity with the ASEAN states which were having to cope with the refugee influx at first hand, although this may have been an important factor influencing Singapore's condemnation of Vietnam over this issue.\footnote{192} Rather, the core of Singapore's concern seemed to be that the flow of largely ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam could increase anti-Chinese, and perhaps pro-Soviet, sentiment in the region, especially in Malaysia and Indonesia. This would cause Singapore, with its predominantly ethnic Chinese population, extreme embarrassment and perhaps serious external security problems. Lee argued that, in the worst case, "another nation" in Southeast Asia might be tempted to solve its ethnic Chinese "problems" by emulating Hanoi.\footnote{193} In particular, such a course might have appealed to Malay extremists in Malaysia: there was certainly unease in that country's non-Malay communities at the height of the exodus from Vietnam.\footnote{194}

\footnote{190} Straits Times, 28 and 29 June 1979; IHT, 14-15 July 1979.
\footnote{191} Straits Times, 21 June 1979.
\footnote{192} According to Rajaratnam: "Where we feel another member country is in trouble, we have to speak out and sometimes it is easier to speak louder when you are far away from the antagonists because their aims do not reach that far. Those who are closer may have to speak softly". FEER, Asia Yearbook 1979, p. 275; Mary Lee, FEER, 20 July 1979, p. 18.
\footnote{193} Wain, The Refused..., pp. 132-33.
Lack of evidence precludes a definitive assessment of the Vietnamese authorities' role in the refugee exodus. But it does seem that Hanoi saw a number of advantages in facilitating, and indeed in encouraging, the exodus of some of Vietnam's population from 1978. Not only did the officially-sponsored refugee outflow relieve the government of the burden of ethnic Chinese residents who were increasingly seen as a security threat in view of the escalating conflict with Beijing, but also of many people from southern Vietnam whose association with the former anti-communist regime and the United States military put their reliability in a socialist society under question. Moreover, by levying heavy fees on outgoing refugees, the authorities were able to earn hundreds of millions of dollars in gold,\textsuperscript{195} while simultaneously securing tighter governmental control over the economy in southern Vietnam, to the detriment of the black market.\textsuperscript{196} But there is no evidence to suggest that the potentially destabilizing effect of the refugee exodus on non-communist Southeast Asia was anything more than incidental to these important domestic benefits that Hanoi hoped to gain.

Even if Hanoi did perceive any advantage in the impact of the refugees on the ASEAN countries, the Vietnamese ultimately deemed this benefit as dispensable. It seems clear that the international outcry (precipitated to a large degree by the hardening policies of Malaysia

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p. 133.

\textsuperscript{195} According to the US Department of State, this rationale was acknowledged by a Vietnamese diplomat in December 1978. See US Department of States, Vietnam's Refugee Machine (Washington DC: US Department of State Document No. 2-22, 20 July 1979).

\textsuperscript{196} See Wain, The Refused..., p. 157.
and its ASEAN partners in the first half of 1979) against the
Vietnamese-sponsored refugee flow was highly effective in persuading
Hanoi to change its policies towards the refugee issue. At the UN
Conference on Indochinese Refugees at Geneva in July 1979, the
Vietnamese agreed to a moratorium on refugee departures and the
institution of an "orderly" departure scheme. From this time,
there was no evidence of systematic Vietnamese government complicity
in the refugee traffic.

The Singaporean position that responsibility for the refugee
crisis lay with Hanoi was held to a greater or lesser extent
throughout the ASEAN region. ASEAN's foreign ministers, after their
meeting in Bali in June 1979, agreed in a joint statement that Vietnam
was responsible for the unending exodus of refugees. But there was
less willingness to allege, like Singapore, that the Vietnamese had
created the refugee problem deliberately to destabilize regional non-
communist countries by causing political, economic, social, racial and
security problems.

The official Philippine view went no further than referring to
the "destabilizing effects generated by a seemingly deliberate design"

197 Richard Nations, FEER, 3 August 1979, pp. 18-19.
198 Indeed, the severity of the measures taken by Hanoi to stem the
refugee flow provoked criticism from at least one Western country
asylum countries after mid-1979 confirmed that fleeing Vietnam
had become a matter of "escaping" and running the gauntlet of
Hanoi's navy. Personal interviews with Vietnamese refugees,
Canberra, January 1983.
199 Joint Communique, Twelfth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (Bali,
30 June 1979), ASEAN Digest, No. 4/79 (August 1979).
Bangkok's view of the problem's origins was complicated by the fact that the great majority of refugees reaching Thailand were from Laos and Cambodia rather than from Vietnam itself, making a more sophisticated analysis necessary if Hanoi's malevolent culpability was to be upheld. But it was clear that although Cambodian and Laotian refugee problems were to a large extent the result of the political and military relationships between Hanoi and the Vietnamese-oriented governments in Phnom Penh and Vientiane, the refugee outflow across the border into Thailand did not work to the advantage of Vietnam (although it did cause problems for Bangkok). On the contrary, it provided the principal resource base for the anti-Vietnamese resistance in both countries. Compared to the Laotian and Cambodian refugee presence, the Vietnamese boat people had little socioeconomic impact in Thailand. For these reasons (as well as a more general wish to keep open channels of communication with Vietnam) the Thai authorities, while probably not discouraging Singapore from accusing Hanoi of using the refugees as a weapon against the ASEAN countries, did not themselves attack Vietnam in such strong and direct terms over the issue.

In Indonesia and Malaysia official allegations concerning Hanoi's responsibility were tempered by some understanding of Vietnam's supposed problems with its ethnic Chinese minority, reflecting not only these countries' own domestic situations but also a concern to steer ASEAN away from siding openly and completely with Beijing against Hanoi. Jusuf Wanandi claimed that "... the source of the

200 Shahani, p. 6.
problem lies in Hanoi. The increasing outflow of people is in fact 'organized' by Hanoi." But by going on to assert that "internal Vietnamese problems" were being transferred to the ASEAN countries he acknowledged Hanoi's argument that the largely ethnic Chinese refugees had been causing difficulties for Vietnam.

Although there was a feeling in some official Malaysian circles that the refugees were equivalent "almost to a planned invasion", Kuala Lumpur's anger over the crisis was directed at the United States (and the West in general) for not doing more to help resolve the problem, rather than at Hanoi for creating it. Malaysian displeasure towards China was also apparent: Ghazali Shafie, the Interior Minister, unsuccessfully attempted to draw Beijing's attention to its "ethnic responsibility" for ethnic Chinese ejected from Vietnam.


202 Personal interview with Malaysian official of Under Secretary rank, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuala Lumpur, 15 April 1981.

203 This was emphasized by Deputy Prime Minister Mahathir and Home Affairs Minister Ghazali in meetings with the US House of Representatives Study Mission in August 1979. The Indochinese Refugee Situation, August 1979, pp. 23-24.

204 Asiaweek, 29 June 1979. The Malaysian authorities normally took a rather different stance on the issue of relations between the People's Republic and ethnic Chinese living in Southeast Asia: that is, that Beijing should disavow its connections with Chinese residents in the region.
Conclusion

The flow of refugees to the ASEAN countries after the communist victories in Indochina in 1975 was not a phenomenon without precedent, particularly in the case of Thailand. But in the context of communist Indochina as a security concern of the ASEAN states this series of large-scale population movements had a new, important and multi-faceted significance for many of the region's policy-makers and decision-takers. Although discussion of the issue was often obscured by hyperbole, it is arguable that the approach of the ASEAN governments towards the post-1975 Indochinese refugee problem (or series of problems) was influenced more by security considerations in the broadest possible sense than by any other factors such as humanitarian impulses.

All the ASEAN governments were concerned with the security implications of the Indochinese refugees, but particularly in the early stages of the problem (before 1978), it was Thailand that was most affected, owing largely to its long land borders with Laos and Cambodia. At first, the central concern in the ASEAN region was that the provision of asylum to Indochinese refugees (most of whom were, at this stage, people closely associated with the ousted anti-communist regimes) would jeopardize the normalization of relations with the communist regimes in Indochina. But in Thailand there were powerful official elements -- particularly amongst regional military commanders and local officials -- who sponsored, or at least acquiesced in, the use of the refugee camps as resource bases for military and political activity by anti-communist groups across the border into Cambodia and Laos. To some extent this phenomenon was a continuation of practices
that had originated during the Second Indochina War, but it also represented an attempt to provide a counterweight to Laotian and Cambodian backing for Thai communist guerillas operating across the border in the opposite direction. But the evidence suggests that Thai support for cross-border subversion into Indochina may have precipitated, rather than kept at bay, Indochinese support for the CPT.

The danger that the attempted use of Indochinese refugees to destabilize neighbouring communist regimes could effectively invite intervention across the border into Thailand came to the fore as a security concern for Bangkok after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978. But in Bangkok's view this concern was overridden by the perceived necessity of maintaining the Cambodian resistance (including the Khmer Rouge and non-communist groups) as a viable military and political force with which to counter Vietnamese domination of Cambodia. Indeed this latter objective influenced Thai policy towards the Cambodian refugees more than any other factor: the refugees were used as a lever with which to exert pressure on the Vietnamese-imposed status quo in Cambodia through the granting of temporary sanctuary at strategic times and the maintenance of "agglomerations" straddling the border.

At the same time as using the Indochinese refugee presence as a weapon against Hanoi's dominion over Cambodia and Laos, the Thai authorities -- like their counterparts throughout ASEAN -- stressed the threats to national security posed by the refugees' subversive potential and socioeconomic impact. Without access to classified information, the evidence in support of allegations that the refugees
were engaged in subversion appears tenuous and it seems that such claim were more useful in underlining widely held official notions that the Indochinese outcasts were a threat to the social, economic, ethnic and political balance in the ASEAN countries than in presenting a convincing case that the refugee flow was part of a Vietnamese plan directly to infiltrate the region with agents. But even the arguments stressing the socioeconomic impact of the refugees on the ASEAN countries' security were themselves frequently unconvincing, and were to a large extent prompted by governmental attempts to counter efforts by opposition political groups to undermine the credibility of ruling elites: certainly, in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia the authorities frequently felt it necessary to demonstrate that they were as concerned about and as willing to take action against the refugee influx as their opponents. In Malaysia, and to a lesser extent in Indonesia, the Chinese ethnicity of many of the seaborne refugees was a crucial factor in precipitating harsh governmental action to counter the influx. In this sense, the refugee problem provoked concern over regime security as much as national security.

But there do seem to have been genuine fears in official circles in the ASEAN countries that by continuing to provide "first asylum" they could be plagued by a residue of refugees not deemed suitable for resettlement in third countries.205 It was thus felt necessary to convince the West (and particularly the United States) that the speedy

205 Mahathir expressed this fear very directly in a meeting with the US House of Representatives Study Mission. The Indochinese Refugee Situation, August 1979, p. 24.
and complete resettlement of Indochinese refugees in third countries was vital to the security of the ASEAN states if they were to continue providing first asylum. The forcible repatriation of Cambodian and Laotian refugees, and the towing back to sea of Vietnamese refugees -- on the grounds that the "security" of the ASEAN countries were threatened -- were very successful weapons, particularly in mid-1979, in the struggle to convince the West that it should shoulder more of the refugee "burden". But at the same time, for reasons of self-interest the ASEAN countries were usually careful not to offend the West's standards of humanitarianism (and particularly that of the Carter administration) with refugee policies that were blatantly inhumane, as this could put in jeopardy Western economic aid, military assistance and political support.

On one level it often seemed that the Indochinese refugee problem had a further effect on the security of non-communist Southeast Asia in the sense that it appeared to undermine the solidarity of ASEAN's members. For example, Bangkok's lack of firm action against piracy in the Gulf of Thailand meant that tens of thousands of seaborne refugees avoided the area and landed in Malaysia rather than southern Thailand. Kuala Lumpur's tough attitude towards boats heading for Malaysia effectively created a refugee problem for Indonesia. But as the refugee problem intensified through 1979 it seems to have become clear to most ASEAN policy-makers that it was an issue that could best

206 US concern for Thailand's security was particularly evident. See, for example, H Eugene Douglas, "The problem of refugees in a strategic perspective", Strategic Review, Fall 1982, p. 15. Douglas was the Reagan administration's Ambassador-at-large and Coordinator for Refugee Affairs.
be dealt with by united diplomatic action rather than by piecemeal measures which had the effect merely of shifting the responsibility onto other ASEAN members. Moreover, the refugee issue came to be seen as part of the overall security threat emanating from Indochina -- or more precisely, from Hanoi's policies.

While all the ASEAN governments saw Hanoi as responsible for the problem of the seaborne refugees, only Singapore claimed that Vietnam had set out to use the exodus as an instrument with which to destabilize the ASEAN region. But although the four larger ASEAN states wished to keep open the possibility of dialogue with Hanoi, with Indonesia and Malaysia being particularly anxious to avoid an overly close alignment with China over the Indochinese crisis, at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Bali in June 1979 they all put their weight behind a strong statement emphasizing Vietnam's responsibility for the "serious situation" in Southeast Asia, resulting from its "interference" in Cambodia and the "unrestricted flow of Indochinese displaced persons/illegal immigrants (refugees)." But the ASEAN countries' generally firm stand behind the Chinese and US positions on issues connected with Indochina probably worked against resolution of the refugee problem, at least in the short to medium term.

Indeed, according to some sources, Malaysian Interior Minister Ghazali Shafie claimed that an aspect of Malaysia's policy was to create a refugee problem for Jakarta in order to secure Indonesian support for Kuala Lumpur's initiative to set up a refugee processing centre. See Wain, The Refused..., pp. 131-32 and Asiaweek, 27 July 1979, p.16. Malaysia's stance also created fears in Bangkok of an intensified influx of boat people. Bangkok Post, 17 June 1979.

The continuing refugee flow from Vietnam after Hanoi introduced strict measures in 1979 to restrict the exodus showed that it was influenced by factors beyond the immediate control of the Vietnamese authorities: principally these were the deteriorating domestic economic conditions reflected in unemployment and shortages. These problems would have been ameliorated if the Vietnamese economy had received assistance from the West, and if Hanoi had not felt obliged to continue its military role in Cambodia in response to what it perceived as an attempt by China to maintain military pressure on two fronts. ASEAN acquiesced in both America's economic embargo of, and China's military pressure on, Vietnam. In furthering what they believed to be the region's long-term security interests (principally a Cambodia free of Vietnamese domination) the ASEAN states were probably indirectly exacerbating the seaborne refugee problem -- which they claimed to be a security threat (if a less important one than the presence of 200,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia). Moreover, avoidance of military service in Cambodia was a more direct motive for many Vietnamese who became "boat people" after 1979. Thailand's sporadic blockading of Laos undoubtedly contributed to Vientiane's economic problems, and to a continuing Laotian reliance on Vietnam. In turn this led to an increased refugee flow for both economic and

209 See Carlyle Thayer, "Vietnamese outflow expected to continue", Canberra Times, 14 October 1981.

210 For example, at the height of the seaborne refugee crisis in mid-1979, the US administration urged international charities, other governments and the World Bank to adopt economic sanctions against Hanoi in an attempt to halt the exodus. Simon Barber, FEER, 6 July 1979, p. 23.
political reasons. ASEAN's opposition to the Vietnamese role in Cambodia contributed to -- and to some extent necessitated (in view of the wish to provide a resource base for the Khmer Rouge and Khmer Serei) -- Thailand's continuing Cambodian refugee "problem".

By 1981, any lasting end to the Indochinese refugee problem as a security concern of the ASEAN states seemed unlikely except in the case of a resolution, by political or military means, of the Cambodian imbroglio, and a lessening of tension between Hanoi and Beijing. In the mean time, the ASEAN countries' method of trying to assist the resolution of the Cambodian problem seemed likely to help ensure the continuing existence of the refugee "threat".
PART THREE

THE ASEAN STATES' MANAGEMENT OF THEIR SECURITY CONCERNS WITH INDOCHINA
CHAPTER 8

THE ASEAN STATES' DEFENCE POLICIES, 1975-81: MILITARY RESPONSES TO INDOCHINESE DEVELOPMENTS?

The defence policies of the ASEAN countries began to undergo important transformations in the 1970s and early 1980s. Defence expenditures and military personnel strengths were expanded, while the increased procurement of military equipment useful in 'conventional' warfare, and a new emphasis on such warfare in military exercises seemed to reflect regional armed forces' expanded capacity for defence against external threats. Various of the ASEAN states also stepped up their military cooperation with each other.

The figures in Tables 1-4, while not entirely reliable, show the principal trends in the ASEAN states' defence expenditure and military personnel strength from 1973 to 1981. Superficially, the picture they present of fairly dramatic increases in the ASEAN states' defence efforts in the 1970s and early 1980s appears to attest that the dramatic contemporaneous developments in Indochina were crucial influences on defence policies in non-communist Southeast Asia during this period. However, when examined in detail the evidence is more ambiguous.

If Indochinese developments had profoundly affected the ASEAN states' defence policies it would seem reasonable to expect that their defence expenditure would have risen markedly following the two cataclysms of the 1975 communist victories and the invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978, with the latter development having a greater impact. Moreover, one would have expected those governments
TABLE 1

Defence Expenditure by the ASEAN States 1973-1981 at Constant Prices
Figures are in US$ million, at 1980 prices and 1980 exchange rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>(1472)*</td>
<td>(1604)*</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>2065</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>2174</td>
<td>2449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>1249</td>
<td>1357</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>888</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>784</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>677</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>(741)</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>1101</td>
<td>1382</td>
<td>1557</td>
<td>1476</td>
<td>1574</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for ASEAN (3626)* (3984)* (4870) 5291 5597 5963 6122 6588 7340

( )* = Imputed values, with a high degree of uncertainty.
( ) = Estimates

E: The figures in Table 1 were abstracted from the 1983, 1984 and 1985 editions of World Armaments and Disarmament: SIPRI Yearbook (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1983, 1984 and 1985) and should be taken as providing a general impression, rather than a precise indication, of trends in military spending in the ASEAN states. Government statements of military expenditure -- on which the SIPRI figures are based -- are notoriously unreliable. Large proportions of actual military expenditure (especially when related to internal security and paramilitary forces) may be secreted in other areas of government spending. According to one estimate (see Astrid Suhrke, "ASEAN: Adjusting to New Regional Alignments", Asia Pacific Community, No. 12 (Spring 1981), p. 27), in the case of Indonesia three times the amount of declared defence spending may be "hidden" in this way. Discussions in Kuala Lumpur in April 1981 with academics interested in Malaysian defence policy confirmed that there were considerable grounds for confusion in assessing Malaysia's defence expenditure, owing to its division between annually recurrent operating expenditure and longer-term development expenditure.

Furthermore, original expenditure estimates may be revised during the financial year in the light of changing economic and political circumstances -- and particularly in times of high inflation. Another point is that the financial years of various states seldom coincide, making comparison difficult. These issues are examined at greater length in SIPRI Yearbook 1983, pp. 175-80. Nevertheless, the SIPRI figures are used here as they are the only readily available constant price estimates and are generally recognized as roughly reliable (if not wholly accurate, particularly in view of fluctuating exchange rates affecting the conversion to dollars).
### TABLE 2
Defence Expenditure by the ASEAN States at Current Prices
(Figures in US$ million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>1024</td>
<td>1513</td>
<td>2036</td>
<td>1653</td>
<td>2073</td>
<td>2713</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>2037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>1554</td>
<td>1096</td>
<td>1669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for ASEAN</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>2786</td>
<td>2703</td>
<td>3892</td>
<td>4780</td>
<td>5667</td>
<td>5735</td>
<td>8040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 3
Defence Expenditure as a Percentage of Total Government Expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** n.a. = not available

### TABLE 4
(Figures are in thousands)

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for ASEAN</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RJCE:** The figures used in Tables 2, 3 and 4 were abstracted from various editions of The Military Balance published between 1973 and 1985. Like those in Figure 1, these figures should not be taken as entirely reliable.
(in Bangkok and Singapore) which expressed most concern over the security implications of these developments to have increased their defence efforts by a substantially greater degree than those ASEAN governments (in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines) which were less concerned.

Table 1 (which provides an indication of changes in the real value of the ASEAN states' defence expenditure, in US dollars adjusted to take account of inflation) corroborates these hypotheses only to a very limited extent. The table shows that the increases in the aggregated defence expenditure of all five ASEAN states in 1976 (9% higher than the previous year), 1980 (8%) and 1981 (11%) -- the years following the 1975 and 1978/79 Indochinese crises -- were more substantial than those recorded in 1978 (7%) and 1979 (3%), and that Thailand and Singapore increased their defence expenditure to a greater extent between 1975 and 1978 (by 87% and 26% respectively) than their ASEAN partners. Thailand's defence spending expanded more rapidly than any other ASEAN state's between 1975 and 1981.

This limited support for the argument that the ASEAN states' defence efforts were profoundly affected by the Indochinese events of 1975 and 1978/79 is thoroughly undermined by the countervailing evidence to be found in Table 1. The largest increases in the total of all the ASEAN states' defence spending occurred in 1974 (10%) and 1975 (22%): even the latter year's expenditures must have been budgeted for prior to the collapse of non-communist Indochina in April 1975. The largest increases in defence spending between 1973 and 1981 (180%) and 1978-81 (68%) took place in Malaysia, which expressed less concern than Thailand and Singapore over the security implications of
that was happening in Indochina. The 25% increase in Malaysian expenditure between 1975 and 1978 was very nearly as large as that recorded by Singapore; similarly, Kuala Lumpur's 110% increase between 1975 and 1981 was almost as substantial as the expansion of Thai spending over the same period. Thai defence expenditure increased far more rapidly in the 1974-78 period (by over 20% every year) than after the invasion of Cambodia. By far the largest increase from one year to the next occurred in the Philippines -- the ASEAN member least concerned by Indochinese developments -- from 1973 to 1974 (57%).

Using figures provided by a different source, Table 2 also illustrates the growth of the ASEAN states' defence spending in the 1973-81 period, but in current US dollar values. The table indicates similar trends to those already highlighted using Table 1, though the fact that the figures are not adjusted to take account of inflation and fluctuating exchange rates means that they may give a distorted picture of year to year changes in defence expenditure. Table 2 provides even less evidence in support of the case that Indochinese developments profoundly affected the ASEAN states' defence policies. Nevertheless, the table does show that Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand increased their defence spending to a much greater degree over the three year period (1978-81) following the invasion of Cambodia than in the previous three years. On the other hand, however, Table 2 shows that from 1975 to 1976 expenditure by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore decreased, while that by the Philippines only increased infinitesimally: overall the dollar value
of the ASEAN states' defence spending decreased by 3% in 1976. In current dollar terms, only Thailand increased its military expenditure significantly in the immediate wake of the communist victories in Indochina. Moreover, the aggregate expansion of the ASEAN states' defence expenditure proceeded more slowly in the two years following the invasion of Cambodia (1979 - 19%; 1980 - 1%) than in any other year except 1976. It is also of note that between 1973 and 1981 Thailand and Singapore, the two ASEAN states most concerned with the putative threats posed by communist Indochina, increased their defence expenditure less substantially (by 366% and 276% respectively) than Malaysia (610%), Indonesia (500%) and the Philippines (384%).

Table 3 is even more damaging to the argument that the two Indochinese crises decisively influenced the ASEAN governments' defence efforts, as it indicates that the Indonesian, Malaysian, Singaporean and Thai authorities all allocated a smaller proportion of their total expenditure to defence in 1976 than in 1975. Although Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand all devoted a higher proportion of government resources to defence in 1979 than 1978, it is fairly likely that spending allocations for 1979 were decided well before the invasion of Cambodia. In any case, these proportions all declined again in 1980. Only Singapore and Thailand allocated a higher proportion of expenditure to defence in 1981 than in 1973, and in Thailand's case this did not appear to result from a general upward trend.

Table 4 discloses that although the total military personnel strength of the five ASEAN states increased particularly rapidly after
1978, the aggregate figure was boosted by an exceptional expansion of Malaysia's armed forces. The Singaporean and Thai armed forces expanded as much in the 1973-76 phase (that is, well before the invasion of Cambodia) as from 1976-81. The greatest increase in military personnel strength over the whole 1973-81 period was recorded by the Philippines, and the bulk of this expansion took place between 1973 and 1977.

To summarize, Tables 1-4 together provide substantial evidence:

(i) that although there was a substantial expansion of the ASEAN states' defence efforts between 1975 and 1981, increases in defence spending and military personnel strength were already well in train before 1975;

(ii) that there was no extraordinary rise in the ASEAN states' defence expenditure or the size of their armed forces in the three years following the 1975 Indochinese communist victories;

(iii) that only in the cases of Thailand (as evinced by a substantially enlarged defence budget in 1979 and increases in military personnel strength in 1980 and 1981) and Malaysia was there any remarkable expansion of the ASEAN states' defence effort after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia;

(iv) and that the expanded defence efforts of the Philippines (1973-77), Malaysia (1978-81) and Indonesia (throughout the 1973-81 period) were as marked as Thailand's and more notable than Singapore's between 1975 and 1981.
In other words, the figures in Tables 1-4 show that there was actually little correlation between either the sea changes which occurred in Indochina in the mid- and late 1970s and increased defence efforts by the ASEAN states, or the scale of particular ASEAN governments' increased defence budgets or military personnel strength and their declaratory positions with regard to the seriousness of the threats emanating from Indochina.

The Continuing Influence of "Background Factors"

If the course of the ASEAN states' defence policies in the 1975-81 period cannot be attributed (except in the case of Thailand after 1978) to contemporaneous political and military developments in Indochina, other factors must also have played very important parts. Indeed, a range of such factors is discernible and may be divided into several categories: domestic political developments (particularly when these involved changes in the political status and role of the military) in the ASEAN countries; the availability of funds as a result of fast economic growth; problems of maintaining internal security in the face of both communist and ethnic-separatist challenges; competition and latent conflict between various ASEAN states; changes in the interests and presence of extra-regional powers in the region; and new developments relating to maritime security. Appendix 2 to this thesis examines the influence of these 'background factors' on the ASEAN states' defence policies in some detail, and provides evidence that many of these factors continued to exert powerful influence over the ASEAN states' defence expenditure,
military force structures and arms procurement after the 1975 Indochinese communist victories.¹

A prime example of the enduring influence of these 'background factors' was evident in the way that in Indonesia, Thailand and to a lesser extent the Philippines, the central political role of the armed forces continued to allow the military leadership great influence in the allocation of government resources. In a slightly different sense, this was true also in Malaysia: the phenomenon of close family relationships reached an unprecedented climax in January 1981 when Prime Minister Hussein Onn appointed his brother as Deputy Chief of the General Staff and his cousin and brother-in-law as Chief of the Armed Forces Staff.²

The relatively rapid economic growth of the ASEAN countries allowed their governments to allocate more resources to defence without detriment to other areas of expenditure. This was especially so in Indonesia and Malaysia: both benefitted from increases in the price of their most valuable export, oil. Kuala Lumpur, and possibly other administrations in the region, also saw the development of defence infrastructure as possessing a valuable 'spin-off' effect in


terms of the economic development of impoverished regions.\textsuperscript{3} In Malaysia's case, the decision in late 1981 to impose constraints on the expansion of the armed forces projected in the \textit{Fourth Malaysian Plan} (published earlier in the year) principally as a result of slackening international demand for the country's main exports illustrated the critical role of economic growth as an influence on defence spending.\textsuperscript{4}

In general, internal security problems remained more important concerns for the four larger ASEAN states after 1975 than external threats. The Thai armed forces were still preoccupied with combating the Communist Party of Thailand's insurgency, while their Philippine colleagues devoted almost all their energies towards operations against the communist New People's Army and the Muslim Moro National Liberation Front in the south of the country. Counter-insurgency against the Communist Party of Malaya continued to be the principal role of the Malaysian armed forces. The Indonesian military's long standing concern with the suppression of political dissidence and regional secessionism was reinforced with the incorporation of East Timor at the end of 1975.

It is arguable that the bilateral tensions which continued to exist beneath the surface gloss of ASEAN unity exerted a considerable influence on some of the ASEAN states' defence policies. It seems

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} Michael Richardson, \textit{Age}, 30 October 1981.
\end{itemize}
likely that the Singaporean government still viewed Malaysia and Indonesia as potential threats, and that the Philippine and Malaysian authorities remained concerned over the possibility of conflict involving Sabah. Moreover, it seems clear that some of the ASEAN governments allowed considerations of prestige in relation to other members of the Association to influence their arms procurement decisions.

Defence planners and policy-makers in the ASEAN countries were also concerned with continuing changes in the regional interests and military presence of extra-regional powers in the late 1970s. The costs implicit in taking over air bases and other military facilities previously used by departing US forces necessitated increased defence spending by Bangkok in the mid-1970s. Even in the late 1970s the expansion of the Singaporean (and to a lesser extent, Malaysian) armed forces was still influenced by a desire to compensate for the British military withdrawal, which was completed in 1976. The Indonesian armed forces (and, to a lesser degree, their Malaysian counterparts) continued to see China as a potential threat, especially in terms of its increasing naval presence in the South China Sea from the late 1970s. The Soviet Union's greater military involvement in the region from 1979 concerned all the ASEAN states but, because it was so intimately linked with Indochinese developments, its impact on their defence policies is particularly difficult to assess.

The expansion and enhancement of the ASEAN states' maritime defence capabilities in the late 1970s and early 1980s evidently resulted largely from perceived needs to assert sovereignty over extended national waters (in the cases of Indonesia, Malaysia and the
Philippines), to patrol recently-declared Exclusive Economic Zones and to back up claims over maritime territory in the South China Sea.

The Indochina Factor and the ASEAN States' Military Expansion Programmes

Although it is evident that various factors unrelated to Indochinese developments exercised extremely important influences on the ASEAN states' defence policies during the 1975-81 period, the question of the degree of influence of the 'Indochina factor' remains.

Developments in, or related to, Indochina apparently had only a minor impact on defence policies in non-communist Southeast Asia from 1975-78. The new situation in Indochina after the 1975 communist victories did create potential threats to which Thai military leaders had as a matter of professional duty to pay attention. In particular, it is undeniable that the border conflicts with Laos and Cambodia and these countries' support for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) influenced the development of the Thai armed forces. But there is no evidence that serious consideration was given to upgrading these forces to deter a large-scale conventional offensive by Vietnam.


The principal aim of Kuala Lumpur's military expansion programme under the Third Malaysia Plan (covering 1976-80) was to enhance internal security capabilities. To the extent that the expansion also improved conventional warfare capacity, this was related almost entirely to factors other than Indochinese developments, such as the need for a new naval base to replace the anachronistic Woodlands facility in Singapore, and considerations of military status in relation to the other ASEAN members.  

The 1975 communist victories had no noticeable impact on the steady progress of Singapore's continuing military build-up. Rather, events in Indochina were explicitly held up as a vindication of defence programmes that were already well under way. There was no extraordinary rise in defence expenditure from 1975 to 1976, no sudden spate of arms purchases and no reports of plans to expand the Singapore Armed Forces' order of battle ahead of schedule.

Compared with the threat posed by the MNLF and NPA insurgents, Indochina ranked very low as a security concern for Manila. Although Philippine defence expenditure rose in 1976, this spending was concentrated on increasing the army's manpower and improving its equipment with counter-insurgency in mind.

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8 See, for example, the "Singapore Armed Forces Day" message from Goh Keng Swee, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Straits Times, 2 July 1975.

The decision in 1977 or 1978 to upgrade substantially the Indonesian armed forces' capabilities for conventional warfare may have been partly the result of concern over the security of Indonesia's northernmost maritime frontier in the South China Sea where Jakarta's and Hanoi's maritime claims overlapped. But Jakarta did not emphasize this conflict, and the overall impression gained is that the impact of the Timor operation in late 1975 and a wish to bolster Indonesia's claim to regional pre-eminence, together with the increased revenue made available from Indonesia's valuable oil exports, all influenced Indonesian defence policy at least as significantly as any factors related to Indochina.

Indochinese developments exerted a greater influence on the ASEAN governments' defence policies in the 1979-81 phase than in the previous three and a half years. But it was only in Thailand's case that the "Indochina factor" appeared to be the dominant influence. Although even the invasion and occupation of Cambodia did not imply that Vietnam posed a serious and immediate direct military threat to Thailand, the cancellation of Cambodia's traditional role as a "buffer" state and the presence there of almost 200,000 Vietnamese troops represented a real change in Thailand's strategic circumstances and provided Thai military leaders with an almost impregnable

10 Marwyn Samuels, Contest for the South China Sea (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 163.

justification for their subsequent efforts to upgrade significantly their forces' hitherto limited capabilities for conventional warfare. The Vietnamese military incursion into Thailand in June 1980 bolstered the generals' claims for greater resources. But this is not to say that the factors which had previously exerted important influence over Thai defence policy ceased to operate. Although the CPT was in a state of decline by 1979, it would remain a serious security threat as long as fundamental socioeconomic problems were unresolved, and it was clear that much of the new equipment procured by the armed forces after the invasion of Cambodia would be equally as useful in counter-insurgency operations as in repelling Vietnamese incursions. Moreover, while the Thai armed forces were certainly more oriented towards conventional warfare in 1981 than they had been three years earlier, the enhanced operational effectiveness which theoretically resulted from the defence policies of the 1979-81 period was balanced by the military's continuing deep political involvement. It is doubtful that a Thai government in which the military played a considerably less crucial role than it did in the Prem administration would have made such efforts to boost the armed forces' capabilities. But it is also fairly clear that the military-dominated regime wished to avoid a direct, large-scale military confrontation with the

12 See statements by the Supreme Commander, General Serm na Nakhon, and the Defence Under-Secretary, General Pralang Veeraplee, Bangkok Post, 20 and 22 February 1979.

13 One analyst noted "... the lack of troop discipline, incompetence among some of the senior officer ranks, and disorganized command-and-control procedures". Sheldon W. Simon, The ASEAN States and Regional Security (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), p. 45.
Vietnamese, as a battlefield defeat for the Thai army might also irreparably damage its political prestige, credibility and legitimacy.\textsuperscript{14}

While the expansion of Malaysia's armed forces in the 1979-81 period outpaced military developments in the other ASEAN states, Kuala Lumpur's efforts to enhance its forces' conventional capabilities were by no means a simple reaction to Hanoi's subjugation of Cambodia. The government usually justified the military expansion programme on the grounds that Malaysia faced a much wider range of military contingencies than had previously been thought likely: a threat from Vietnam was very seldom referred to directly,\textsuperscript{15} although it does seem that worry over the perceived political and military weakness of Thailand was one factor in the decision to strengthen the military's presence in northern peninsular Malaysia for late 1979.\textsuperscript{16} But to the extent that this move was related to Indochina, it appears to have reflected fears not of a Vietnamese offensive through Thailand and into Malaysia, but rather a concern that a reduced military presence

\textsuperscript{14} The armed forces' tardy and half-hearted response to the major Vietnamese incursion in June 1980 was symptomatic of this desire to avoid a significant military clash with Vietnamese forces.

\textsuperscript{15} However, the armed forces' Chief of Staff, General Sany Ghaffar, claimed that the military's expansion was required "to meet external threats posed by developments in Indochina". \textit{Straits Times}, 3 December 1979.

\textsuperscript{16} See \textit{Weekend Australian}, 20-21 September 1980; Ho and Cheah, \textit{FEER}, 24 October 1980, p. 35. Concern over Thailand's weakness can be traced back to the earliest days in which the "domino theory" held sway. According to British Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff papers released at the beginning of 1984, a plan was prepared in 1953 for British troops to secure a \textit{cordon sanitaire} in southern Thailand to secure Malaya against communist infiltration from the north. \textit{The Times}, 3 January 1984.
in Thailand's deep south (which might result from a redeployment of the Thai army in the event of direct, large-scale Vietnamese aggression) might allow a revival in military operations by the Communist Party of Malaya.

But bearing in mind the lack of unanimity within the government regarding "the Vietnamese threat", and the success of operations against the CPM, it seems likely that other factors continued to play extremely influential roles in relation to Malaysian defence policy after the invasion of Cambodia. The fact that important measures to expand the armed forces' capacity for conventional warfare had been included in the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-80) and were implemented as early as 1977-78\(^\text{17}\) seems to confirm this. Quite apart from the influence of an expanding economy, close personal links between the Malay political and military elites, and considerations of military status within ASEAN, strong armed forces (especially a large army) were important to the government for several domestic political reasons: they affirmed Malay political dominance as it became clear that the New Economic Policy was yielding only dubious benefits for many "bumiputras", and provided one element in a comprehensive enlargement of the government's apparatus for maintaining internal security in the event of renewed communal or other domestic upheavals.\(^\text{18}\)


\(\text{18}\) The elements of this interlocking apparatus were "a strong intelligence-gathering machine, home guard, police, special branch and army backed by special (legal) powers", Weekend Australian, 20-21 September 1981.
The increase in Singapore's defence expenditure in the 1979-81 period did not represent a break with the gradual upward trend which had been evident throughout the 1970s. After 1979, there was no rush (as there had been in Thailand's case) to purchase major new weapons systems, nor to construct new defence infrastructure on a large scale. Given Singapore's consistent expression of the most "hawkish" views within ASEAN regarding "the Vietnamese threat" after the invasion of Cambodia, the minimal impact of this event on Singaporean defence policy appears paradoxical. This apparent paradox may be resolved by considering two important factors. First, Singapore's armed forces had been built up on the basis that the island faced a conventional external threat (though not from Indochina) from their very beginnings in the mid-1960s. If the Singaporean leadership had genuinely seen Vietnam as a serious threat after its invasion of Cambodia, Singapore was, largely fortuitously, already better equipped to defend itself against this threat than were its ASEAN neighbours. Secondly, the lack of any discernible military response to the alleged threat from Vietnam may have indicated the largely rhetorical nature of the hard-line Singaporean political response to the invasion of Cambodia.

Although the Indonesian government adopted a considerably more relaxed attitude than its ASEAN partners towards the possibility of Vietnam becoming a military threat after its invasion of Cambodia, the Indonesian armed forces began to undergo important changes, aimed partly at increasing their "conventional" capability, during the 1979-81 period. There was thus an apparent discrepancy between the government's threat assessments and its defence policy. However, Indonesian defence policy at this time was related much more closely
to the factors which had influenced the attempt to enhance the armed forces' capabilities in 1977-78 than to the invasion of Cambodia.

The accession of General Mohamed Jusuf to the posts of Defence Minister and Commander-in-Chief in April 1978 also had a profound effect on the Indonesian armed forces. By early 1979 Jusuf had investigated the military's problems and secured President Suharto's support for efforts to overcome the armed forces' deficiencies, especially in terms of their combat readiness. A new five-year strategic plan (RENSTRA II), based on Jusuf's recommendations and calling for a compact, professional military equipped with modern weapons, came into effect in April 1979. Although it is possible that the military development programme contained in RENSTRA II could have been conceived in the light of the invasion of Cambodia, this seems unlikely. It is doubtful that Jakarta's cumbersome politico-military decision-making machinery could make such important and expensive decisions so quickly. Also, the new programme's primary emphasis was on enhancing the army's capability, whereas any direct clash with Vietnam would almost certainly have occurred at sea. Moreover, to the extent that Jakarta did upgrade its naval capabilities, this development was aimed at protecting Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone and defending against low intensity threats.


(such as refugees, smugglers, poachers and pirates). Finally, despite RENSTRA II's emphasis on improving conventional warfare capability, the fact that Jusuf's first priority in trying to rejuvenate the military was to "re-unite the armed forces and the people" emphasized that the army remained oriented principally towards domestic tasks.

In contrast to the other ASEAN governments, Manila lowered its defence expenditure in both 1979 and 1980. The Armed Forces of the Philippines were still extremely heavily committed to the war against the NPA and MNLF in the south, and the Marcos regime remained as dependent as ever on the United States to provide an external defence capability. Although concern over Vietnamese expansionism and Soviet use of Vietnamese naval and air base facilities may have influenced the very limited improvements which Manila made to its maritime and air defence capabilities, there is no evidence that Indochinese developments had any more profound influence on Philippine defence policy.


22 Weatherbee, pp. 150-53; Peter Rodgers, Sydney Morning Herald, 23 August 1980; East, p. 28.

Military Cooperation between the ASEAN States

A further aspect of military developments in non-communist Southeast Asia in 1975-81 was the apparently increasing willingness of ASEAN's members to cooperate on military matters. This cooperation confirmed some observers' views that the ASEAN states were responding collectively to Indochinese events militarily as well as politically. However, a closer examination of this military cooperation reveals that it was not as extensive as was often implied, that it was generally not closely related to security concerns over Indochinese developments, and that important obstacles impeded its further intensification and expansion.

With one important exception, military cooperation between the ASEAN states occurred on a strictly bilateral (or, very occasionally, trilateral) basis, and by 1981 included:

(i) counter-insurgency agreements between Malaysia and Thailand, and Malaysia and Indonesia;

24 According to Carlos Romulo, Philippine Foreign Minister, regular meetings were held involving very senior military officers (at "Chief of Staff level") from the ASEAN states to discuss security issues and to exchange intelligence. But these meetings were not conducted under ASEAN auspices, and were not publicized. Personal interview with Romulo, Manila, 23 March 1981.

(ii) Indonesian cooperation, on a bilateral basis, with Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines in maritime security;26

(iii) exchanges of military intelligence between Malaysia and Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, and perhaps other combinations of the ASEAN states;27 and

(iv) frequent joint exercises, especially between Indonesia and Malaysia.28

But there was no policy coordination with regard to arms procurement,29 and the ASEAN states' fledgling defence industries were competitive rather than complementary.30

26 Indonesian Times, 7 February 1976, "RMN on the threshold of great changes", p. 42; Ho and Cheah, p. 34.

27 Bangkok Post, 22 December 1976; "ASEAN -- A Defence Pact?", ADJ, January/February 1977, p. 4; Derek Davies and Denzil Peiris, FEER, 18 February 1977, pp. 26-27; Ho and Cheah, p. 32; Personal Interview with See Chak Mun, Director (Political Affairs), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, 7 February 1981.


30 Economic motives -- principally the desire to reduce expensive dependence on external sources of arms and to direct defence procurement expenditure towards the domestic economy -- provided the main impetus for the development of defence industries in the ASEAN states. See Ron Huisken, Defence Resources of South East Asia and the South West Pacific: A Compendium of Data (Canberra: Australian National University, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 1980), pp. 11-13, 25-26, 37-40, 55-57, 67.
Evidence that the Indochinese crises of 1975 and 1978-79 stimulated the intensification of military cooperation amongst the ASEAN states is limited. The impending collapse of the Lon Nol and Thieu regimes may have encouraged the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to agree on a joint counter-subversion programme in April 1975, and at least the Malaysian and Thai navies sometimes coordinated their efforts to prevent Indochinese refugees from reaching their countries' coasts. After the invasion of Cambodia, concern over Vietnam as a maritime threat possibly influenced the growing size and complexity of joint Indonesian-Malaysian naval exercises. An anticipation that Thailand might, in extreme circumstances, require air support from its ASEAN partners in the event of large-scale Vietnamese aggression, coupled with concern over Soviet use of Vietnamese air bases may have contributed to the decisions to commence joint Indonesian-Singaporean, Thai-Malaysian and Thai-Indonesian air exercises in 1979-81. But, in general, intra-ASEAN military cooperation related to long-standing, low intensity problems rather than the deterrence of external threats.

Attitudes within ASEAN towards the broadening of military cooperation to encompass multilateral exercises, conscious standardization of equipment, and perhaps a formal defence pact (relating particularly to the defence of Thailand against Vietnamese aggression) varied between the various governments, between


institutions and individuals within these governments, and over time. It was not, however, until after the invasion of Cambodia that discussion of the issue became widespread. But, for important reasons, all the ASEAN governments usually opposed suggestions that the already existing web of defence cooperation should be significantly intensified, broadened or formalized, either in relation to the specific contingency of providing military assistance to Thailand in an emergency, or more generally in reaction to a regional environment that was often portrayed as increasingly unstable and potentially dangerous.

There was particular concern that dramatically increased military cooperation might be taken as a provocation by Hanoi, or lead to involvement in wider conflict between major powers. Threat perceptions within ASEAN diverged widely: even after the invasion of Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia were still concerned as much with a perceived long-term threat from China as with Vietnamese and Soviet objectives. Although they were generally subdued especially by the need to maintain diplomatic unity on the Cambodian issue from 1979, there remained lingering suspicions and latent animosities between various ASEAN members, so that by 1981 the Association was not yet a "security community" in the Deutschian sense: it seemed highly unlikely that the five states could institutionalize their military cooperation before resolving their differences to the extent that the use of force by one ASEAN state against another was no longer a

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Further obstacles to formalized military cooperation included practical problems such as wide divergences in military command, control and communications procedures. According to some defence analysts in the region, there were problems enough in bilateral cooperation to be solved before thinking seriously about implementing multilateral military linkages. Because of these problems, there was no consensus that the potential benefits of a formalized or institutionalized multilateral defence arrangement would outweigh its possible costs.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, it must be said that there is a slight air of unreality surrounding any discussion about the extent to which military developments in the ASEAN states in the 1975-81 period were a response to developments in Indochina. Despite the claims of certain senior political and military figures in the ASEAN countries regarding "threats" from Indochina, in concrete terms the military threat was a collection of low intensity problems, including small-scale incursions on Thailand's border with Laos and Cambodia and occasional infringements of ASEAN airspace by Soviet aircraft.

As Chapter 5 substantiated, Vietnam almost certainly lacked not only the capability but also the will or even a motive to undertake further, large-scale military adventures after the invasion of Cambodia (which was motivated by specific historical and security factors). That this was on balance clear to the ASEAN states was evident in their failure to assign greater priority to the enhancement
of conventional military capabilities and the intensification of military cooperation with each other. To have increased their conventional military capabilities much more significantly would have required the ASEAN countries not only to increase defence expenditure in real terms, but also as a proportion of government spending and national product. This they were unwilling to do: although in absolute terms they spent more on defence, the ASEAN states' overriding common philosophy in relation to security remained the enhancement of domestic stability through economic and social development. Moreover, security problems were still overwhelmingly perceived as national concerns: the spectre of a military threat from Indochina was not taken seriously enough by all the ASEAN states to override the bilateral tensions and differences of outlook which precluded closer military cooperation.

What, then, was the significance of military developments in the ASEAN region in the 1975-81 period? These developments varied widely, not only between the five states but also over time. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some general conclusions.

In the first place, it is important not to exaggerate the changes which took place in the ASEAN states' armed forces in the 1975-81 period. The size of these forces was certainly increased (except in the case of Indonesia), and a variety of new equipment was purchased. But although these developments undoubtedly enhanced the ability of ASEAN's armed forces to operate in low intensity roles such as counter-insurgency and maritime resource protection, their potential effectiveness in a high intensity, conventional war role remained essentially token.

Secondly, such military developments as there were in the ASEAN
region from 1975 to 1978 were probably attributable in large measure to factors other than the communist victories in Indochina. From the late 1960s, sweeping changes in the balance of external powers involved in Southeast Asia, and particularly the creation of a partial military vacuum by the large-scale withdrawal of British and American forces, created a climate of politico-military uncertainty in the region. This phenomenon, as well as domestic political factors (especially the role of the military), the impact of economic growth, internal security problems, intra-ASEAN tensions, and developments in maritime security provided important reasons, generally independent of developments in Indochina, for the ASEAN governments to upgrade their armed forces' capabilities.

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia undoubtedly represented a watershed in the ASEAN states' perceptions of Vietnam as a security threat. However, these fears were not based to any significant extent on an expectation that a large-scale military onslaught by the Vietnamese against non-communist Southeast Asia was likely. This was true even in the case of Thailand: the role of the Thai armed forces in relation to the border situation was essentially to control small-scale incursions and to manage the refugee problem. In the highly unlikely event of a determined cross-border assault by the Vietnamese, Bangkok evidently intended that Thai forces would merely constitute a "tripwire" for US intervention -- though whether or not Washington could be relied upon to intervene decisively is another question.

It seems reasonably clear that after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, military developments in the ASEAN states were generally not much more attributable to events in Indochina than had been the
limited expansion and reequipment which had taken place in the 1975-78 period. Many of the underlying factors which had influenced defence policies in the region since (and before) 1975 continued to have important effects on military planning, expenditure and procurement. Defence policy was still formulated overwhelmingly on the basis of the need to counter low intensity threats to national security, rather than regional defence cooperation to meet a common, direct threat to non-communist Southeast Asia as a whole.

The relationship between developments in Indochina and the militarization of the ASEAN region in the 1975-81 period is not as clear cut as is often suggested. For example, to say that the ASEAN states "have more than doubled their military spending since the communist victories in Indochina in 1975" is comparable to the common assertion that food prices in Britain have increased by a factor of since the United Kingdom joined the EEC: the facts on both sides of the equation may be correct, but their linkage is merely implied rather than proved. A closer examination of the facts concerning the ASEAN states' militarization reveals that there were many other factors involved in the process besides Indochina, and that any attempt to link the phenomenon directly to an alleged perception by these states of an increasingly serious, direct military security threat emanating from Indochina is highly misleading. Nevertheless, "regional instability" after 1975 and a more specific "Vietnamese threat" after the invasion of Cambodia often provided useful

justifications for military developments which the ASEAN states' political and military leaders saw as desirable for a broad range of reasons.
CHAPTER 9

THE ASEAN STATES' POLITICAL RESPONSES TO INDOCHINESE DEVELOPMENTS, 1975-78

The governments of the ASEAN states saw, or claimed to see, the communist states of Indochina as posing a wide variety of security threats during the 1975-81 period. But a careful examination of these threat assessments makes it clear that concern with direct military threats from Indochina, Indochinese sponsorship of local communist insurgents, and the flow of Indochinese refugees into the ASEAN region were often exaggerated and manipulated by the ASEAN governments. On the other hand, less tangible security concerns relating to changes in the regional balance of power and the broad political, social and economic challenges posed to the ASEAN states' non-communist systems were more central to the ASEAN governments' threat perceptions. This was reflected in the nature of these governments' political responses to the phenomenon of communist Indochina.

Responses to the Political and Socioeconomic Challenge of Indochina, 1975-77

There was a widespread appreciation in the ASEAN states' ruling circles that the end of the Second Indochina War need not necessarily be seriously detrimental to their countries' security. Although there was anxiety within governmental bodies concerned with internal security over the possible encouragement which the communist victories might provide to revolutionary movements in the ASEAN region, there was also an expectation that the Indochinese states would wish to
concentrate their energies on post-war reconstruction, and the consolidation of their political, economic and social systems, in the short to medium term at least. There appeared to be grounds for hoping that the common interest of communist and non-communist Southeast Asia in peaceful development would overcome mutual suspicion and hostility. Two basic strands to the ASEAN states' attempts to adjust their policies to the new regional environment were discernible. While attempting individually and collectively to strengthen their own political, economic and social systems to withstand the communist challenge, they also made efforts to establish cooperative relationships with the Indochinese states. But this is not to say that the ASEAN states were uniformly successful in achieving these dual objectives, or even that these policies were necessarily pursued wholeheartedly.

Withstanding the Challenge of Indochinese Communism: National and Regional "Resilience"

The events of 1975 did not significantly alter the general and well-established consensus in the ASEAN countries' political and military elites that "security" did not involve merely the deterrence of and defence against external military threats. Indeed, the principal concern was with actual or potential rebellion against the rule of government by revolutionary and ethnic-separatist insurgents. Counter-insurgency experience in the Philippines, Malaya, Indochina and elsewhere since the late 1940s had demonstrated that such low intensity security threats were most successfully countered not by the
large-scale application of military force but by undermining the insurgents' support through the implementation of land reforms, the improvement of public infrastructure and utilities, the eradication of official corruption, the improvement of governmental responsiveness and other popular measures. There was still a role for the armed forces, but this lay in the careful gathering of intelligence and in adopting many of the insurgents' own tactics through patient, arduous and manpower-intensive patrolling on the ground. There were many reasons for the defeat of the anti-communist forces in Indochina but it was reasonably clear that an unwillingness to make fundamental social, economic and political reforms, and an over-reliance on military technology and firepower were key factors in the debacle. Moreover, the anti-communist regimes' reliance on American and other foreign military support had undermined their political legitimacy and enhanced and nationalist credentials of the communists.

The Indonesian leadership provided the most highly formulated theoretical framework for increasing the ability of their country (and, indeed, the non-communist Southeast Asian countries in general) to counter -- or hopefully to pre-empt -- domestic security threats which might be exacerbated in the wake of the Indochinese communists' successes. The essential precepts of ketahanan nasional or "national resilience" were:

... a total domestic development effort, sustained by a strong national spirit of ideology that overcomes partisan divisiveness and social unrest, brings tangible technocratic leadership, and rejects alien ideologies.¹

Statements by leading members of the Indonesian government at the time of the final communist victories in Indochina indicated that they saw such a developmental approach to security, emphasizing the need for economic progress, political stability and high national morale, as an appropriate response to the implicit challenge posed by the new regional balance of power. According to Major General Ali Murtopo (head of the President's special assistants -- Aspri), it was necessary for the ASEAN countries to improve public welfare and "narrow the gap between rich and poor" to reduce the opportunities for communist subversion. Foreign Minister Adam Malik echoed these sentiments. Suharto's former ambassador in Saigon, General Dharsono, saw the need to "enhance resilience in all fields" as one of the principal lessons for Indonesia of the "fall of Indochina". Although "national resilience" was an Indonesian formula, politicians in the other ASEAN countries expressed similar outlooks in response to the communist successes in 1975.

In the view of many politicians and officials concerned with

3 Antara in English, 0907 gmt, 15 April 1975 (SWB FE/4880/A3/1, 17 April 1975).
5 See, for example, comments by Lee Kuan Yew, Mirror (Singapore), 19 May 1975; Juan Ponce Enrile (Philippine Defence Secretary), "S.E. Asia after the Viet Nam War...", p. 391, 24 April 1975; and Major General Chatchai Choonhavan (Thai Foreign Minister), Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 14 April 1975 (SWB FE/4883/A3/17, 21 April 1975).
security in the ASEAN states, "resilience" or self-reliance was necessary on a regional as well as a national level in Southeast Asia's new strategic environment. Like "national resilience", the idea of "regional resilience" was expounded most forcefully by the Indonesian regime. According to Malik, writing in 1974, Indonesia's concept of "national resilience" encompassed other Southeast Asian countries.⁶ Murtopo asserted that increased collective as well as individual efforts by the ASEAN states were necessary to accelerate the pace of their economic development in order to combat foreign-inspired subversion.⁷ Indonesia's ASEAN partners were in general agreement that the enhancement of "regional resilience" was a desirable objective: indeed, the formation of ASEAN itself in 1967 owed much to a conviction on the part of regional leaders that such a cooperative venture would be a useful instrument in their efforts to eliminate the economic and social deprivation which had proved such a fertile breeding ground for communism.

An important aspect of the concepts of national and regional "resilience" -- at least in the Indonesian formulation -- was their general lack of emphasis on conventional military force as a means of achieving security. Not surprisingly, the military regime in Jakarta envisaged a key role for the armed forces in building "national resilience" (a concept which was partly derived from the army's own "territorial defence" doctrine). But this role lay principally in

⁶ Adam Malik, "Regional Cooperation in International Politics", Indonesian Times, 29 October 1974.

maintaining internal security by supervising social, economic and political development at grassroots level. High military budgets were rejected as they would reduce the funds available for development programmes. Substantial military dependence on extra-regional powers was eschewed because of the danger that this would lead to excessive purchases of over-sophisticated weapons, while undermining the popular morale and will-power so crucial in developing "national resilience". On the other hand, some senior Indonesian military officers favoured military cooperation between the ASEAN states as a component of "regional resilience". On several occasions in the early 1970s, Jakarta's Minister of Defence, General Maraden Panggabean, suggested that the ASEAN states should cooperate militarily on a more formalized, multilateral basis, but this view did not represent the dominant attitude within the regime.

The communist victories in Indochina provided a substantial impetus to ASEAN's members to intensify their cooperation through the Association as a means of enhancing their individual and collective "resilience" in the face of what they perceived as a serious challenge to their security. In the years between 1967 and 1975, ASEAN had provided its diverse members with a forum in which they developed a habit of consultation, and made significant strides towards overcoming


9 Panggabean suggested the militarization of ASEAN in January 1971 and December 1974. But on other occasions (as in April 1972 and February 1976) he adhered to the Indonesian regime's normal line that only bilateral military cooperation was acceptable. See van der Kroef, "National Security...", pp. 488-89.
the intra-regional suspicions of the early and mid 1960s. But despite a profusion of sanguine and rather complacent communiques in ASEAN's early years, it took the jolt provided by the collapse of non-communist Indochina to trigger more tangible economic and political cooperation.

The summit meeting of ASEAN's heads of government on Bali in February 1976 was the culmination of a period of intense consultation and negotiation following the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon. At the summit, the leaders of Indonesia's four ASEAN partners emphasized their agreement with the idea that economic and social development and cooperation were essential instruments with which to face the new regional challenge. This consensus was reflected in the formal public statements issued by the meeting, which enshrined more explicitly than the Bangkok declaration (which had established ASEAN in 1967) the idea that security could be attained through the enhancement of national and regional "resilience". The Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in Southeast Asia expressed a determination to strengthen "national resilience" in "political, economic socio-cultural as well as security fields" (Article 11) and to "co-operate in all fields for the promotion of regional resilience" (Article 12). In the principal resolution of the Declaration of ASEAN


11 10 Years ASEAN (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 1978), pp. 93, 98-9, 104.

Concord, the Association's members agreed to "eliminate threats posed by subversion... thus strengthening national and ASEAN resilience".\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, under the Declaration the ASEAN states adopted a "programme of action" involving specific measures to enhance political, economic, social, cultural and security cooperation.\textsuperscript{14}

It is not altogether clear that the flurry of meetings and declarations which followed the Indochinese communists' triumphs in 1975 led to any really significant strengthening of the individual and collective "resilience" of the ASEAN states in the late 1970s.

ASEAN's members maintained impressive annual rates of economic growth, mainly in the 6-10% range (in terms of gross domestic product).\textsuperscript{15} Average per capita income also grew significantly. Although the ASEAN countries (except Singapore) did not match the performance of developing East Asian economies such as those of Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan, even the weakest ASEAN economies (those of Indonesia and the Philippines) displayed considerably greater dynamism than those of the Indochinese countries.\textsuperscript{16}

Although the ASEAN states' economies, and average per capita incomes, continued to grow fairly rapidly in the late 1970s, this did

\textsuperscript{13} Declaration of ASEAN Concord (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 1976), p. 1.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
not mean that these countries made significant progress towards
conquering the socioeconomic problems which undermined their "national
resilience". The Singaporean and, to a lesser extent, Malaysian
governments were broadly successful in translating their countries' rapid growth rates into higher living standards for the masses. But in the three least developed ASEAN countries -- Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines -- there was little indication of any noteworthy amelioration of the basic rural problems of landlessness, indebtedness and unemployment or of any improvement in the incomes and living conditions of the rapidly enlarging urban proletariat.

Indeed, there were signs that the lot of many ordinary rural and urban people in these countries was actually deteriorating in the late 1970s. For example, the real wages of workers in the Philippines continued a decline which had begun in the early 1970s. By 1979, real agricultural incomes were only 60% of what they had been in 1974. During his year in power in 1976-77, Thailand's extreme right-wing Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichien made a policy of attempting to cut back real wages, exacerbating "a considerable erosion of real incomes not only for unskilled labour, but for the urban work force as a whole". According to a World Bank report in 1978, successive Thai governments' policies had tended:


18 Ho Kwon Ping, FEER, 29 June 1979, p. 52.

... to contribute to, rather than help reduce, welfare disparity among the country's population. In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to discern a sense of direction and purpose in public sector behaviour in any way comparable to its stated intentions and objectives.\textsuperscript{20}

In Indonesia, governmental neglect of agricultural development continued in the late 1970s. Real agricultural wages declined and in Java landlessness increased rapidly. By 1979, three quarters of Java's agricultural families did not own enough land for subsistence, and nutritional levels were worsening.\textsuperscript{21} Even in relatively affluent Malaysia, there were serious problems: the government failed to meet the socioeconomic targets set in the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-80), and the bumiputra policy appeared to be heightening inequality within the Malay community. By the early 1980s, the average paddy farmer earned 20-25\% less in real terms than he had five years earlier.\textsuperscript{22}

The socioeconomic problems of the four larger ASEAN members were of course present in many other Third World countries and could not, even with the best will in the world, have been resolved quickly. But despite their declaratory emphasis on the need to strengthen "national resilience", the governments of these countries did not pursue this objective wholeheartedly in the 1975-81 period. If "national

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
  \bibitem{22} Ho Kwon Ping, "ASEAN: The Five Countries", in Broinowski (ed.), p. 221.
\end{thebibliography}
resilience" was to become a reality, those governments needed to confront some important questions regarding their socioeconomic policies. Most fundamentally, it was necessary to recognize that aggregated GDP growth figures did not necessarily imply that "development" was occurring in a manner beneficial to a particular country as a whole. In fact, such figures often obscured widening disparities in wealth between both rural and urban social classes and between central and peripheral geographical regions. If these disparities were not to exacerbate divisive political tensions which had the potential to destroy the fragile cohesion of the larger ASEAN states' political, economic and social systems, a far greater emphasis on social justice -- the distribution of the benefits of growth -- was called for.\textsuperscript{23} If the ASEAN governments had been truly committed to strengthening "national resilience", they (particularly the Thai, Philippine and Indonesian regimes) would have concentrated far greater attention and resources on measures to effect radical and comprehensive land reform, to fix higher minimum wage levels and to ensure a fairer balance in the distribution of benefits between regions.

Their very nature made it extremely difficult for the regimes which ruled the three largest ASEAN countries to implement the policies necessary to strengthen "national resilience". These

\textsuperscript{23} This was recognized in Article 3 of the Declaration of ASEAN Concord, under which ASEAN's members agreed to "... intensify cooperation in economic and social development, with particular emphasis on the promotion of social justice...". Declaration of ASEAN Concord, p. 2.
Authoritarian regimes' rather narrow power bases were located principally in the military, business, landowning, bureaucratic and technocratic elites: given that the regimes thus depended for their survival on the support of these elements (who generally saw their interests as coincident with the maintenance of a social, economic and political status quo which tolerated exploitation and corruption) rather than the population as a whole, there was little incentive to undertake fundamental reforms. As one commentator has observed with reference to Thailand, "public policy tends to be shaped by the interests of small, usually urban-based higher-income groups, rather than the declared social and economic priorities of the nation". In Indonesia, "the inadequacy of the steps taken so far to alleviate the condition of the mass of the people is indicative of the sociological character of the ruling groups which appears to inhibit them from initiating appropriate reforms".24

The continuing failure of the Indonesian, Philippine and Thai governments to respond effectively to their countries' chronic socioeconomic ills boosted popular opposition to their dominance in the late 1970s. In the face of such challenges, the Indonesian government attempted to use the need for "national resilience" following the communist victories in Indochina as a device for bolstering its tenuous legitimacy, and particularly as a justification for the repression of forces which challenged the status quo but whose

participation in the political system was probably necessary if a truly durable domestic order was to be constructed. The Indonesian authorities used the Indochinese communist victories as one pretext for promoting a "national ideological fanaticism" based on the Panjasila (or "five principles"), which was effectively a means of depoliticizing Indonesian society. The events in Indochina were used as a justification by the Marcos regime in the Philippines for the continuation of martial law, and by the Thai right-wing for opposing and eventually overthrowing the democratically-elected government in Bangkok. The effect of this manipulation of the idea that domestic political solidarity was necessary in the new regional environment was to undermine "resilience" by radicalizing opposition groups deprived of a constitutional voice, thus adding a political dimension to the widening social and economic polarization within the larger ASEAN countries.

Given that at least three of the five ASEAN governments proved incapable of implementing policies which would strengthen "national resilience", in the sense of ameliorating fundamental socioeconomic and political weaknesses, the strengthening of "resilience" at the regional level could not progress far. One ASEAN state's susceptibility to insurgency, and hence interference from outside, could easily undermine the "resilience" of neighbouring ASEAN members. Ultimately, the strengthening of "regional resilience" was dependent

26 Justuf M. van der Kroef, "S.E. Asia after the Viet Nam War...", pp. 378, 391.
on the success of the weakest ASEAN states in overcoming their chronic socioeconomic problems. In the late 1970s, the ASEAN states increased their cooperation on security matters, and particularly in counter-insurgency in border areas. In one sense this cooperation reflected the readiness of the countries concerned to pool their efforts as a means of enhancing "regional resilience", in line with their commitment in the Declaration of ASEAN Concord to continue security cooperation "on a non-ASEAN basis". But in another sense, it was evidence of the continuing failure of some of the ASEAN governments to eliminate the conditions which engendered their countries' internal security problems in the first place.

Apart from the obstacles posed to the improvement of "regional resilience" by the weaknesses of individual ASEAN states, the divergent national interests of various ASEAN members stood in the way of closer regional cooperation. This is not to say that ASEAN did not achieve some striking successes in the 1975-78 period. In particular, the Association forged ahead with the intensification and institutionalization of its relations with the industrialized West and Japan. ASEAN was able to apply coordinated pressure on these "dialogue partners" to secure improved access for its members' exports and to promote foreign investment in the region. But, as Lee Kuan Yew said, it was "easier to deal with ASEAN's external partners, than sort

27 Declaration of ASEAN Concord, p. 7.

out the intra-regional arrangements between the (ASEAN) partners themselves".  

Despite a flurry of meetings and a proliferation of ASEAN bodies after the Bali summit, economic cooperation between the Association's members proved problematic and slow in implementation. Indonesia and Malaysia were loath to agree to tariff reductions which might leave their fledgling industries defenceless against competition from the other members, so the agreement on Preferential Trading Agreements signed in January 1977 was necessarily gradualist in approach. The scheme to implement a series of joint industrial projects faltered because of conflicts between the selected projects and industries already existing in the region: for this reason, Singapore's planned diesel engine plant was ultimately dropped from the scheme completely.

Although political cooperation between ASEAN's members generally fared better than the Association's stymied economic dimension, it was by no means uniformly successful. The Bangkok Declaration, by which ASEAN was established in 1967, emphasized economic, social and cultural cooperation but it was clear from the very beginning that political motives underlay the decisions of the five states involved.

30 For the text of this agreement, see ASEAN Documents Series 1967-1985, pp. 179-184.
31 David Irvine, pp. 283-93.
32 For the Declaration's text, see ASEAN Documents Series 1967-1985, pp. 17-18.
to join the Association. In particular, the members saw ASEAN as a mechanism for overcoming the legacy of their recent disputes with each other. In the late 1970s, ASEAN continued to play this role, but latent tensions and clashes of interest remained. For example, although President Marcos promised at ASEAN's Kuala Lumpur summit in 1977 to abandon the Philippines' claim to the Malaysian state of Sabah, Manila did not formally renounce its irredentist ambition and bilateral relations between Kuala Lumpur and Manila remained strained. The ASEAN states' increasing cooperation on security matters sometimes highlighted the divergent as well as convergent interests of the states in question, as in the examples of Malaysian and Thai sensitivity to the presence of Singaporean and Malaysian forces (respectively) on their soil.

Accommodating Communist Indochina: Towards a New Regional Order?

The second principal aspect of the ASEAN states' attempts to adjust their policies to the novel regional environment involved an effort to reduce the security threats perceived in the new situation, by integrating communist Indochina into a system of regional order. Although there was by no means complete unanimity within individual ASEAN governments or between the ASEAN states that the communist

33 10 Years ASEAN, p. 164.
34 Kuala Lumpur refused to allow Singaporean forces access to Malaysian training areas or even joint exercises between the two countries' forces, and there were periodic disruptions in cooperation between Thai and Malaysian forces against Communist Party of Malaya guerillas. See Sheldon W. Simon, "The ASEAN States: Obstacles to Security Cooperation, Orbis, Summer 1978, pp. 420-25.
Indochinese states were potentially suitable partners for regional cooperation rather than ineluctable adversaries, the former view provided the dominant perspective within ASEAN in the 1975-78 period.

Could ASEAN itself provide a suitable framework for cooperation between Southeast Asia's communist and non-communist states after 1975? The 1967 Bangkok Declaration talked of the Association being "open for participation to all states in the South East Asian Region". But as the conflict in Indochina continued in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it seemed ever less likely that Indochina could be brought into ASEAN. Although the ASEAN governments (and particularly the Suharto regime through its Foreign Minister, Adam Malik) made moves towards expanding the Association's membership to include Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam and South Vietnam, it was clear that meaningful participation by Vietnam and Laos was impossible while they remained divided by war. Sihanouk was unwilling to jeopardize Cambodia's neutrality by joining ASEAN.

The Paris Peace Agreement in January 1973 briefly revivified the idea of enlarging ASEAN, and inspired the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, meeting in Kuala Lumpur the following month, to call for a meeting of all Southeast Asian countries (an "Asian Forum") "at an appropriate time in the future" as a step in this direction. It was also decided to establish an ASEAN Coordinating Committee for the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of the Indochinese States, although it was soon

36 See Jorgensen-Dahl, pp. 96, 98-98.
evident that the ASEAN states could not agree on what type of assistance to provide, and that any such assistance was inappropriate in the circumstances of continuing conflict which prevailed in Indochina after the Peace Agreement. Most importantly, it was clear that the North Vietnamese regarded ASEAN with great suspicion, because of the support given by members of the organization to the United States' war effort. This led Hanoi to reject invitations to send observers to ASEAN Ministerial Meetings.  

Even after the 1975 communist victories in Indochina, important voices in ASEAN (particularly that of the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Razak) continued to express the view that the Indochinese countries could and should be involved in the Association. But quite apart from the fact that Hanoi's hostile attitude towards ASEAN as an organization clearly indicated that Vietnam at least would not wish to join the Association, the main trend of thinking within ASEAN was against any expansion to include Indochina. The predominant view within the conservative and cautious ASEAN governments was that the potential value of ASEAN as a "practical way of safeguarding against the possible adverse consequences of the emergence of revolutionary Indochina" outweighed the dubious benefits of transforming the Association into an ideologically-mixed "community of Southeast Asia". The press statement issued by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting  

38 Roger Irvine, p. 31.  
40 These two views of ASEAN's role were expressed at the May 1975 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur by the Singaporean Foreign Minister (Rajaratnam) and the Malaysian Prime Minister (Tun Razak) respectively.
in May 1975 made no mention of the possibility of expanding ASEAN's membership. But despite the fact that ASEAN's members had decided, in effect, to maintain the Association's non-communist ideological purity as a basis for creating "regional resilience", ASEAN's Foreign Ministers left open the possibility of an amicable and cooperative relationship between the two halves of an ideologically-divided region.41

Indonesian Attitudes Towards Regional Order and Indochina

As with the formulas of national and regional "resilience", the Indonesian regime provided much of the inspiration for the idea that although it was not appropriate for the communist Indochinese states to join ASEAN, they (particularly Vietnam) should be involved as partners of the ASEAN states in creating a new regional order. While their virulent anti-communism after the attempted coup of 1965 ensured that some elements within the Indonesian armed forces favoured policies aimed at bolstering the conservative regimes in Indochina before 1975 (particularly in view of the still close alliance between Hanoi and Beijing),42 on balance there was still a widespread and realistic appreciation in the Indonesian foreign policy-making elite that the struggle of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong against the American-backed Saigon regime was inspired as much by nationalism

41 Harvey Stockwin, FEER, 30 May 1975, pp. 22-23.
42 See Lie Tek Tjeng, "Vietnamese Nationalism: An Indonesian Perspective" (Paper presented at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Round Table Conference on "Crisis Region Indochina -- Causes and Effects", Jakarta, 4-6 March 1981), p. 5.
as communism. The ultimate communist victory in Vietnam was neither unexpected nor unwelcome in Jakarta. By the early 1970s there was consensus among the makers of Indonesian foreign policy that Vietnam would eventually be unified on communist terms. Moreover, the Indonesian military leadership still saw China as the major (if long-term) external threat to Indonesian security. Indonesian respect for Vietnamese nationalism bolstered by evidence of a widening rift between Beijing and Hanoi, suggested that a unified Vietnam might act as a welcome barrier to any future attempts by China to expand its influence into the ASEAN region. Although it was clear in 1975 that it was neither possible nor desirable (particularly in view of Jakarta's wish to maintain the Association's cohesion as a vehicle for Indonesia's aspirations to sub-regional leadership) for a united communist Vietnam to join ASEAN, the Indonesian leadership hoped that Vietnam might be willing to cooperate with the ASEAN states (especially Indonesia) in maintaining "regional order".

In the Indonesian regime's conception, the achievement of a

43 According to Ali Alatas, who was Secretary, Directorate General of Political Affairs in Jakarta's Department of Foreign Affairs in 1972-73. See "Summary Record of Proceedings", Seminar on Aspects of the Australian-Indonesian Relationship, Canberra, 18-20 October 1979, p. 97.

44 According to Suharto in April 1975, the recent developments in Indochina were "nothing but a stage in an incomplete decolonization process -- a process of nation-building in line with national identity". Jakarta home service, 1250 gmt, 24 April 1975 (SWB FE/4888/A3/5, 28 April 1975).

satisfactory regional order implied the resolution of conflict within
and between Southeast Asian states by these countries themselves with
the help of their regional associates. The legitimate interests of
extra-regional large powers would be accommodated, but undue influence
or interference -- especially the maintenance of military bases or
alliances -- by these powers (particularly China, but also the USSR,
the United States and Japan) would ideally be excluded. Most
importantly, a satisfactory regional order would involve the implicit
acknowledgement by other Southeast Asian states (the ASEAN members, at
least) of Indonesia's leadership. The experience of "Confrontation"
in the mid-1960s had shown the dangers of using the military
instrument to pursue this goal: the Jakarta regime saw that political
means would now have to be used. ASEAN had provided the framework for
the reconciliation of its members after their bilateral disputes in
the mid-1960s, and Jakarta now saw it as the vehicle for fulfilling
its aspirations to leadership among the non-communist regional

46 This attitude was derived from Indonesian ideas about the meaning
of nationalism which, according to Suharto, involved being
"master in one's own house", and in control of one's own destiny.
The experiences of Dutch colonialism, American interventionism in
the 1950s and Chinese interference in the 1960s all contributed
to this view.

47 Indonesia's aspirations to regional leadership were derived from
its large population, wealth in natural resources, economic
potential, cultural and historical importance and geostrategic
position. According to Jusuf Wanandi, "Indonesia, willing or
not, is objectively the natural leader in ASEAN and in Southeast
Asia". See Jusuf Wanandi, "Japan and Australia: the Security
and Prosperity Connection", in Japan-Australia Relations: Past,
Present and Future (Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and
The Suharto regime hoped in 1975 that cooperation on a less institutionalized basis would reconcile the ASEAN and Indochinese states, thus reducing opportunities for interference by extra-regional powers. Although Jakarta could not hope to subordinate a unified communist Vietnam to Indonesian leadership, an initiative to open dialogue with Indochina had the potential to revive Indonesia's flagging credibility as the "first among equals" in ASEAN.

In the event, Indonesia was successful in persuading its ASEAN partners not only to hold the Association's first Heads of Government meeting on Bali (in February 1976) but also to establish the permanent ASEAN secretariat in Jakarta, with Indonesia's Lieutenant-General Hartono Dharsono as its first Secretary-General. More importantly, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia agreed at the Bali summit incorporated Indonesian ideas about regional order. The Treaty set out a basic code for inter-state relations in the region, stressing the inviolability of national sovereignty and territorial


50 Indonesian leadership in ASEAN had been undermined particularly by the decisions of Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines to establish diplomatic relations with Jakarta's bete noire, Beijing, in 1974-75.

51 See David Irvine, pp. 55-56.
integrity and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Significantly, the Treaty was "open to accession by other states"\(^\text{52}\) -- a clear intimation that it could serve as a mechanism for building political links between the ASEAN and Indochinese states.

Despite the ASEAN governments' virtually unanimous expressions of goodwill towards Indochina in the months after the communist victories there -- and particularly at the Bali summit -- their attitudes, policies and actual progress towards establishing cooperative relationships with the Indochinese states were by no means uniform in the 1975-78 period. Differences in security, geographical and historical relationships with Indochina and attitudes towards security links with extra-regional powers all contributed to this diversity. There was also a considerable degree of ambivalence within the foreign policy making elites of individual ASEAN states, due to institutional differences of interests.

There were differences of outlook on Indochina even within the Indonesian regime. Some policy-makers in Jakarta, particularly within the military, disagreed with the Foreign Ministry's view of Vietnam as basically benign and a potential collaborator in establishing a regional order beneficial to Indonesia.\(^\text{53}\) There was concern in the

\(^{52}\) Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (Article 18), reprinted in ASEAN Documents Series 1967-1985, p. 28.

\(^{53}\) Although the Foreign Ministry was heavily influenced by the armed forces (particularly through the positioning of senior military officers in key policy-making areas), Foreign Ministers Adam Malik and (from 1978) Mochtar Kusumaatmadja frequently supported policies at odds with the views of the military leadership. See David Jenkins, FEER, 29 August 1980, p. 11.
military that Vietnam might use diplomatic and ultimately military means to compete with Indonesia for the political and economic leadership of Southeast Asia. Hanoi's forthright rhetoric in support of the Fretilin resistance movement in East Timor and its disagreement with Jakarta over maritime boundaries in the South China Sea exacerbated the suspicions of those Indonesians who saw Vietnam as a competitor rather than a partner.

Vietnam's hostility towards ASEAN as an organization and to Indonesia's role within the Association gave additional credence to the fears of those in Jakarta who doubted Hanoi's credibility as a collaborator. The stated wish of the Vietnamese to improve relations with individual non-communist Southeast Asian states did not stop Hanoi from sharply criticizing Indonesia for its role as the "main prop" of Washington's new regional strategy of using ASEAN to rally regional anti-communist forces to thwart the progress of the Southeast

54 See David Jenkins, FEER, 24 June 1977, pp. 15-16.

Asian "revolutionary movement". Hanoi alleged that the invasion of East Timor was evidence of Jakarta's role as an instrument of the United States' "aggressive strategy".

In 1977 it appeared that those in the armed forces who doubted Vietnam's reliability as a regional partner were gaining the upper hand in an evidently continuing debate within the Indonesian regime over relations with Hanoi. At the second ASEAN Heads of Government meeting in August 1977, Suharto claimed that, in the face of Vietnam's hostility towards ASEAN and its members, "We have closed our ranks". Senior officers also exerted pressure on the government to intensify military cooperation within ASEAN. But the Foreign Ministry remained intent on fostering better relations with Hanoi. The alternative would have been to abandon hope of establishing a regional


58 Leifer, Indonesia's Foreign Policy, p. 163.


60 See Denzil Peiris, FEER, 3 September 1976, p. 14 and David Jenkins' interview with Foreign Minister Adam Malik, FEER, 10 June 1977, p. 37. It has been suggested that Malik's retirement as Foreign Minister in September 1977 was attributable to his dissatisfaction with the anti-communist tone of recent Indonesian foreign policy, which he allegedly believed to jeopardize the possibility of rapprochement with Indochina. But it seems more likely that Malik's retirement had been planned well in advance and was unconnected with any dispute over policy towards Indochina. Malik was appointed Vice-President in March 1978 and retained considerable influence over foreign policy. "Intelligence", FEER, 16 September 1977, p. 7 and David Jenkins, FEER, 16 September 1977, p. 26.
order based on reconciliation, with the risk that this might result in a more clear-cut polarization of regional states into antagonistic sub-regional blocs. Such a development might provide new openings for large power interference in the region as well as undermining still further Indonesia's commitment to achieve security through "national resilience" rather than massive military expenditure.

While Indonesia's pretensions to sub-regional leadership through the vehicle of ASEAN posed a serious obstacle to the construction of a 
modus vivendi with the Indochinese states (or at least Vietnam and Laos), an independent initiative by Jakarta to overcome this barrier seemed highly likely. Given the profoundly anti-communist predisposition of the Jakarta regime and the importance of a leading role in ASEAN to Indonesia's aspirations to be a respected medium power, any significant amelioration of relations with communist Indochina was likely to be dependent on a change in Hanoi's view of the Association.

Malaysia, Indochina and ZOPFAN

Malaysian politicians, officials and military leaders were not seriously concerned in 1975 with any highly significant direct or immediate threat to their country's security as a result of developments in Indochina. Coupled with continuing wariness towards China, this factor produced an overall perspective on Indochina which was close to the optimistic view prevalent in Jakarta, despite the Malay elite's lack of the widespread empathy with the Vietnamese communists evident in the Indonesian leadership.
Bearing in mind Kuala Lumpur's security concerns at the time, it seems likely that the Razak government had fairly precise ideas about the value of detente within the region. It was almost axiomatic that cooperative relationships with the Indochinese states were necessary, in the interests of continuing development and prosperity (which were vital to undermine support for domestic communists and ethnic or religious extremists), and to prevent the ideological schism within the region from spawning mutually antagonistic blocs. More specifically, Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs officials concerned with security thought that a rapid normalization of relations might undercut any nexus which might otherwise develop between Vietnam and the CPM. Moreover the encouragement of better relations between the ASEAN and Indochinese states might forestall tension on the Thai border with Laos and Cambodia (which had the potential to undermine Thai willingness to cooperate militarily with Malaysia against the CPM).

Malaysia possessed distinct advantages over its ASEAN partners as it attempted to construct working relationships with the communist Indochinese states. Although Tunku Abdul Rahman's staunchly anti-communist government had been associated (though not directly involved) with the US war effort, no US forces had ever been based in Malaysia and Tun Razak had made considerable efforts to move Malaysia

61 Personal interview with Noordin Soopie, Managing Editor, New Straits Times, Kuala Lumpur, 21 April 1981.

62 One specific intention of establishing diplomatic relations with Hanoi in 1973 was probably to nip in the bud potential Vietnamese support for the CPM. Nayan Chanda, FEER, 27 August 1976, p. 59.
towards more genuinely non-aligned foreign policies\textsuperscript{63} in response to Southeast Asia's changing strategic environment as British and US forces were withdrawn from the region. Razak had established links with communist countries, including diplomatic relations with North Vietnam in March 1973.\textsuperscript{64} Unlike Indonesia, Malaysia did not seriously aspire to regional pre-eminence, so there was no potential (as there at times appeared to be in Indonesia's case) for competition with Hanoi for the leadership of Southeast Asia.

There were close similarities between the Indonesian and Malaysian governments' views regarding the desirability of a harmonious relationship between the communist and non-communist Southeast Asian states. Although at the declaratory level at least the Razak administration emphasized its proposal for the establishment of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia as the overarching framework for its policies towards Indochina,\textsuperscript{65} Jakarta had ensured that the 1971 Kuala Lumpur Declaration which formally proposed ZOPFAN was in no way incongruent with the Indonesian perspective on regional order.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{63} See Marvin C. Ott, "Foreign Policy Formulation in Malaysia", \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. 12, No. 3 (March 1972), p. 237.


\textsuperscript{65} Thus Tun Razak claimed soon after the fall of Saigon that ZOPFAN would "enable regional countries to cooperate and work for mutual benefit". Kuala Lumpur home service in English, 1100 gmt, 4 May 1975 (SWB FE/4896/A3/9, 6 May 1975).

\textsuperscript{66} See Leifer, \textit{Indonesia's Foreign Policy}, pp. 147-59.
In practice, Kuala Lumpur's emphasis on ZOPFAN proved to be as much of an obstacle to the establishment of better relations with Vietnam as the wish to retain a leading role in ASEAN was in the case of Indonesia. According to Razak, a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality was infeasible without the participation of the Indochinese states. But it had been clear from the beginning that Hanoi was hostile to ZOPFAN, the credibility of which was tarnished in the eyes of the Vietnamese communists because the Kuala Lumpur declaration had been issued under the auspices of ASEAN, at a time when two of the Association's members (Thailand and the Philippines) were actively involved in supporting the United States' war effort in Indochina. In the Vietnamese view, it was necessary for the ASEAN countries to end -- or at least reduce in importance -- their military relationships with the United States and other "imperialist" powers to make regional neutralization a feasible proposition.

The final withdrawal of US forces from Thailand in July 1976 substantially reduced what Hanoi had seen as a continuing American military threat to Vietnam's security. By this stage, the Vietnamese were evidently not seriously concerned by the US bases in the Philippines or the Australian and New Zealand forces stationed in

67 Interview with Tun Razak, Age, 26 June 1975.
68 Nhan Dan, 1 December 1971. At the 1972 Paris Peace Talks, a North Vietnamese spokesman suggested a "zone of true neutrality", evidently involving the withdrawal of US forces from the region (or at least from Thailand) as a precondition. Dick Wilson, The Neutralization of Southeast Asia (New York: Praeger, 1975), p. 95.
Malaysia and Singapore. At the same time, the Vietnamese leadership wanted better relations with the ASEAN states, not only for their own sake (particularly in order to boost trade), but also to fulfill one of the preconditions for normalization with Washington laid down by Secretary of State Kissinger. These factors doubtless influenced Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh's announcement early in July 1976 of a new guiding principle for Hanoi's foreign policy: the "development of cooperation among the countries in the region for the building of prosperity... and for the cause of independence, peace and genuine neutrality in Southeast Asia". But official Malaysian optimism that this principle heralded a new Vietnamese attitude towards ZOPFAN and ASEAN was dealt a serious blow when Hanoi's Deputy Foreign Minister, Phan Hien, visited Kuala Lumpur later in the month. Hien emphasized the difference between Vietnam's PIN (Peace, Independence and Neutrality) concept and ZOPFAN, objecting particularly to the "Cold War" connotations of the "Freedom" component in the ASEAN proposal. Hien also justified Vietnam's continuing suspicion of ASEAN, by quoting President Ford's emphasis on the Association as the cornerstone of his Pacific Doctrine.

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70 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 30 July 1976, p. 12.

71 As well as expounding this new principle, Trinh reiterated Vietnam's previous three-point policy for regional relations: mutual respect for territorial integrity and non-interference; no foreign military bases in the region; and mutual economic and cultural exchange. Nayan Chanda, FEER, 16 July 1976, p. 14; 23 July 1976, p. 9 and 6 August 1976, p. 28.

The clearest indication of Hanoi's continuing unwillingness to become involved in a new regional order on ASEAN's terms (that is, using ZOPFAN as a framework) came in August 1976. Laotian and Vietnamese delegates to the non-aligned summit meeting in Colombo attacked the ZOPFAN proposal in strong terms after Malaysia proposed that the meeting re-endorse the Kuala Lumpur declaration,\(^73\) claiming that ZOPFAN was designed to "resuscitate the past" by camouflaging an intensifying American "war of aggression in Indochina".\(^74\)

The Vietnamese and Laotian leaderships may genuinely have been worried by the potential threat from an American-influenced and possibly militarized ASEAN, and by the possibility that ZOPFAN, if implemented, would legitimize the influence of the United States and China in the region while isolating Vietnam and Laos (by stymying the development of their relations with the Soviet Union). But another explanation for their behaviour at Colombo may have been that Hanoi and Vietnamese, acutely conscious of their post-war weakness, lacked the diplomatic confidence to deal with ASEAN as a political and economic bloc. With the withdrawal of US forces from Thailand, Vietnam and Laos had little reason to feel militarily insecure in relation to the ASEAN states, but the latter were, collectively, far stronger by almost every non-military indicator. This may have influenced the Vietnamese and Laotian regimes to attempt to impress on

\(^73\) The previous non-aligned summit (at Algiers in 1973) had endorsed ZOPFAN.

\(^74\) See speeches by the Laotian President, Souphanouvong, and the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh. Nayan Chanda, FEER, 10 September 1976, p. 10.
ASEAN members that, for the foreseeable future at least, only bilateral relations would be possible. Thailand's economic blockade of Laos and support for anti-government Laotian rebels, resulting in increasing Laotian economic and military dependence on Vietnam, may account for Vientiane's leading role in the attack on ASEAN and ZOPFAN at Colombo.

The success of Vietnam and Laos in preventing Malaysia and ASEAN from retaining non-aligned endorsement for ZOPFAN at the Colombo summit led to a reassessment in Kuala Lumpur of the proposal's usefulness in relation to Indochina. Tun Razak had died in February 1976 and Hussein Onn, the new Prime Minister, had little compunction in pragmatically playing down the previous emphasis on ZOPFAN as the specific key to regional harmony, in the interests of fostering equable bilateral relations with Vietnam and Laos as a first step towards overcoming the ideological divide in the region, although ASEAN and ZOPFAN remained the basis of Malaysian foreign policy for general declaratory purposes.

The Malaysian government did not allow Hanoi's media attack on Thai-Malaysian military cooperation against the CPM in early 1977 to affect its drive for better relations with Vietnam. In May 1977, Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Ahmad Rithauddeen, became the first

75 See, for example, Rithauddeen's address to the UN General Assembly, 6 October 1976, FAM, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December 1976), pp. 13-15.

76 Although the Vietnamese criticism offended the Malaysian government, Hanoi's invective was aimed at Thailand's new right-wing regime rather than Kuala Lumpur. K. Das, FEER, 4 February 1977, p. 10; Nayan Chanda, FEER, 15 April 1977, pp. 15-16.
senior member of an ASEAN government to visit Hanoi. While there and in Vientiane, he concluded agreements to consult with Vietnam and Laos before future non-aligned conferences, to avoid repeating the clash which had occurred at Colombo.\textsuperscript{77} In appearance at least, this was a breakthrough in relations between communist and non-communist Southeast Asia. Rithauddeen also promised Malaysian technical assistance for the reconstruction of Vietnam's rubber and palm oil industries. Significantly, Rithauddeen mentioned neither ASEAN nor ZOPFAN in his speeches in Hanoi and Vientiane, although he stressed the similarity in outlook between himself and his hosts on the "realization of peace and stability in the region".\textsuperscript{78}

The Two Strands of Thai Policy

Thai policy towards Indochina in the aftermath of the 1975 communist triumphs was characterized by tension between two contrasting foreign policy outlooks. It was not until General Kriangsak seized power in October 1977 that a workable consensus on the issue was evolved.

In contrast to the ambivalence of the previous two Thai administrations,\textsuperscript{79} the foreign policy outlook of the elected

\textsuperscript{77} K. Das, \textit{FEER}, 24 June 1977, p. 16.


\textsuperscript{79} The Thanom-Praphat and (after the October 1973 "revolution") Sanyagovernments had made tentative moves towards establishing a modus vivendi with Hanoi, but had failed mainly because of their concurrent stress on the continuing relevance of Thailand's security relationship with Washington. See Charles E. Morrison and Astri Suhrke, \textit{Strategies of Survival: The Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Smaller Asian States} (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), pp. 125-37.
administration led by Kukrit Pramoj from March 1975 was similar -- at least on a declaratory level -- to that of the Indonesian and Malaysian governments. According to Kukrit's Foreign Minister, the goal was to achieve ZOPFAN by following a policy of non-interference and genuine neutrality, by building up indigenous social and military strength and by intensifying ASEAN cooperation. In practical terms, the Kukrit government's foreign policy declarations promised an attempt to establish working relationships with the Indochinese and other communist states (particularly China) while simultaneously de-emphasizing Thailand's alliance with Washington.

If it had been forcefully and expeditiously effected, the Kukrit government's declaratory policy would have been a profound departure from Thailand's recent conduct of international relationships. But the new policy was to a very large extent the result of the efforts of a small number of senior Foreign Ministry officials under Under-Secretary of State Anand Panyarachun to convince Kukrit (and his brother Seni, after he became Prime Minister in April 1976) of the need to come to terms with both the communist ascendancy in Indochina and the unreliability and unsuitability of the alliance with

Statement by Major General Chatchai Choonhavan, Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 14 April 1975 (SWB FE/4883/A3/17, 21 April 1975).

For example, at the ASEAN Foreign Minister's meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Chatchai called for "an early meeting of all Southeast Asian countries to discuss common problems and remove misunderstandings and suspicion". Jakarta home service, 1200 gmt, 13 May 1975 (SWB FE/4904/A3/9, 15 May 1975). Kukrit had already pledged that all American forces would be withdrawn from Thailand within a year. Bangkok home service, 0001 gmt, 18 March 1975 (SWB FE/4859/B/6, 20 March 1975).
Washington in the new regional environment. This approach favouring intra-regional reconciliation and a balance of extra-regional influences (including better relations with Beijing) faced widespread opposition from senior military officers in the Cabinet, the National Security Council and the Defence Ministry's Supreme Command, and from right-wing civilian politicians.  

The military and political right-wing genuinely may have seen a unified, heavily-armed and ideologically hostile Vietnam, together with communist-ruled Laos and Cambodia as untrustworthy and as serious security threats. But there is evidence that they consciously exaggerated and sometimes even tried to perpetuate these threats to

82 Kukrit's coalition Cabinet included members of parties which were successors to the formerly dominant United Thai People's Party (UTPP) of Thanom and Praphat. Within the Cabinet, the posts most closely concerned with relations between Thailand and Indochina were held by two right-wing retired senior army officers and former UTPP members: Major General Chatchai Choonhavan (Foreign Minister) and his brother-in-law and politically ally, Major General Pramarn Adireksan (Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister). Pramarn was associated with the extreme right-wing Navapol movement, which opposed closer relations with Indochina as part of its overall anti-communist line. It seems likely that Pramarn's support for Kukrit's foreign policy did not extend far beyond paying it lip-service: according to one senior Foreign Ministry official, he was the "personification" of the military's extremely conservative, anti-communist foreign policy line. Chatchai, however, seemed to grasp intuitively the need for major revisions to Thai foreign policy, despite his political affiliations. See Sarasin Viraphol, Directions in Thai Foreign Policy (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Occasional Paper No. 40, May 1976), pp. 50-52; Robert F. Zimmerman, "Thailand 1975: Transition to Constitutional Democracy Continues", Asian Survey, Vol. 16, No. 2 (February 1976), p. 160; Norman Peagam, FEER, 23 January 1976, p. 14; 27 February 1976, p. 21; 19 March 1976, p. 21; 2 April 1976, p. 12 and 11 June 1976, p. 22; Richard Nations, FEER, 27 August 1976, p. 9.
serve their own interests. In particular, the evocation of an external communist bogey was a useful instrument with which to undermine popular support for radical, liberal and moderate conservative political parties in Thailand during the democratic interlude before the October 1976 coup.

The hesitancy that the Thai right-wing imposed on the Kukrit and Seni administrations' foreign policies sometimes appeared to be aimed at sabotaging the whole process of detente with Indochina. It is arguable that pressure from, or obstruction by, Thai military leaders may have prevented Kukrit from distancing Thailand to a greater degree from a series of American actions in 1975 which jeopardized Bangkok's burgeoning policy of rapprochement with Indochina. After the "Mayaguez" incident had precipitated the Kukrit government into announcing its intention to review all existing bilateral agreements with Washington, Thai conservatives (especially the military) staunchly opposed Kukrit's pressure on Washington to withdraw its forces from Thailand -- that is, to remove the principal obstacle to better relations with Vietnam.

When the final withdrawal of US forces from Thailand in July 1976 made possible a visit by the Seni government's Foreign Minister,

83 The Thai press often assisted this exaggeration by its hostile and inaccurate coverage of Indochina. John Everingham, FEER, 23 July 1976, pp. 18-20.

84 These actions included the United States' use of its air bases in Thailand to resupply Lon Nol's rapidly crumbling army in early April 1975, as sanctuaries for the sequestration of aircraft flown from Vietnam by fleeing Thieu regime pilots, and as staging posts for operations into Cambodia during the "Mayaguez" crisis in May 1975.
Pichai Rattakul, to Vientiane and Hanoi, the extreme caution of the Thai military in relation to Indochina became particularly apparent. Just before Pichai left for Vientiane in August, 200 Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok were arrested on security grounds. Pichai's delegation was accompanied by senior military and intelligence officials, presumably to ensure that cooperation did not progress too far, too fast. The joint communiques agreed with Laos and Vietnam (including the establishment of diplomatic relations with Hanoi) had to be approved by a special cabinet meeting in Bangkok before Pichai was allowed to sign them. Even so, military leaders saw Pichai's attempts to improve relations with Laos and Vietnam as "contributing to an image of Thailand as fearful and weak".

The means at the disposal of the Thai right-wing to counter the "Vietnamese threat" were limited to attempts to discourage the Kukrit and Seni governments from loosening security links with Washington and from pursuing closer relations with Hanoi, while simultaneously

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85 See, for example, Thanat Khoman, "The Consequences for Southeast Asia of Events in Indochina" (Paper delivered at the Conference on "Asian Business in 1976", Hong Kong, 21-23 October 1975), p. 85. The military's efforts to thwart government policy over the US military withdrawal included direct negotiations between the Supreme Command and the US Embassy, according to one senior Foreign Ministry official. (See Viraphol, p. 32.) As the 20 March 1976 deadline for the withdrawal approached the government reportedly feared a military coup, or at least a violent clash between pro-government demonstrators and military-backed counter-demonstrators. Norman Peagam, FEER, 26 March 1976, pp. 10-11.

86 Such arrests were to become a customary signal of military disapproval when the Foreign Ministry made approaches to Hanoi. Nayan Chanda, FEER, 13 May 1977, p. 24.

encouraging improvements to Thailand's military capability. But Thailand's geographical contiguity with Cambodia and Laos provided tangible opportunities to continue to struggle for influence in these former buffer states, using political, economic and indirect military means. Although some of the disruption of Thailand's eastern borders was provoked by local, middle-level Thai officers and officials involved in smuggling who wished to perpetuate the unsettled conditions in which such activity thrived, this was only one aspect of a broader pattern of cross-border interference from Thailand. Other aspects, such as the links between Bangkok's Internal Security Operations Command and the Cambodian and Laotian anti-communist resistance groups were almost certainly directed, rather than merely tolerated, by the highest military echelons.

The Thai military's machinations on the border with Cambodia conflicted directly with the civilian government's interest in detente with Phnom Penh as a means not only of assuring frontier security and restoring valuable cross-border trade, but possibly also as the basis for re-establishing Cambodia as a buffer against Vietnam. The

89 See sections on "Vietnam, Laos and the Communist Party of Thailand" and "The Khmer Rouge and the CPT, 1975-78" in Chapter 6, pp. 200-1 and 213-14 above.
90 With encouragement from Beijing, Thailand and Cambodia resumed diplomatic relations in November 1975 when Ieng Sary (Cambodia Deputy Premier for Foreign Affairs) visited Bangkok.
armed forces' leadership was apparently as "irked" by Pichai's conciliatory visit to Phnom Penh in June 1976 (when the exchange of ambassadors was agreed) as they were by his later visits to Vientiane and Hanoi.92

The Thai military saw the collapse of non-Pathet Lao elements in the Laotian coalition government in May 1975 as a greater security threat than the Khmer Rouge takeover, owing to the close ethnic and linguistic links between the inhabitants of northeastern Thailand and Laos. Whereas until the second half of 1976 there was no evidence of Khmer Rouge support for the CPT, the Pathet Lao's links with the Thai communists were well-established by 1975.93 Attempts to interfere across the border in reaction to the new situation inside Laos had a considerably more damaging effect on Bangkok's overall relationship with Vientiane (and indirectly Hanoi) in 1975-76 than similar meddling had on relations with Phnom Penh. The sponsorship of Laotian rebels and other provocations led to direct armed clashes between Thai and Pathet Lao forces, culminating in the closure of the border by Bangkok in November 1975.94

The border closure was intended to inflict economic pain on Laos95 to demonstrate Bangkok's (or at least the Thai military's)
grave view of the threats to Thai security arising from Laotian support for the CPT and the border clashes. But this policy (which was often repeated during the 1975-81 period) itself had effects which were potentially damaging to Thailand's interests, as it forced Laos into greater economic dependence on Vietnam and the Soviet Union, and may have contributed to the Pathet Lao's apparently abrupt decision in December 1975 to dissolve the Provisional Government of National Union, abolish the monarchy and create the Lao People's Democratic Republic.96 Moreover, Thailand lost the more tangible benefits of Laotian economic dependence, including revenue from high transport charges imposed on Laotian goods.

There was no significant improvement in Thai-Lao relations until August 1976, when Pichai's visit to Vientiane was made possible by the determination of the Seni government to implement its detente policy97 and a new willingness by the Laotian leadership to negotiate with Bangkok as a result of the final withdrawal of US forces from Thailand, Hanoi's newly positive outlook on regional relations and Vientiane's wish to restore economic links with Thailand.98 Despite


97 Although the right-wing's evocation of the Indochinese communist threat contributed to the virtual eradication of leftist parliamentary opposition in Thailand's April 1976 elections, Seni's new four party coalition controlled 206 of the 279 seats in the House of Representatives and thus possessed a clearer mandate than the preceding Kukrit administration. Harvey Stockwin, FEER, 20 August 1976, p. 11.

the evident wish of the Thai right-wing to prevent a reconciliation, agreement was reached on the re-opening of river crossings and measures to prevent further border clashes. For a few weeks before the 6 October coup, it appeared that the view that Thailand's interests were best served by a cooperative relationship with Laos was prevailing over that which saw continued confrontation in response to a perceived (but consciously exaggerated) threat from across the Mekong as the correct course.

The burgeoning success of the Seni administration in ameliorating relations with Indochina was an important factor contributing to the eventual overthrow of democratic rule by the October 1976 military coup. Many military and civilian ultra-conservatives may have genuinely felt that national security was threatened by what they saw as Seni's weakness, but they also probably had ulterior motives for wanting continued confrontation with Indochina. In particular, such a policy would help to justify both increases in the military budget and an important political role for the armed forces.

The declaratory policy of the regime led by Thanin Kraivichien, installed by the military after the coup, promised an effort to restore a closer security relationship with Washington and to strengthen cooperation with Thailand's ASEAN partners in order to forestall what the new administration portrayed as Indochinese communist expansionism -- in other words, to reverse the recent


100 See section on "Thai Views of the CPT: Links with Vietnam and Laos" in Chapter 6, pp. 204-5 above.
tentative progress towards non-alignment and rapprochement with Indochina. In practice, Thanin's relations with Vietnam were reduced to little more than a propaganda contest, the security situation on the Laotian and Cambodian borders deteriorated in a vortex of reciprocal provocation, the regime's hardline domestic and international policies were viewed with dismay in Washington after the election of the liberal Carter administration, and Thanin's attitudes towards the communist world conflicted with those of the other ASEAN members. The main benefit was that the creation of an image of a persistent "communist threat" helped to rally "an exhausted and disaffected Thai population" and to undermine domestic opposition.

Ironically, Thanin pursued his new policies at home and abroad too vigorously for the liking of some of the military leaders who had installed him. Fearing Bangkok's isolation both in the region and the wider world (and especially from the West and Japan), to the ultimate detriment of Thai security, General Kriangsak Chomanan (Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and Secretary-General of the presiding military junta, the National Administrative Reform Council [NARC]) attempted to moderate Thanin's Cold War style foreign policy. Kriangsak recognized that neither the United States (particularly under the Europe-oriented Carter administration) nor ASEAN (with its vague notions of "regional resilience") could be expected to provide

101 According to Thanin, it was time to "stop doing things in accordance with ways and means planned and dictated by the communists". New Straits Times, 15 October 1976.
Thailand with reliable and comprehensive security guarantees. It was thus necessary for Thailand to continue to bear the main burden of managing its own security concerns, particularly by maintaining a dialogue with the Indochinese states.

Beneath the surface of Thanin's bellicose, anti-communist foreign policy, Kriangsak worked with Upadit Pachariangkul (the diplomat appointed as Foreign Minister by the NARC) to pave the way for a renewal of detente with Indochina. In the face of opposition from extreme right-wing elements the Foreign Ministry opened new links with Vietnam and Laos by reviving the Mekong Committee. Bangkok announced that Thailand would back Vietnam's bid for UN membership and Kriangsak called for economic aid for Laos and Cambodia. Upadit met his Vietnamese and Cambodian opposite numbers at the United Nations. Kriangsak and Upadit effectively took control of Thai policy towards Indochina in the later stages of Thanin's rule.

The frustrations of Kriangsak and the NARC with Thanin's inflexibility culminated in a coup against the government in October

103 For example, Samak Sundaravej (the Interior Minister) ordered the arrest of Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok. Nayan Chanda, *FEER*, 13 May 1977, pp. 22-24.

104 Before 1975, the Mekong Committee had displayed the potential to act as a forum for the coordination of development strategies between the Indochinese states and Thailand. Thai, Vietnamese and Laotian delegations met as the Interim Mekong Committee in Vientiane in July 1977. Nayan Chanda, *FEER*, 26 August 1977, p. 46.


106 Interview with Upadit by Derek Davies, *FEER*, 9 December 1977, p. 22.
1977. The "Revolutionary Party" (as the NARC became) appointed Kriangsak Prime Minister, with Upadit as his Foreign Minister. The new regime emphasized that its aim was to use diplomacy rather than confrontation as a weapon against the security threats posed by the Indochinese (and Chinese) communists and saw improved relations within the region as important also for economic reasons, by regaining access to important traditional markets (especially Vietnam) for Thai exports and improving Thailand's image as a creditworthy recipient for development finance from the West and Japan.

Kriangsak's attitude that it was necessary to engage in constructive political and economic relations with the Indochinese states in order to ensure Thailand's security (in the broadest sense) was similar to that of the Kukrit and Seni administrations. But whereas the civilian governments' efforts had been compromised by opposition from the military and civilian extreme right-wing, Kriangsak was able to project his foreign policies from a secure basis of support in the armed forces. In effect, Kriangsak created a foreign policy consensus which had been lacking since regional developments in the early 1970s polarized opinion within the Thai

107 Upadit was the only member of the new Cabinet who had also served under Thanin.

108 See statement by Admiral Sangaad Chaloryu (Chairman of the Revolutionary Party), Bangkok Post, 22 October 1977.


elite. To be sure, many conservative senior officers opposed Kriangsak's "dovish" attitude towards Indochina, but he was supported by a coterie of generals in key posts, as well as the field commanders known as the "Young Turks". There was now a widespread appreciation in the military of the dangers of a policy of confrontation in the new regional environment, and the fact that Kriangsak -- one of their own -- was Prime Minister minimized and undercut criticism that the new government was engaged in appeasement or non-alignment.

While improving relations with Indochina, Kriangsak simultaneously ameliorated Bangkok's standing with the Carter administration by the implementation of relatively liberal domestic civil rights policies, facilitating an affirmation of US security guarantees to Thailand by Vice President Mondale when he visited Bangkok in May 1978. But Kriangsak acknowledged that it was unrealistic to expect the United States to reinvolve itself on a major scale in Thailand's security. Kriangsak viewed improved relations with China, however, as potentially useful not only in terms of helping to neutralize the CPT threat, but also as a balance to Vietnam should attempts to improve relations with Hanoi fail.

113 "Mondale Sows the Seeds", FEER, 19 May 1978, pp. 11-12.
115 Kriangsak visited Beijing in March 1978. Peter Weintraub, FEER, 14 April 1978, p. 11.
Singapore's Globalist Outlook

In the 1975-78 period relations with Indochina were by no means as important an issue for the Singaporean government as they were for the Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai administrations. Before the mid-1970s, the Singaporean leadership had placed relatively little emphasis on relations with either its ASEAN partners or war-torn Indochina, concentrating rather on developing the wider international links appropriate to a "Global City". The British and American military disengagement from Southeast Asia, the collapse of the non-communist Indochinese regimes and the global economic crisis after the 1973-74 Arab oil embargo forced a revision of Singapore's attitude towards ASEAN. Particularly after the events of April 1975, Singapore played a much more enthusiastic part in the organization in order to strengthen "regional resilience" as a means of countering the possibility of a more serious threat of insurgency to Singapore's neighbours. But in contrast to their counterparts in Indonesia (with their interest in fostering Vietnam's cooperation as a partner in maintaining regional order), Malaysia (who, under Tun Razak particularly, saw the Indochinese states' participation as vital for

116 According to Lee Kuan Yew: "All our major links have been with countries outside ASEAN. And they have been growing faster than links within ASEAN". Straits Times, 26 November 1975.

117 Indeed, Singapore's wish to accelerate economic cooperation in ASEAN was frustrated by the desire of other members (especially Indonesia) for a slower pace. See Morrison and Suhrke, p. 190.

118 See Lee Kuan Yew's Chinese New Year speech, Straits Times, 18 February 1977.
the implementation of ZOPFAN) and Thailand (with their complex, immediate security concerns involving the Indochinese states), the makers of Singapore's foreign policy lacked interest in constructing a broad, cooperative relationship with communist Indochina.

Whereas the other ASEAN states' relationships with Vietnam showed a gradual, if distinctly uneven, improvement through the 1975-78 period, the development of relations between Singapore and Hanoi was more tenuous. Diplomatic relations had been established as early as May 1973, but Hanoi and Singapore did not exchange ambassadors even after the communist victory in South Vietnam. The Singaporean view appeared to be that it was up to the Indochinese communists to improve their relationship with the ASEAN states rather than for each side to accommodate the other.119 Lee Kuan Yew saw possibilities for cooperation, but these were in the economic rather than the political sphere.120 But although Vietnam's trade with Singapore remained the most significant of its economic links with any ASEAN member in the late 1970s, it remained relatively small as a proportion of each country's total trade or compared to trade between Singapore and the Thieu regime before April 1975.121

The Singaporean leadership's strategic outlook remained

119 According to Rajaratnam (the Singaporean Foreign Minister), the ASEAN countries had a "head start" towards forming a strong region with which "the communist states may come to terms". Rodney Tasker, FEER, 11 March 1977, p. 14.

120 "Trade First for Lee", FEER, 30 January 1976, p. 11.

essentially globalist after 1975. Lee Kuan Yew and his government had always harboured serious reservations about the ZOPFAN concept, seeing Singapore's survival as best assured by the continuing balanced involvement (in military as well as political and economic senses) of major extra-regional powers in Southeast Asia\textsuperscript{122} coupled with strenuous efforts to increase national resilience in economic and military terms. With the communist victories in Indochina, Singapore's sense of vulnerability was aggravated. While inducing a more serious interest in cooperation within ASEAN, the new regional situation also intensified Lee Kuan Yew's enthusiasm for a continued American military presence in Southeast Asia to balance increasing Soviet naval deployment (and Chinese influence) in the region\textsuperscript{123} and Hanoi's nexus with Moscow. In the Singaporean view, maintaining both Singapore's and ASEAN's political, military and (especially) economic links with the industrialized West was far more conducive to security than any precipitate movement towards intra-regional cooperation with Indochina across the ideological divide.

Although the Singaporean leadership occasionally made encouraging and optimistic comments regarding relations between the two ideological halves of the region,\textsuperscript{124} political relations with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{122} See Dick Wilson, pp. 78-84. Rajaratnam's view was the Southeast Asia should make itself important to the big powers so they would feel protective towards the region.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} See, for example, Lee Kuan Yew's comments quoted by \textit{Straits Times}, 6 July 1977.
\end{itemize}
Indochina (and particularly Vietnam) remained cool and occasionally displayed flashes of the antipathy which was to be characteristic after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Singapore reacted more strongly than either Indonesia or Malaysia\textsuperscript{125} to the repudiation by Vietnam and Laos of Malaysia's attempts to gain the Colombo non-aligned summit's support for ZOPFAN. Despite Singapore's own well-known lack of enthusiasm for the neutralization proposal, Lee Kuan Yew lambasted Laos and Vietnam, implying that their "peace, independence and neutrality" proposal was aimed at the "overthrow by violence" of the ASEAN governments.\textsuperscript{126} A more serious, bilateral dispute arose in November 1977 when Singapore refused to repatriate four Vietnamese who had hijacked an aircraft to the island, temporarily checking the further development of economic relations.\textsuperscript{127} The Singaporean government's attitude appeared to be that a minimal political relationship with Hanoi -- through "regular contact" between Vietnamese and Singaporean diplomats in third countries\textsuperscript{128} --

\textsuperscript{125} These were the other non-aligned members of ASEAN.


\textsuperscript{127} The Vietnamese Import and Export Corporation office in Singapore "continued with its routine activities" and telephone and telex services between Singapore and Ho Chi Minh City (broken off in April 1975) were restored in December 1977. But the visit to Singapore of an important trade mission led by Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Trade Minister was cancelled by Hanoi. Hansard (Singapore), Vol. 37, No. 5 (31 January 1978), cols. 205-06; Singapore home service in English, 1130 gmt, 13 November 1977 (SWB FE/5669/A3/4, 17 November 1977). See also Michael Richardson, \textit{FEER}, 25 November 1977, and "A correspondent", \textit{FEER}, 9 December 1977, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{128} Hansard (Singapore), Vol. 37, No. 5 (31 January 1978), col. 206.
was sufficient, and that Vietnam's eagerness for trade links with Singapore was such that economic relations between the two states would not be disrupted in the medium to long term by the adoption of hardline positions as at Colombo and over the hijacking. So, unlike its ASEAN counterparts, Singapore was unwilling to adopt a conciliatory posture in relation to Hanoi.

The Philippines: Detente with Vietnam despite the American Military Presence

The Philippines' relationship with Vietnam in the 1975-77 period was remarkable for its warmth, given that not only had Manila been actively involved in the United States' recent war effort, but remained a close ally of Washington and provided the Americans with the bases for their remaining air and naval forces in Southeast Asia. The Philippines possessed neither an equivalent to the Indonesian and Malaysian administrations' grand regional visions (which required them to transcend Southeast Asia's ideological divide to evolve comprehensive and constructive relationships with communist Indochina) nor Thailand's interest in managing its pressing security concerns with its communist neighbours. So why was the Marcos regime so enthusiastic about establishing a cordial relationship with Vietnam after April 1975? Moreover, why was Hanoi willing to indulge in such a relationship when Manila maintained such close security links with Washington?

The speed with which Manila approached Hanoi after the fall of Saigon\textsuperscript{129} demonstrated the Marcos regime's desire to normalize

\textsuperscript{129} Harvey Stockwin, \textit{FEER}, 2 May 1975, p. 30; Rodney Tasker, \textit{FEER}, 24 June 1977, p. 18.
relations with Vietnam expeditiously once the communists were victorious, although diplomatic relations were not actually established until July 1976. But there is no evidence that Manila saw any important specific advantages in creating a modus vivendi with Hanoi. Geographical isolation and the orientation of the New People's Army and Moro National Liberation Front insurgents towards China and the Islamic world respectively effectively insulated the Philippines from any security concerns which might be ameliorated by improving links with Vietnam. Trade with Vietnam had not been significant even when the Thieu regime ruled the South, and the lack of complementarity between the Philippine and Vietnamese economies ruled out important economic relations in the near future.

Manila's attitude towards Vietnam was essentially just one aspect of a broader effort to diversify the Philippines' international connections in response to a changed regional and domestic political environment in the early and mid-1970s. An upsurge in Philippine nationalism coincided with America's military withdrawal from Vietnam and Thailand, Washington's detente with Beijing and Japan's increasing economic role in Southeast Asia: all suggested a need for a

130 Although a joint communiqué was released in Hanoi in August 1975 establishing diplomatic relations, this was quickly rescinded by Manila. The Philippine diplomat involved in the negotiations with Hanoi appeared to have proceeded beyond the bounds of his assignment. Rodney Tasker, FEER, 24 June 1977, p. 18.

131 Philippine exports to Vietnam (South and North) were worth US$2.2m in 1974, US$0.6m in Vietnam and US$0.1m in 1976. Imports from Vietnam were valued at US$0.3m, US$1.4m and US$0.4m in the same years. Australian Foreign Affairs Record, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 1978), p. 22.
re-orientation of Philippine foreign policy away from the traditionally almost total political, economic and military dependence on the United States. As well as taking a more active role in ASEAN, the regime attempted, without great success, to use its openings to communist countries\textsuperscript{132} to emphasize its newly more active and "non-aligned" foreign policy.\textsuperscript{133} Improved relations with the socialist camp -- including Vietnam -- were also potentially useful as levers in negotiation with the United States over the future of its military bases in the Philippines. But it is extremely doubtful that the Marcos regime ever saw the expulsion of the US military presence as a real option, and the anticipation of a continuing American security "umbrella" probably increased Manila's confidence in dealing with Hanoi after 1975.\textsuperscript{134}

Although the Vietnamese communists made rhetorical attacks on Manila's "neo-colonial" relationship with Washington and the continuing presence of US bases in the Philippines,\textsuperscript{135} Hanoi did not allow this issue to obstruct the normalization of relations with the Philippines as it did in the case of Thailand. Indeed, it sometimes seemed in the 1975-77 period that the Vietnamese had singled out the Philippines from amongst the ASEAN states for special treatment. In January 1977, Manila was allowed to send the first trade delegation

\textsuperscript{132} Bernadino Ronquillo, FEER, 30 May 1975, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{133} The Philippines was given only "guest" status at the Colombo non-aligned summit in 1976.

\textsuperscript{134} "Intelligence", FEER, 25 July 1975, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{135} Morrison and Suhrke, p. 252.
from an ASEAN country to communist Vietnam and the following April an official mission from Manila was invited to investigate the plight of Philippine nationals stranded in the South after April 1975.136

In contrast to Thailand, the Philippines had not had a historically antagonistic relationship with Vietnam, and it is evident that Hanoi did not feel that it had "scores to settle" with Manila after 1975. Philippine involvement in the Vietnam War had been limited in comparison to Thailand's in terms both of the clearly token nature of Manila's military commitment in South Vietnam and the fact that the United States was not allowed to use its Clark Field air base for bombing Indochina. Hanoi recognized that the security relationship between Washington and Manila was rooted in the Philippines' colonial past, and was not directed particularly against Vietnam.137 Most importantly, the Vietnamese appeared to be impressed by the Marcos regime's apparently tough stand in asserting Philippine sovereignty in renegotiating the base agreements with Washington.138 Hanoi may have believed that it could use its closer relations with Manila to encourage Philippine nationalism and a further movement away from the alliance with the United States, and perhaps the eventual eviction of the American military presence.


137 This was certainly the view of Phan Hien (Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister), according to Nayan Chanda, FEER, 30 July 1976, p. 12. See also Rodney Tasker, FEER, 24 June 1977, p. 18.

Responses to the Emerging Conflict in Indochina, 1977-78

By the end of 1977, the ASEAN states had certainly not made uniformly good progress towards establishing cooperative working relationships with the Indochinese states. This was partly due to a lack of consensus in either the ASEAN grouping or within individual ASEAN states (particularly Thailand before the advent of the Kriangsak administration) that the Indochinese states were trustworthy and reliable partners. The failure to construct a harmonious relationship across Southeast Asia's ideological divide was also due to caution, suspicion and hostility on the Indochinese side. But the intensifying conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia, supported by the Soviet Union and China respectively, had by 1978 profoundly affected the attitudes of the Indochinese states and their big power allies, apparently removing much of the previous ambivalence in their attitudes towards ASEAN and its members. At least on a declaratory level, Vietnam appeared not to demand such a major role in determining the ground rules for relations with ASEAN and its members. Although this led to some limited improvements in relations between particular ASEAN and Indochinese states, it also reinforced the caution of the former in dealing with the latter: the ASEAN governments saw hazards as well as opportunities in the clash of communist interests in Indochina.

Indonesia

In the words of one Indonesian observer, "the deterioration of Vietnam's relations with her giant neighbour [China] created the
preconditions for an improvement of Indonesian-Vietnamese relations". The visit by Nguyen Duy Trinh to Jakarta in January 1978 opened a new phase in the relationship, involving cooperation in specific spheres such as negotiation over the delineation of continental shelf boundaries. Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong's visit in September provided further evidence of a new warmth in relations, with both sides pledging to respect each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political systems, and not to use force or the threat of force in their bilateral relations. Dong did not endorse ZOPFAN as such, but both sides stressed that this was due to differences more in terminology than in fundamental attitude. Probably most importantly for the Suharto regime, Dong said that he now understood better Jakarta's position on East Timor. Overall, it appeared that Jakarta's wish to involve Vietnam in maintaining regional order was gradually being realized, although the continuing failure of the continental shelf negotiations slightly undermined Jakarta's faith in Hanoi's goodwill.

139 Lie Tek Tjeng, "Vietnamese Nationalism...", pp. 6-7.
140 Trinh was Vietnam's Vice-Premier with responsibility for foreign affairs.
142 David Jenkins, FEER, 6 October 1978, p. 19.
143 Leifer, Indonesia's Foreign Policy, p. 152.
At the same time that the widening Sino-Vietnamese rift prompted Hanoi to move towards detente with the ASEAN countries, China's behaviour reaffirmed the Indonesian military's deep-seated security concern with China and weakened the hand of those policy-makers (particularly in the Foreign Ministry) who wished to normalize relations with Beijing. Of particular concern to the military were China's protective attitudes towards the ethnic Chinese expelled by Vietnam, the Sino-Japanese Treaty of September 1978 (which was seen as a threat to Indonesia's crucial economic relationship with Japan) and the continuing Chinese rhetorical support for regional communist parties.

By late 1978, Jakarta's position on the intensifying Indochina conflict had developed into barely disguised support for Vietnam. As Deng Xiaoping began a tour of ASEAN capitals (excluding Jakarta to which he had not been invited) in November 1978, Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (who had succeeded Malik as Foreign Minister) visited Hanoi. The exact timing of the visit may not have been significant, and the only concrete result was a trade agreement, but on his return Mochtar emphasized the "special flavour" in the Indonesian-Vietnamese relationship. Mochtar claimed that China's withdrawal of aid and its "belligerent attitude" had forced the recent Soviet-Vietnamese treaty on Hanoi, but that Vietnam was nevertheless not a Soviet "proxy".


146 Ibid., p. 33; David Jenkins, FEER, 24 November 1978, p. 33.
While it enabled the Suharto regime to establish a modus vivendi with Hanoi, Indonesian policy-makers were concerned that the new Indochinese conflict might spill over into the ASEAN region. Already in 1978 the instability in Indochina was generating a large-scale refugee outflow, which was directly affecting Indonesia. A Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia would have a serious impact on Thai security, and might cause a polarization within the region between Indochina and ASEAN and impel a closer relationship between China and ASEAN -- which Indonesia was anxious to avoid. The dispute was increasingly involving China and the USSR in regional affairs, to the detriment of Indonesia's cardinal ambition that Southeast Asian problems should be managed by regional states themselves. If the Indochinese conflict was to remain of net benefit to Jakarta, it was important that there should be no precipitate shift in the sub-regional balance of power in Vietnam's favour.

While basically in sympathy with Vietnam and apprehensive of Chinese ambitions in Southeast Asia, the Suharto regime's unwillingness to lend full support to Hanoi was reflected in its readiness to establish links with China's ally, Democratic Kampuchea. Before 1978, the Khmer Rouge's attitude towards Jakarta had generally been one of indifference punctuated by occasional hostile outbursts,

147 David Jenkins, FEER, 24 November 1978, p. 33.

particularly over East Timor. Relations were not normalized until August 1978, as Phnom Penh attempted to broaden its diplomatic connections in response to its conflict with Vietnam. Ieng Sary visited Jakarta in October 1978, but the Indonesian regime was careful not to emphasize publicly its interests in Cambodia's continuing independence of Vietnam, for fear of jeopardizing the relationship with Hanoi. Whereas some elements of the Indonesian administration (probably including senior Foreign Ministry officials) thought that the reopening of Indonesia's embassy in Phnom Penh would be a useful contribution to stabilizing the regional balance, others (almost certainly the more cautious military leaders) saw "no need" for Indonesia to take this step. The rationale behind this attitude may have been that if Vietnam invaded Cambodia (as seemed highly likely by late 1978), the presence of an Indonesian mission in Phnom Penh would make it more difficult to avoid siding with China in condemning Hanoi's "hegemony" in Indochina.

**Malaysia**

In a speech in October 1977, Malaysian Prime Minister Hussein Onn emphasized the opportunities provided for the ASEAN countries by the

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150 Ieng Sary was Democratic Kampuchea's Deputy Prime Minister responsible for foreign affairs.


152 Ibid., loc. cit.
Indochinese schism, Kuala Lumpur exploited the new circumstances to foster its relations with both Cambodia and Vietnam. The Malaysian government had a particular interest in trying to reduce Cambodia's pressure on its border with Thailand, as this was potentially indirectly detrimental to Malaysian security. Indeed, Kuala Lumpur may have played an intermediary role between its ASEAN partners and Phnom Penh. But there was considerably more substance in Malaysia's dialogue with Hanoi.

According to the joint communique agreed when the Vietnamese Foreign Minister (Trinh) visited Kuala Lumpur in January 1978, the situation in Southeast Asia had undergone deep changes favourable to the development of mutually beneficial relations among countries in the region thereby contributing to the promotion of peace, independence, freedom and neutrality in Southeast Asia.

The Malaysians considered that the inclusion of the word "freedom" showed that the Vietnamese had been persuaded to move a step in the direction of ZOPFAN. This apparent change of policy on ZOPFAN may

155 Although Kuala Lumpur's ambassador in Beijing was accredited to Phnom Penh in May 1978, Malaysia did not open a diplomatic mission in Cambodia, and trade between the two countries remained insubstantial. Rodney Tasker, FEER, 9 June 1978, p. 31.
have reflected Hanoi's greater need to ensure the support or at least neutrality of the ASEAN states as the rift with China and Cambodia widened. Although Vietnam could expect to benefit to a limited degree from the sympathies of the basically anti-Chinese Malay leadership, Beijing had some advantages in that it had expressed support for the ZOPFAN proposal since 1973, for ASEAN since the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976 and for the Malaysian-Indonesian declaration of the Malacca Straits as national waters in 1970. When Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Minister, Phan Hien, visited Kuala Lumpur again in July 1977 he took this new flexibility a stage further, claiming that Hanoi's previous objections to ZOPFAN, which he asserted were only minor and unimportant differences of interpretation, had been misunderstood.\textsuperscript{158}

Malaysia's detente with Hanoi reached its apogee in October 1978 with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong's visit to Kuala Lumpur. Dong not only reiterated a willingness to work towards making Southeast Asia "an area of peace, independence, freedom and neutrality",\textsuperscript{159} but also effectively disclaimed Vietnam's links with the CPM.\textsuperscript{160} This gesture contrasted with Chinese Vice-Premier Deng's refusal to disavow moral support for the Malaysian communists when he visited Kuala Lumpur the following month.\textsuperscript{161}


Although Malaysia's relations with Hanoi were the closest of any ASEAN state during 1978, Onn's government was careful to remain neutral as Vietnam's disputes with China and Cambodia deepened. Although Beijing's ambivalent attitude towards the region remained the major external security concern, the Malaysian administration harboured serious doubts over Vietnam's reliability as a regional partner. Ghazali Shafie (the Home Affairs Minister) questioned the value of Dong's assurances concerning the cessation of Vietnamese support for the CPM. There was also growing concern over the large-scale exodus of Vietnamese refugees, many of whom landed on the Malaysian coast. More seriously, a Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia promised to destroy the balance of power on which Kuala Lumpur's detente policies were predicated: would Hanoi still feel a need to make concessions to Malaysia and its ASEAN partners once its power preponderated in Indochina? Vietnamese domination of Indochina might also increase the pressure on Thailand's borders to the detriment of Malaysian security.

Thailand

Kriangsak and his Foreign Minsiter, Upadit, were able to take advantage of the conflicting nationalist forces underlying communism

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164 See section on "The Socioeconomic Impact of the Refugees" in Chapter 7, pp. 295-300 above.
in the region in a way that would probably have been impossible under Thanin's approach based on blanket distrust of all communists.

Thailand's physical position and relative economic strength made it vital to China and Cambodia as a geopolitical counterweight to Vietnam, as well as an important target for Hanoi's efforts to foster regional links to help it break out of what it perceived as a Chinese attempt at encirclement. In addition to exploiting these factors to bring relative peace to Thailand's borders with Laos and Cambodia, Kriangsak was able to exact assurances from both the Vietnamese and the Chinese that they would downgrade their links with the CPT.165

However, Kriangsak was aware that the regional situation held grave dangers for Thailand. Although the immediate effect of the crisis was to move the focus of conflict away from Thailand's borders, the dispute had the potential to embroil Thailand and the other ASEAN states in the wider Sino-Soviet rivalry: Kriangsak stressed the importance of coexistence between regional socialist states themselves as well as between socialist and non-socialist states in Southeast Asia.166 Nevertheless, the Thai preference was certainly for a local balance of power within Indochina rather than a unified, Vietnamese-dominated bloc.

Kriangsak tried to maintain a balance between relations with the Hanoi-Vientiane and Beijing-Phnom Penh axes until (and to a limited degree even after) the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December

165 Such assurances were given during the visits to Bangkok by Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong in September 1978 and Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping in November 1978.

1978. This reflected not only a wish to help stabilize the precarious regional balance, but also a continuing concern with threats to Thai security from both sides of the communist schism.

The Thais were still suspicious of Beijing's underlying attitude, although superficially China seemed less of a threat than at any time since 1949: when he visited Bangkok in November 1978, Deng stressed the importance of "state-to-state" relations at the expense of "party-to-party" links. 167 But there was disquiet within the Thai military over Beijing's apparent failure to use its influence with the Khmer Rouge and the CPT to ameliorate the situation on the Thai-Cambodian border. 168 Beijing's protective policies towards the ethnic Chinese expelled by Vietnam reawakened Bangkok's concern over China's attitude towards Thailand's own ethnic Chinese community. Nevertheless, the Thai regime did not concur with Vietnamese charges that China intended to use its links with regional communist parties and ethnic Chinese minorities, and its economic power, to exert political dominance over Southeast Asia.

Similarly, the Kriangsak administration was not convinced by Deng's charge that Vietnam was an "Asian Cuba", irretrievably enmeshed in a multi-faceted alliance with the USSR. 169 But, by late 1978, Bangkok did view Vietnam and its Soviet alliance as a more serious threat to Thai security than China or Cambodia. Although Kriangsak

believed that Vietnam's entry into COMECON (in June 1978) and a 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow (in November 1978) were measures necessitated by Hanoi's wish to break out of the political and economic isolation imposed by deteriorating relations with the USA and China, these were still unwelcome developments as they increased Moscow's stake (potentially including a military dimension) in Indochina and possibly foreshadowed a decisive military gambit against Cambodia. Thailand's relationship with Democratic Kampuchea was not entirely comfortable, but a Vietnamese-controlled Cambodia could pose a much more serious threat to Thai security. The collapse of the Khmer Rouge would not only cancel Cambodia's traditional role as a buffer state between Thailand and Vietnam, but might also provide Kriangsak's extreme right-wing domestic critics with a chance to attack the administration's mildly reformist programme at home as well as its foreign policy.170

By the time of Deng's visit in November 1978, Thailand's diplomatic balancing act looked precarious: this was highlighted by Deng's assertion that if Cambodia was overrun by the Vietnamese (as he thought likely) then Thailand and the other ASEAN states would be expected to play "an important role in solving the problem".171 But although it was clear that neutrality might be increasingly difficult, Kriangsak persisted in demonstrating willingness to cooperate with either side of the communist schism in order to enhance Thai security.

His visit to Vientiane in January 1979 resulted in an agreement renouncing subversive acts across the Thai-Cambodian border; remarkably (in the light of later Thai policy) this agreement was signed as Laotian forces were assisting the Vietnamese army to consolidate its hold on Cambodia.

Singapore

Singapore's basic lack of interest in constructing harmonious relationships with the Indochinese states was not altered by the intensifying dispute in Indochina during 1978. In general, the Singaporean leadership saw -- or professed to see -- the new Indochinese conflict as a source of danger rather than opportunity for the ASEAN states. In September 1978, Lee Kuan Yew saw the situation as possibly beneficial because it might postpone the "threat" to Singapore and the region,²⁷² but by December he was clearly concerned that the conflict might escalate dangerously and expressed hope that "sanity will prevail".²⁷³

The Singaporean leadership's principal worry was that the Vietnamese-Cambodian conflict was being used by the Soviet Union and China to wage a proxy war which might expand to involve Thailand and the rest of ASEAN.²⁷⁴ But there was more concern over Vietnam's role

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²⁷² Straits Times, 23 September 1978.
²⁷⁴ Rodney Tasker, FEER, 9 June 1978, p. 31.
in bringing greater Soviet influence into Southeast Asia than over China's efforts to defend its regional foothold in Cambodia. Singapore's trade relations with Hanoi were strengthened in 1978, but politically and diplomatically the city state kept its distance from Vietnam. Hanoi's wish to open a consulate in Singapore was thwarted. Although Vietnamese Vice Foreign Minister Phan Hien and Prime Minister Dong were allowed to visit (in July and October respectively), the Singaporean attitude to these visitors was correct but unaccommodating. Indeed, Dong was probably invited to Singapore to maintain the appearance of ASEAN unity, rather than with the intention of improving bilateral relations. It was clear from Rajaratnam's comments at the time that the Singaporean regime was extremely suspicious of Vietnamese and Soviet intentions towards the region.

Superficially, the Singaporeans were seriously concerned about China's role in the Indochina conflict. The significance of Deng's visit in November was played down and he apparently left Singapore with no more than an assurance that the republic would not take sides in the dispute. Singaporean officials hinted that they still saw China as a long-term threat. But this apparent indifference may have represented less the government's true attitude than an attempt to allay Indonesian and Malaysian fears regarding Singapore's empathy

175 Straits Times, 10 February 1978.
with the ancestral homeland of most of its population. In fact, Singapore seemed to be considerably more comfortable hosting Deng than Dong, particularly as the Chinese Vice-Premier emphasized Beijing's lack of interest in subverting the loyalties of Singaporean Chinese.

The Philippines

Manila's relations with Hanoi prospered as the Vietnamese sought to sustain the nexus in the face of competition from China for the Philippines' support. When Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh visited Manila in January 1978, he agreed that Vietnam and the Philippines would settle any future mutual differences in a "spirit of conciliation and friendship". This agreement may have reassured the Marcos regime that Hanoi would not take precipitate military action to further its claim to the disputed Spratly islands. But as the Indochinese dispute intensified and Hanoi strengthened its relations with Moscow, Manila became more wary of Hanoi's detente policies. Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo was particularly cynical regarding Vietnam's volte-face on recognizing ASEAN and supporting ZOPFAN. Nevertheless, Pham Van Dong's visit to Manila in September brought an announcement that the two countries would not support

179 Asia Yearbook 1979, p. 290.
180 Joint agreement signed by Trinh and Marcos, Hong Kong Agence France Presse in English, 1048 gmt, 7 January 1978 (FBIS-APA-78-5, 9 January 1978).
181 Asia Yearbook 1979, p. 283.
subversion against each other and a more specific agreement that they
would settle peacefully their dispute over the Spratlys. 182

The Marcos regime did not allow its comfortable relationship with
Vietnam to impede the growth of links with Beijing and Phnom Penh, as
the Chinese and Cambodian governments attempted to neutralize Hanoi's
diplomatic offensive in the ASEAN region. But although Vice-Premier
Li Hsien-Nien -- then the highest-ranking Chinese leader to have
visited an ASEAN country -- reiterated support for ASEAN and "the just
struggle of Southeast Asian countries of safeguard their
independence", 183 Manila remained chary of China. Concern centred on
Beijing's continuing links with the New People's Army and possibly
also on the potential for Chinese interference to protect the
interests of ethnic Chinese in the Philippines. 184 Nevertheless,
despite its distrust of China the Marcos regime was willing to agree
with visiting Cambodian Deputy Premier Ieng Sary that an "independent
Cambodia" contributed to regional peace. 185 Like its ASEAN partners,
the Philippine government seemed to recognize the paradox that while
the Indochinese conflict helped it to reduce the tension in its own
relationships with the Indochinese states and China, this advantage
might evaporate if Vietnam overturned the current balance of power in
Indochina.

182 Straits Times, 22 September 1978.
183 Hong Kong Agence France Presse in English, 1526 gmt, 12 March
184 van der Kroef, Communism in Southeast Asia, pp. 228-29.
185 Joint communiqué signed by Ieng Sary and Marcos, Hong Kong Agence
France Presse in English, 0425 gmt, 20 October 1978 (FBIS-APA-78-
204, 20 October 1978).
Conclusion: A Fragile Unity

In the 1975-78 period, the ASEAN governments attempted to enhance their security in the new regional environment created by the Indochinese communist victories by individually and jointly striving to strengthen their own political, economic and social systems while simultaneously trying to construct cooperative relationships with the Indochinese states. But their reliance on narrow elitist power bases rendered the ruling regimes of the three largest ASEAN countries incapable of making the fundamental socioeconomic and political reforms necessary to ensure that impressively rapid economic growth was effectively translated into "national resilience". Moreover, the divergent national interests of ASEAN's members, as well as the weaknesses of individual ASEAN states, slowed down progress towards "regional resilience". Although some progress was made towards reducing the tension which characterized relations between the ASEAN and Indochinese states after the communist victories, Hanoi was unwilling to become involved in a new regional order on ASEAN's terms (the Vietnamese preferring to conduct their relations with the economically more powerful non-communist states on a strictly bilateral basis). Moreover, certain elements in the ASEAN states, particularly the Thai right-wing and the Singaporean government, remained sceptical regarding the likely benefits of any profound movement towards intra-regional cooperation with Indochina.

Hanoi's deepening conflict with Cambodia and China had a significant impact on relations between communist and non-communist regional states by promoting intense competition between the Hanoi-
Moscow and Phnom Penh-Beijing axes for the ASEAN states' favour in 1978. In particular, Hanoi appeared to recognize the importance of ASEAN as an organization and ZOPFAN as a long-term objective for the Association's members. But although the ASEAN states were able to take advantage of this situation to improve their relations with all the parties to the new Indochina conflict, this new cordiality was built on an extremely delicate balance of power in Indochina.

The ASEAN states' responses to the blandishments of the communist states involved in the new Indochinese conflict showed striking similarities during 1978. All were careful not to be drawn into the dispute on one side or the other, and the five countries displayed an impressive ability to coordinate their responses, exemplified by their refusals to enter into Treaties of Peace and Friendship with Vietnam and their determination to move Hanoi's regional Peace, Independence and Neutrality proposal closer to ASEAN's own ZOPFAN concept. But there were nuances in the individual ASEAN states' attitudes, reflecting the divergent strategic perspectives of the five governments. Whereas the concern of Malaysia, Indonesia and to a lesser extent the Philippines with China as a serious, though long-term security threat inclined them to empathize (if not sympathize) with Hanoi, Thailand (mainly because of the Vietnamese threat to Cambodian independence), and Singapore (because of intensifying Soviet-Vietnamese relations) tended more towards the Chinese view of Vietnam as a danger to regional security. As long as a balance of power existed within Indochina, this intra-ASEAN

divergence of outlook did not threaten the diplomatic cohesion of the Association. But these differences foreshadowed the deeper divisions which emerged within ASEAN, at times straining its unity, after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978 demolished the Indochinese balance.
The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978 profoundly affected the ASEAN states' attitudes and policies towards Indochina. Hanoi's intervention destroyed the inter-communist balance of power and established Vietnamese preponderance in Indochina, cancelled Cambodia's historical role as a buffer state between Thailand and Vietnam, and appeared to confirm long-established Thai views about Vietnamese "expansionism". But not only Bangkok was affronted by and concerned over the invasion: the Vietnamese action was contrary to the vision of regional order supported by all the ASEAN states in their 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and undermined the basis of the non-communist countries' detente with the Indochinese countries in 1977-78. The response of the ASEAN states to the invasion and the subsequent installation of the pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh reflected a much greater concern with the external threat to their security posed by Vietnam, compared to the 1975-78 phase when their overriding security concern was with internal security, particularly in the light of the anticipated socioeconomic and political challenge of victorious Indochinese communism.

The crux of the ASEAN states' response to the new situation was an attempt to prevent Vietnam from consolidating its hold on Cambodia. In the months and years after the invasion, the ASEAN states displayed an impressive degree of unity in the adoption of a series of
diplomatic and political measures aimed at compelling Hanoi to withdraw its forces from Cambodia and at the ouster of the Heng Samrin administration. But beneath the superficial cohesion of ASEAN the divergent security perspectives of the individual members states persisted, as did differences of opinion within the policy-making establishments of each country.

The Evolution of Thai Policy on Cambodia

For geographical reasons, the invasion was of much greater concern to the Thai regime, whose immediate strategic environment was violated, than to its more removed ASEAN partners. The invasion posed a serious dilemma for the Kriangsak government, which had invested a great deal of political capital in its attempts to ameliorate relations with Vietnam, China, Laos and Cambodia over the previous fifteen months. If Thailand accepted Vietnamese domination of Cambodia it would run the risk that Vietnam might try to exert influence over Thailand (like the Soviet Union over Finland) or redevelop its links with the CPT once it had consolidated its position throughout Indochina. Meanwhile, there was the danger that Vietnamese forces might violate Thailand's territorial integrity in pursuit of Khmer Rouge remnants or to punish Bangkok for the support it gave the resistance. But Thailand did not itself possess military capability or diplomatic leverage sufficient to expel the Vietnamese forces and remove the Heng Samrin regime. Although a full-scale invasion of Thailand was hardly likely, Thailand's armed forces might be hard pressed to cope with the more likely smaller scale Vietnamese
incursions. A military setback for the Thai armed forces in such circumstances might imperil the domestic political credibility of the military-led Bangkok regime. Moreover, the Kriangsak administration's most important security concern was the CPT insurgency (and the socioeconomic problems on which it thrived) and it did not wish to divert scarce government resources away from development and counter-insurgency.

Bangkok's relationships with its ASEAN partners and Washington were extremely useful in helping to secure the diplomatic opposition of Western and non-aligned countries to Vietnamese hegemony over Cambodia. But only China and the remnants of the ousted Democratic Kampuchea regime -- the Khmer Rouge -- were willing and able to exert physical pressure on Vietnam and the new Cambodian regime. The bitterness of the Khmer Rouge's dispute with Hanoi and the Vietnamese-supported Heng Samrin regime promised determined resistance to the new Cambodian status quo, and China's willingness to use military force against Vietnam was demonstrated by its limited invasion of that country in February-March 1979. Even after the withdrawal of Chinese troops from northern Vietnam in 1979, continuing Chinese military pressure on the Sino-Vietnamese border subsequently tied down about 200,000 Vietnamese troops, thus reducing the forces available to Hanoi for deployment in Cambodia.

Bangkok's relationship with China and the Khmer Rouge after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia may not, however, be explained simply by the Thai government's wish to insure itself against Vietnamese

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1 China's punitive invasion of Vietnam may have heartened Bangkok, but it caused concern in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, and was condemned by ASEAN.
military incursions and to exert military pressure on the Vietnamese forces and the Heng Samrin administration. In the first place, it is by no means clear that Kriangsak had complete freedom of action in relation to China and the Khmer Rouge. China's guarantee of Thai security -- in the form of promises to render assistance (perhaps including a "second lesson" against Vietnam) -- was probably dependent on Bangkok allowing the Khmer Rouge to use Thai territory for sanctuary and resupply purposes. Secondly, if Thailand had refused to become involved in opposing Vietnam's role in Cambodia, Beijing might have revived its support for the CPT. Thirdly, the Thai regime may have feared the consequences of not supporting the Khmer Rouge in their struggle against the Vietnamese: the 30-40,000 strong Cambodian guerilla force (and very large numbers of dependents) might then have been forced into Thailand, possibly linking up with the CPT in opposition to the Bangkok government. Fourthly, the Kriangsak regime saw important economic reasons for closer relations with China: the potential of the relationship in this sphere was demonstrated very soon after the invasion when Beijing contracted to supply up to a million tons of crude oil per year for five years at below market prices.

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2 The first public airing of China's guarantee of Thai security was on 1 April 1979 when Beijing's envoy in Thailand, Chang Wei-Lieh, told journalists that China was ready to "assist the Thai people" in the event of an attack by Vietnamese "hegemonists". Straits Times, 2 April 1979. But earlier promises of assistance may have been made privately when Kriangsak went to Beijing in April 1978 or when Deng visited Bangkok the following November.

Having decided to acquiesce in the Chinese and Khmer Rouge resistance to the Vietnamese domination of Cambodia, the Kriangsak administration secured not only a possible deterrent against a large-scale Vietnamese incursion and an instrument with which to contest physically Hanoi's hegemony, but also a further downgrading of Beijing's relations with the CPT. Simultaneously, Kriangsak used the "Vietnamese threat" to extract additional military and economic aid from Washington, and generally to strengthen relations with the United States. But while the American administration may have seen its positive response to Bangkok's requests principally in terms of bolstering Thailand's security against Vietnamese aggression, Kriangsak's main use for the additional US aid was in the counter-insurgency campaign against the CPT, and as a signal to his opponents in the Thai military that his administration had Washington's imprimatur.

Although in 1979 Thailand effectively had little choice but to become involved in supporting the Cambodian resistance, and despite Bangkok's exploitation of this involvement to redouble its efforts to

4 Kriangsak's visit to Washington in February 1979 resulted in the Carter administration agreeing to accelerate the delivery of weapons on order, a 25% increase in Foreign Military Sales credits for Fiscal Year 1979 (and a further one-third increase for FY80) and to donate to Thailand US$11.3m worth of ammunition left in the country by US forces when they withdrew in the mid 1970s. See Richard Nations, FEER, 2 February 1979, p. 8.

5 For discussions of Kriangsak's Cambodian policies, see New York Times, 5 January 1980; Richard Nations, FEER, 10 October 1980, pp. 13-14 and Helen Chauncey, "Thailand plays the great power game", Southeast Asia Chronicle, No. 69 (January-February 1980), pp. 2-7. Unlike either its own successor or the Singaporean leadership, the Kriangsak administration did not emphasize the threat posed by the Soviet Union's links with Vietnam and Laos.
suppress domestic communist rebellion and improve relations with Washington, Kriangsak certainly did not abandon his efforts to achieve detente with Vietnam and Laos. The benefits of cooperative relationships with Hanoi and Vientiane had been, and were potentially, considerable. Most importantly, Kriangsak had achieved the cessation of Vietnamese and Laotian support for the CPT.

Kriangsak was opposed to Vietnam's role in Cambodia, but claimed privately that Thailand and Vietnam shared a fundamental long-term strategic interest in preventing the spread of Chinese influence southwards. Although he saw cooperation with China as a tactical imperative in the immediate circumstances, it seems that the ultimate objective of Kriangsak's policy was probably not to "bleed" Vietnam to the extent of forcing it to relinquish its interest in Cambodia, withdraw from its alliance with Moscow and acknowledge its weakness vis-a-vis China (as appeared to be Beijing's aim), but rather to negotiate a "package deal" involving concessions both to and by Hanoi. One possible formula might have involved a withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia in exchange for the expansion of Hanoi's trade with ASEAN and the West, and possibly the normalization of US-Vietnamese relations. By this stage -- possibly five years in the future -- the Thai government would have worn down the CPT to a level at which it would be unable to absorb Chinese assistance if this was resumed as retribution for Bangkok's defection from the anti-Vietnamese cause. At the same time, Thailand's security relationship with Washington would be revived, to balance both Bangkok's links with China and Vietnam's with the Soviet Union.

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The aim was not to appease or accommodate Vietnam but to restore a stable balance of power in mainland Southeast Asia.

A continuing improvement in relations between Bangkok and Hanoi in early 1979 evinced a mutual interest in maintaining a modus vivendi. Although the Thai military soon began to facilitate the movement of Chinese arms to the Khmer Rouge, in January 1979 the Kriangsak regime continued to stress Thai neutrality. Hanoi's attitude was also conciliatory, playing on Democratic Kampuchea's role in exacerbating border tensions and asserting that the new Cambodian regime would prevent "military provocations." Until Chinese forces attacked northern Vietnam in February 1979, Hanoi kept its forces in Cambodia well away (up to 30km) from the Thai border in deference to Bangkok's security concerns. But even when small numbers of Vietnamese troops began to manoeuvre through Thai territory in hot pursuit of the Khmer Rouge, the Thai administration maintained its superficial neutrality, with Kriangsak playing down the significance of these incursions.

Five bilateral technical cooperation and trade agreements with Hanoi were signed between January and April, when Thailand agreed to sell Vietnam 5 million US dollars' worth of rice. There was no open

7 Richard Nations, FEER, 23 February 1979, pp. 8-9; Straits Times, 2 March 1979.
9 Personal interview with senior Vietnamese diplomat, Bangkok, 10 March 1981.
11 Chauncey, p. 6.
Thai support for the Khmer Rouge and there was no "open door" policy for Cambodian refugees until October 1979. Relations with Vietnam's ally Laos also fared well despite the invasion of Cambodia: 1979 witnessed a low-interest Thai loan of 100 million baht (about 5 million US dollars) intended to reinforce trade between the two countries, an agreement to control border crossings and the use of the frontier zone by "terrorists", joint border committee meetings at provincial level, and an exchange of visits by the two countries' Prime Ministers. Kriangsak's visit to Moscow in March and his declaration there that "the Soviet Union and Vietnam are our friends" were intended to lend credibility to Bangkok's claim of neutrality in the Indochina conflict. Kriangsak's wish to avoid the polarization and panic which might have damaged his government's counter-insurgency programme (by undermining the confidence of foreign investors and aid donors and diverting the armed forces' attention to the Cambodian border) was also reflected in his lack of emphasis on any immediate military threat from Vietnam's forces in Cambodia.

Although Kriangsak did not relinquish moderation in his policies towards Indochina as a result of the subjugation of Cambodia, the Vietnamese invasion did seriously damage the foreign policy consensus in Bangkok which had tacitly supported the Prime Minister's detente with Indochina in 1977-78. In contrast to Kriangsak's fairly relaxed view of the threat to Thailand from Vietnamese forces in Cambodia,

12 See section on "Thai-Laotian Detente and the CPT" in Appendix 1, pp. 526-28 below.
important elements in the Thai military took a less sanguine view. These figures in the armed forces may genuinely have believed Thailand's security to be in danger, but it seems that they also attempted to use the "Vietnamese threat" as a means of undermining Kriangsak's leadership. In the summer of 1979 there were rumours that they might stage a coup, ostensibly in reaction against Kriangsak's dovish line on Cambodia.\(^\text{14}\)

The Cambodian issue did not ultimately play a part in the downfall of Kriangsak and his replacement as Prime Minister by the Army Commander-in-Chief and Defence Minister, General Prem Tinsulanond in March 1980, but the change of administration had a far-reaching impact on Bangkok's Indochina policy. The Kriangsak administration's Indochina policy had been based to a large extent on Kriangsak's personal inspiration. Although Prem retained Air Marshal Siddhi Savetsila as Foreign Minister, the new government apparently either failed to understand or purposely disregarded the strategy behind its predecessor's policy in relation to the Cambodian conflict. Under Prem, Thai policy on Cambodia lost sight of Kriangsak's vision of a broad, negotiated settlement: opposition to Vietnam's role in Cambodia became an end in itself.\(^\text{15}\) The following months saw a much tougher Thai attitude, displayed particularly in the large-scale repatriation of Cambodian refugees in June. Another indication of Bangkok's newly inflexible stance towards Hanoi and its allies was a

\(^{14}\) Chauncey, p. 3.

serious deterioration in relations with Hanoi. Kriangsak's policy had been based on an attempt to restore Cambodia to some sort of buffer status at a cost which Thailand could afford. Under Prem, the official Thai view of an ideal status for Cambodia moved closer to Beijing's, and Bangkok incurred greater costs as a result. For example, the June 1980 refugee repatriation effectively provided the Vietnamese with a justification for exercising their superior military strength in the frontier region. Bangkok's move towards a more confrontationist posture on Cambodia also widened the gulf between its policies and those of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Indonesian and Malaysian Policy on Cambodia

Indonesian and Malaysian policy-makers faced similar dilemmas after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. A continuing dialogue with Vietnam was even more important to the administrations in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur than it was to Kriangsak. Indeed, many in Jakarta -- particularly in the Defence Ministry -- saw Vietnamese dominance in Indochina, provided it was coupled with independence from the USSR, as beneficial to regional security, by buffering the ASEAN states against Chinese pressure and acting as a "starting point for a regionally

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17 Moreover Kriangsak and Suharto had reportedly developed a "close" friendship, which may have helped to moderate differences between Thai and Indonesian policy. Robert Manning, FEER, 28 May 1982, p. 14.
ordered structure of relations". Kuala Lumpur was more inclined to criticize Vietnam (particularly because of Hanoi's creation of the seaborne refugee problem), and Malaysian suspicion of China was muted by an increasingly important trading relationship, but like its Indonesian counterpart the Malaysian leadership still saw China as the principal long-term external threat and did not consider Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina as necessarily detrimental to Malaysian security. But for a complex of reasons, the Suharto and Hussein Onn governments refused to accept the new political status quo imposed on Cambodia by Vietnam.

The invasion of Cambodia forced Indonesia and Malaysia to place their loyalty to Thailand, a fellow ASEAN member whose strategic environment had been violated, before their interest in developing cooperative relations with Hanoi. ASEAN was the centrepiece of both Jakarta's and Kuala Lumpur's foreign policies, and its viability would have been endangered if either Indonesia or Malaysia had not backed Bangkok's opposition to Vietnam's domination of Cambodia. Although ASEAN's progress in terms of economic cooperation had been unimpressive, it provided a vital framework for political consultation between its basically conservative members in rapidly changing regional and global circumstances. In the long term view, ASEAN continued to provide the framework for Indonesia's aspirations to regional leadership and a basis for Malaysian ideas about implementing

ZOPFAN, although Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur believed it necessary to defer to Thailand on the Cambodian problem in the short term.

The invasion also violated the emphasis on non-interference and respect for sovereignty in ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, which had been partly intended as a bridge to Indochinese -- and particularly Vietnamese -- involvement in maintaining regional order. While there had seemed little likelihood of open conflict within Indochina when the Treaty was drawn up, it was clearly as relevant to the Cambodian invasion as it was to conflict within ASEAN or between the ASEAN and Indochinese states (which had seemed more likely in 1976).

Although the assurances given by Pham Van Dong to ASEAN's leaders in September 1978 that Vietnam was not a threat to regional security may have been intended to soften the impact on the ASEAN governments of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty and the invasion of Cambodia, some Indonesian and Malaysian policy-makers regarded Hanoi's behaviour as verging on treachery. While there was little inclination in Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur to see the treaty and the invasion as evidence of Hanoi's subservience to an expansionist Soviet Union, Moscow's increasing political and military role in the region certainly conflicted with Indonesian and Malaysian ideas about regional "resilience" and neutrality. For Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur to have forged ahead in developing relations with Hanoi without raising

19 According to one respected Malaysian journalist, Vietnam's behaviour in invading Cambodia was perceived as a "slap in the face" by the Malaysian Foreign Ministry. Personal interview, Kuala Lumpur, 21 April 1981.
serious objections to the invasion of Cambodia would have undermined the credibility of their own and ASEAN's vision of regional order. Although they lacked the physical or political capability to force Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur also saw their support for Thai objections to the invasion of Cambodia as important to prevent Bangkok from moving towards an overly close and dependent relationship with Beijing. Such a relationship threatened not only to extend Chinese influence southwards but also to disrupt ASEAN cohesion or force the Association to align in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Jakarta still refused to open diplomatic links with Beijing, with Mochtar claiming that "China wants to make use of ASEAN". So although Indonesia and Malaysia allowed ASEAN to enter into a tactical alliance with China over Cambodia, by maintaining ASEAN's cohesion they also hoped to help the Association to retain some independence in outlook and policy on the issue.

Kuala Lumpur was also concerned that the Vietnamese military presence on the Thai-Cambodian border might distract the Thai army's attention from cooperation with its Malaysian counterpart against the CPM.

Although the centre of gravity of ASEAN decision-making was effectively moved from Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok and

20 This was particularly evident at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' conference on Bali in July 1979. Rodney Tasker, FEER, 13 July 1979, pp. 70-72.

Singapore after the invasion of Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia were by no means wholehearted in their support for ASEAN's policies on Cambodia and made persistent efforts to use their equable relationships with Hanoi to search for a negotiated settlement to the Cambodian problem. Kriangsak's stance was moderate in comparison to those of China and his own successor (Prem), but there was never any indication that he agreed with the basic attitude underlying the Indonesian and Malaysian approach -- a recognition that Vietnam as well as Thailand had a legitimate and vital security interest in Cambodia. Indeed, there was a widely held view in Jakarta that Vietnam's wish to dominate Indochina was comparable with Indonesia's own drive to control the whole extent of the former Dutch East Indies. Thus Cambodia might be seen as "Vietnam's Irian Jaya". Other Indonesians sympathetically compared the Cambodian invasion with Indonesia's incorporation of East Timor. Moreover, the East Timor issue made it difficult for Jakarta to criticize Vietnam over Cambodia without appearing blatantly hypocritical.

Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur feared that ASEAN's line on Cambodia -- which they felt bound to support -- might in the longer term damage their own and ASEAN's security. The flow of Chinese supplies through

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22 Kriangsak is reported to have thought the ideas expressed in the "Kuantan principle" dangerous. Richard Nations, FEER, 10 October 1980, p. 13.

23 Personal interview with Dr Lie Tek Tjeng, LRKN (National Cultural Research Institute), Jakarta, 6 April 1981. Shortly after the invasion of Cambodia, the Indonesian ambassador in Hanoi (Rear Admiral Sudarsono) claimed, in a statement approved by Suharto, that Vietnam "does not wish to be the enemy of ASEAN" and "always seeks a dialogue with its ASEAN neighbours". Jakarta domestic service, 1200 gmt, 23 July 1980. (FBIS-APA-80-144, 24 July 1980).
Thailand to the Khmer Rouge raised the spectre for Malaysian security officials of Beijing using the same route to supply the CPT and CPM. Moreover, Indonesian policy-makers saw Thai involvement with the Khmer Rouge as obstructing rather than facilitating a settlement by providing the Vietnamese with a justification for maintaining a firm political and military hold on Cambodia. There was also the danger that Bangkok's assistance to the Khmer Rouge might result in a direct clash between Vietnamese and Thai forces, leading to an increased Thai reliance on Chinese security assistance. The possible attrition of Vietnam's strength raised the spectre of Hanoi being subjugated to Chinese influence or forced into greater dependence on the USSR. In sum, unless a way was found to decouple the Cambodian dispute from the Sino-Soviet confrontation, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur saw a danger that not only Indochina but also Thailand and its ASEAN partners would become enmeshed in the wider conflict.

These apprehensions encouraged the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to look for a formula which would satisfy the security requirements of Vietnam as well as Thailand. Discussions between Suharto and Hussein Onn in March 1979 led to an announcement that Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur would explore possibilities for a settlement of the Indochina conflict through bilateral contacts with Hanoi as...

24 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 19 December 1980, p. 32.
25 According to Adam Malik, "Big power contention and intervention continue to threaten the new structures of peace and harmony we have so painstakingly tried to build over the past few years". Sydney Morning Herald, 12 March 1980.
well as Beijing, although the crisis induced by the flow of seaborne Vietnamese refugees into the ASEAN region in the following months subsequently dampened Indonesian and Malaysian enthusiasm for such an initiative. But by the end of 1979 Indonesian and Malaysian frustration with Thailand's relatively tough approach towards Vietnam and resurfaced.

The first concrete manifestation of the search for a face-saving formula was the so-called Kuantan Declaration of March 1980, which proposed basically that Hanoi should remain outside either Soviet or Chinese influence in exchange for Western economic aid and a recognition by ASEAN of Vietnamese security interests in Cambodia. The Kuantan proposal was partly an attempt by Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur to take advantage of the recent change of government in Thailand, but contrary to Indonesian and Malaysian hopes, the Prem administration lacked even its predecessor's vague commitment to reach some sort of compromise with Hanoi. Not only was the proposal unsatisfactory from Bangkok's viewpoint, but Hanoi also rejected the formula at this

27 See, for example, Mochtar's comments after the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting in Kuala Lumpur in mid December 1979. Indonesian Times, 17 December 1979.
29 Richard Nations, FEER, 25 April 1980, pp. 10-11. Kriangsak's resignation also accentuated Indonesian and Malaysian fears that Thailand's political and economic weakness might provide an opportunity for Beijing to increase its influence in Bangkok. Some sort of accommodation with Vietnam over the Cambodian problem would have allowed the Thai government to devote more energy towards resolving the deteriorating economic situation.
stage because of its failure to recognize the distinct lack of
symmetry in Vietnam's relationships with the USSR and China: from
the Vietnamese viewpoint, China was the main threat to regional peace,
whereas the Soviet Union was helping to stabilize Southeast Asia.

Although the Kuantan proposal was unsatisfactory from both Thai
and Vietnamese viewpoints, it highlighted the growing impatience of
Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur with the Cambodian stalemate. Hanoi
attempted to take advantage of this division in ASEAN's ranks,
indicating that it might reduce its military presence in Cambodia and
cooperate with ASEAN in setting up a "zone of peace and neutrality" in
exchange for acknowledgement of the "solidarity" of the Indochinese
states. In May and June 1980 there were signs that at least
Indonesia and Malaysia were negotiating with Vietnam on a compromise
solution, perhaps involving the legitimizing of a broadened version of
the Heng Samrin regime, following elections later in the year. But

30 Leifer, Indonesia's Foreign Policy, p. 168.
31 See, for example, Nguyen Co Thach's comments at his press
conference in Bangkok. Nation Review (Bangkok), 11 May 1980. Vietnam's lack of enthusiasm for the Kuantan initiative was
confirmed by the failure of Thach and Mochtar to reach any
significant agreement during the former's visit to Jakarta in
32 Hong Kong Agence France Presse (cited hereafter as AFP) in
33 In mid-May the Malaysian Prime Minister had officially confirmed
for the first time that delicate negotiations were under way on a
negotiated settlement with Vietnam. At approximately this time,
Lieutenant-General Benny Murdani, the influential deputy director
of Jakarta's integrated intelligence services (Bakin) visited
Hanoi to discuss the Cambodian issue. Age, 15 May 1980; John
the Vietnamese military incursion into Thai territory in June 1980 effectively forced Indonesia and Malaysia to align themselves with ASEAN's other members in condemning Hanoi.\footnote{Hong Kong AFP in English, 0210 gmt, 29 June 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-127, 30 June 1980) and 0400 gmt, 30 June 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-128, 1 July 1980).} While it was undoubtedly irksome for the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to have to subordinate their own views on the Cambodian problem to those of Thailand, their interest in maintaining the cohesion of ASEAN retained its precedence over the desire to foster better relations with Hanoi. ASEAN's successful lobbying on behalf of Democratic Kampuchea had significantly increased the Association's importance as a negotiation bloc on the world stage. The practical usefulness of this enhanced international status extended beyond the Cambodian issue into such vital areas as economic relations with Japan, Australia and the European Communities.\footnote{Sheldon W. Simon, The ASEAN States and Regional Security, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), p. 134.}

Malaysian enthusiasm for a compromise solution with Vietnam appeared to wane after the June incursion, which presumably reawakened the fears of security officials in Kuala Lumpur concerning the distraction of the Thai army from its counter-insurgency task. But although the Indonesian authorities -- and especially the Foreign Ministry -- were now more wary in their dealings with Hanoi, pressure from the armed forces -- and particularly Lieutenant-General Benny Murdani, the head of intelligence coordination -- ensured that Jakarta retained an interest in a constructive, bilateral dialogue with the Vietnamese on Cambodia.\footnote{David Jenkins, \textit{FEER}, 29 August 1980, p. 10.}
Singaporean Policy on Cambodia

Although Singapore's security was not immediately threatened by the invasion of Cambodia, the island republic nevertheless emerged as the most outspoken ASEAN critic of Hanoi's attack on Democratic Kampuchea, adopting the toughest attitude towards Vietnam at the June 1979 ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting. The Singaporean leadership's "globalist" outlook, emphasizing the dangers to regional security from Soviet-backed Vietnamese expansionism and the need for ASEAN to seek security guarantees from the United States and China while enhancing its own defence capability, became even more pronounced after the Vietnamese invasion.

Singapore's globalist foreign policy outlook -- which had affected relations with Vietnam even before the invasion of Cambodia -- is not a totally satisfactory explanation of its attitudes towards Hanoi from 1979. In contrast to their Indonesian and Malaysian counterparts who viewed regional order principally as a useful device

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38 For example, Rajaratnam claimed that "a Soviet led and funded communist revolution" had been launched in the region. Singapore domestic service in English, 1330 gmt, 5 April 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-068, 7 April 1980). In its publication From Phnom Penh to Kabul, the Singaporean government explicitly coupled the invasions of Cambodia and Afghanistan as evidence of a Soviet expansionist drive into Asia. See also Rajaratnam's speech at the National Press Club of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 29 June 1980 when he termed Vietnam "the most enthusiastic of all Soviet proxies".

39 Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister, was clearly impressed and reassured by China's willingness to use direct military force against Vietnam in 1979. See Goh Keng Swee, "No cause for pessimism if only we are resolute", Pacific Defence Reporter, May 1981, p. 18.
for enhancing national power or prestige, owing to their experiences in the 1960s Singaporean leaders saw regional order as crucial to national survival. Although Singapore was not directly threatened militarily as a result of the invasion of Cambodia, the Singaporean leadership's recognition of their small republic's potential vulnerability in the absence of respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity was a more specific reason for opposing the subjugation of Cambodia -- just as Singapore had in 1976 refused to join its ASEAN partners in voting against the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Indonesia's incorporation of East Timor.  

Although the Singaporean government still did not open formal diplomatic links with Beijing, it was considerably less worried about a "Chinese threat" to the region than any of its partners in ASEAN. Alignment with Beijing against Hanoi on the Cambodian issue may have provided a safe outlet for popular sympathy with China. Moreover, the ruling People's Action Party's virtual monopoly of Singapore's small political elite meant that there was not the same diversity of opinions as in other ASEAN countries.

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40 S. Dhanabalan, Singapore's Foreign Minister, argued that "the claim that one country has the moral right to intervene in another and overthrow a regime that it does not approve of is a dangerous principle. It is especially dangerous to us who are neighbours of a Vietnam that has announced repeatedly that it is the vanguard of a revolution...". Speech at ASEAN Ministerial meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 25 June 1980. Reprinted in Speeches (Ministry of Culture, Singapore), Vol. 4, No. 1 (July 1980), p. 85. Dhanabalan's second sentence helps to explain why Singapore was not so concerned by India's "liberation" of East Pakistan in 1971 or Tanzania's invasion of Uganda in 1979.

views found within the governments and bureaucracies of the other ASEAN states. Consequently, the Singaporean government's Cambodian policy was unrestrained by significant internal debate. Singapore's distance from the "front-line" meant that its government felt able to express its strong views on the Cambodian issue without Thailand's fear that this might provoke a military response by Vietnam.42

But Singapore's policy towards Vietnam and the Cambodian issue was not as uncompromising as China's. Singaporean politicians and officials emphasized that they were not fundamentally hostile to Vietnam, but only to Vietnam's role in Cambodia and Hanoi's alliance with Moscow.43 At the International Conference on Kampuchea in July 1981 even Singapore insisted that ASEAN was not interested in "bleeding" Vietnam, but in reducing regional tension.44 Although Singapore was quick to dissociate itself from the Kuantan formula, statements by Lee Kuan Yew later in 1980 implied that he was thinking in terms of acknowledging Vietnam's political leadership of Indochina.45 Shortly before the International Conference, Dhanabalan

42 According to Rajaratnam, "... sometimes it is easier to speak louder when you are far away from the antagonist because its arms do not reach that far". Straits Times, 4 March 1979.

43 According to Dhanabalan, ASEAN was not "anti-Vietnam". Canberra Times, 30 June 1980. The crucial role of Vietnam's alliance with Moscow in precipitating Singaporean and ASEAN resistance to Hanoi's occupation of Cambodia was emphasized by See Chak Mun, Director (Political Affairs), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, in a personal interview, 7 February 1981.


45 S. Awanohara, FEER, 22 August 1980, p. 11.
claimed that a solution to the Cambodian problem would need to safeguard the "security interest" of Vietnam as well as ASEAN.\textsuperscript{46}

Singapore had important reasons for not wanting a complete breakdown in relations between communist and non-communist Southeast Asia, despite its persistently "hawkish" stance on Cambodia and the Soviet-Vietnamese nexus. The Singaporean authorities did not wish to exacerbate tensions with Vietnam to a degree that would discourage foreign investment. A regional "climate of confidence" was needed to ensure continued growth and development. Neither did the government wish to disrupt an increasingly valuable trading relationship with Indochina -- by 1982, Singapore was Hanoi's third largest trading partner after the USSR and India.\textsuperscript{47} Singapore was also concerned not to alienate Indonesia and Malaysia due to disagreement over Cambodia. Any serious threat to ASEAN's cohesion was seen as a threat to Singapore's security, as the Association had provided a framework for the improvement of the city state's relations with its larger neighbours after the traumas of Confrontation and separation from Malaysia. Moreover, while the Singaporean government saw the Cambodian issue as the immediate problem to be solved, it still considered China to be a long-term security concern -- although the


\textsuperscript{47} Approximately 10\% of Vietnam's trade was with Singapore. See Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 1981 (Bangkok: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1982), pp. 551-52.
Chinese threat was not taken as seriously as in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. It was therefore important neither to weaken Vietnam to the extent desired by Beijing, nor to align too closely with China.

**Philippine Policy on Cambodia**

Compared to its ASEAN partners, the Philippine government was both less concerned by the invasion of Cambodia and less actively involved in the search for a solution to the ensuing diplomatic impasse. In part this may be explained by the Philippines' maritime isolation from mainland Southeast Asia, the sense of security from external threats provided by this fact and by the US military presence, and Manila's preoccupation with internal security problems. The isolation factor, together with the pro-Beijing orientation of the New People's Army, and the development of a relaxed relationship with Vietnam in the 1975-78 period accounts for Manila's policy on Cambodia -- when it did exercise a policy -- being closer to those of Indonesia and Malaysia than those of Thailand and Singapore.

Another reason for both Manila's low profile on Cambodia and its generally moderate position on the issue was the institutional weakness of the Philippine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1981, the senior Ministry official in charge of policy on Indochina professed to agree with Singapore's tough line on the Cambodia issue, stressing the dangers for the region of the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance and China's

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48 Personal interview with See Chak Mun, 7 February 1981.
Similarly, the veteran pro-American Foreign Secretary, Carlos Romulo, stressed the importance of not accepting the Vietnamese-imposed status quo in Cambodia. Sometimes the Ministry's viewpoint was reflected in official Philippine policy, but the course of this policy appears to have been influenced to a greater extent by Marcos's "think-tank", the President's Center for Special Studies, and various committees including representatives from the Finance, Trade and Industry Ministries and the National Economic Development Authority as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the Cabinet itself, "hawks" on the Cambodian issue (such as Romulo) were outnumbered by the "doves", who included not only Blas Ople (the Labour Minister) but also the President and Mrs Marcos. Although it may have been written before the invasion, a lengthy article on the region's political future which appeared under Marcos's name in May 1979 showed no concern with a Vietnamese-Soviet threat but emphasized the need for "a strong and united regional community". Like Marcos's opinion that ASEAN should act as a "neutral" bulwark to "fend off big power intentions" in Southeast Asia, this viewpoint seemed much closer to Indonesian and Malaysian regionalism than Thai and

49 Personal interview with Ambassador Luz Del Mundo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Manila, 27 March 1981.
50 Personal interview with Carlos P. Romulo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Manila, 23 March 1981.
51 Personal interviews with senior British and Australian diplomats, and academics at the University of the Philippines, Manila, March 1981.
Singaporean globalism. The Marcos regime's wariness of being drawn deeper into what it saw as essentially a problem for Thailand was demonstrated in 1981 when it joined Jakarta in attempting to persuade their ASEAN partners that the Association should not become involved in soliciting arms for the Cambodian resistance coalition.53

But the Marcos regime did not generally express openly these fairly conciliatory views on Cambodia. ASEAN remained important to the regime as an alternative to political and economic over-reliance on the United States. By not using its "casting vote" to tip the balance of ASEAN opinion towards conciliation and the accommodation of Hanoi's interests in Cambodia, Manila helped to ensure that the Association's cohesion was not threatened. Moreover, the Philippine armed forces, whose support was vital for the regime's continuation in power, might have objected to a Cambodian policy which diverged from Washington's line. Lastly, to have played down the Soviet and Vietnamese threat too far might have removed one possibly useful future justification (in domestic political terms) for the retention of the US bases (which in turn helped ensure Washington's support for the regime despite its abuses of human rights).

Attempts to Break the Stalemate: An International Conference and a Broadened Cambodian Resistance Movement

The ASEAN governments were increasingly aware as 1980 progressed that the Association's policy on Cambodia was unlikely to lead to a

53 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 13 August 1982, p. 46.
resolution of the conflict on their terms. Reports of growing economic normalcy inside Cambodia, coupled with the evidently declining military effectiveness of the Khmer Rouge, indicated that time might be on the side of the Vietnamese and the Heng Samrin administration. Britain's derecognition of Democratic Kampuchea in December 1979 and India's recognition of the Heng Samrin regime in July 1980 confirmed the impression that it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain international support for the ousted Khmer Rouge regime. In September 1980, as in September 1979, the UN General Assembly's credentials committee voted to recognize the Democratic Kampuchea regime. But the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 almost certainly contributed to this vote against Moscow's allies in Southeast Asia. It was becoming apparent that a new formula was needed to ensure that international society did not accept the Vietnamese-imposed situation in Cambodia as a fait accompli.

Recognizing that there were important elements in the ASEAN governments which were unhappy with ASEAN's current policy, in July 1980 Hanoi proposed (through a joint statement of the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian foreign ministers -- the so-called "Vientiane proposals") a "package deal" on Cambodia involving direct negotiations between Bangkok and the Heng Samrin regime, a demilitarized zone on the Thai-Cambodian border, the disarming of the Cambodian resistance, the distribution of all aid within Cambodia (rather than on the border), the signing of non-aggression treaties between the Indochinese and ASEAN states, and discussions on the establishment of a regional zone of peace and stability. While unacceptable to

Thailand -- and thus willy-nilly to the rest of ASEAN -- because they involved recognition of the People's Republic of Kampuchea regime, the Vientiane proposals were part of a broader Vietnamese effort to appear reasonable by presenting attractive alternatives to the sterility of ASEAN's approach. In the UN General Assembly debate on Cambodia in September 1980, the Vietnamese suggested immediate talks between themselves and ASEAN on the basis of ZOPFAN, the Kuantan declaration and the Vientiane proposals. This concession was followed by the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' proposal in January 1981 for a regional conference with the ASEAN states to discuss their differences, coupled with an offer by Hanoi to withdraw some of its forces from Cambodia or at least from the Thai frontier. These Vietnamese initiatives increased the pressure on ASEAN to inject new life into its Cambodian policy, to maintain not only international support for Democratic Kampuchea but also the Association's cohesion.

ASEAN's new strategy on Cambodia involved two main strands. One strand was to make the Democratic Kampuchea regime more acceptable to both the Cambodian population and international society by broadening its political make-up to include non-communist factions. The second strand was to persuade Hanoi to negotiate a withdrawal from Cambodia on terms that took greater account than the Vientiane proposals of Bangkok's security interests, in the context of an international conference involving all interested parties.

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55 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 3 October 1980, p. 16.
This new strategy was broadly successful in the sense that it increased the international respectability and legitimacy of Democratic Kampuchea, ensuring that Heng Samrin's People's Republic remained an international outcast even after it had rebuilt Cambodia and held power for a longer period than the Khmer Rouge. But the International Conference on Kampuchea, held under UN auspices in New York in July 1981, and the formal achievement of a coalition between the Khmer Rouge and two non-communist resistance groups (led by Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk) did little to foster a negotiated solution to the conflict.

The new strategy also helped to ensure that Indonesia did not break ranks with the rest of ASEAN over Cambodia, but failed to assuage the concerns of those in Jakarta (particularly in the armed forces) and Kuala Lumpur who questioned the appropriateness of a policy which still failed to take into account Hanoi's fundamental security interest in ensuring that Cambodia did not resume its previous role as part of a Chinese attempt to "encircle" Vietnam.

57 The ASEAN-sponsored UN General Assembly Resolution on Cambodia of 23 October 1980 included a proposal for an international conference as early as possible in 1981. Four days later Prem visited Beijing, intending to determine China's attitude towards a broadening of the DK regime. Ted Morello and John McBeth, FEER, 31 October 1980, pp. 21-23.

58 The various Cambodian resistance factions held a series of secret meetings beginning in July 1981. In September they agreed in principle to form a coalition but disagreement on the issue of power-sharing delayed the signing of a formal agreement until June 1982.

59 After meeting Suharto in late March 1981, Prem felt able to dismiss reports that there was any conflict between Indonesia and its ASEAN partners over Cambodia. Bangkok Post, 27 March 1981.
That Indonesian military leaders were not alone in their view of the common security interests of Vietnam and ASEAN was shown in the Malaysian foreign minister's claim that ASEAN would be exposed to "China's unfettered machinations" if Beijing succeeded in its plan to bring Vietnam "to its knees". 60

Both Indonesian and Malaysian governments continued to pursue bilateral negotiations with Vietnam at the same time that ASEAN was encouraging moves towards an international conference and a Cambodian resistance coalition: the Malaysian Foreign Minister visited Hanoi in January 1981 and Jakarta hosted Phoune Sipraseuth, the Foreign Minister of Hanoi's ally, Laos, in April. 61 There were also reports in April that Jakarta was unhappy with Prem's refusal to adopt a more conciliatory attitude on Cambodia. 62

When ASEAN's Foreign Ministers met in mid-June 1981 to discuss their strategy for the forthcoming International Conference on Kampuchea, Indonesian and Malaysian pressure ensured that the draft resolution which they drew up was broadly sympathetic to Vietnam's political and security interests in Cambodia. This ASEAN draft made it clear that its proposed "withdrawal of all foreign forces" (that is Vietnam's army of occupation) would not result in a return to power by the Khmer Rouge, unless this was what the Cambodian people desired (which they almost certainly did not); there would be no time limit

60 New Straits Times, 17 June 1981.
61 Canberra Times, 27 April 1981.
62 David Jenkins, FEER, 10 April 1981, p. 16.
for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces; all Cambodian factions -- including the Khmer Rouge -- would be disarmed; and a neutral interim administration would maintain law and order preceding UN-supervised free elections. But although ASEAN attempted to offer Vietnam incentives to withdraw from Cambodia, there was still insufficient common ground for a constructive discussion of the problem with Hanoi. The Vietnamese attitude was essentially that the conference agenda should discuss not only Cambodia but "fundamental issues of peace and security in the region" -- in other words, the "Chinese threat" to Vietnam and ASEAN. Ultimately, both Vietnam and the Soviet Union announced that they would boycott the conference, which they claimed was an interference in Kampuchea's internal affairs.

While ASEAN's draft resolution was undoubtedly satisfying to those in ASEAN who were anxious to find a negotiated solution, Chinese objections ensured not only that Heng Samrin's People's Revolutionary Party was not invited to the ICK but also that the conference emasculated ASEAN's fairly conciliatory resolution. China persuaded the conference to dispense with any reference to the disarming of the Khmer Rouge and other Cambodian resistance groups, to

64 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 17 April 1981, p. 12.
66 See, for example, Michael Richardson's interview with the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 June 1981.
replace the idea of an interim administration with "appropriate measures" for the maintenance of law and order, and to ignore ASEAN's call for a specific offer of aid to Vietnam if it withdrew its troops.68

The ICK thus did nothing to break the deadlock over Cambodia. In the absence of representatives from Moscow, Hanoi and Phnom Penh, the conference was really no more than a gathering of those committed to seeking a revision of the Vietnamese-imposed status quo in Cambodia. ASEAN's conciliatory stance (which was more important to Indonesia and Malaysia than to the Association's other members) was lost in the ICK's final document which, in order to avoid providing Hanoi with an opportunity to exploit the differences between its opponents, emphasized broad principles rather than the all important details which might have reassured the Vietnamese.69

Like the ICK draft resolution, the original ASEAN idea for a Cambodian resistance coalition was intended to provide a basis for negotiation with Hanoi. The aim was to extend the mantle of international legitimacy provided by the Democratic Kampuchean label from the Chinese-oriented and unpopular Khmer Rouge to the Cambodian resistance as a whole, with the intent of weakening the Khmer Rouge and strengthening (both politically and militarily) the non-communist groups led by Sihanouk and Son Sann. Mindful of hints that Hanoi and their allies in Phnom Penh might be willing to broaden the political

basis of the PRK regime, there was reason to hope that if the importance of the Khmer Rouge was reduced, the coalition might provide the basis for negotiation between the resistance and Heng Samrin's administration, and perhaps ultimately the formation of a coalition government in Phnom Penh acceptable to all parties. But the Chinese -- and probably also the Thais -- saw the main potential utility of a resistance coalition as a means of maintaining international support for Democratic Kampuchea rather than as a basis for a settlement with Vietnam.

ASEAN failed to produce a coalition giving as much power or status to the non-communist Cambodian factions as it had hoped. It was only a decision by Beijing (which by late 1981 feared the erosion of international support for Democratic Kampuchea) to press the Khmer Rouge into compromising which produced the eventual coalition agreement in 1982, and even under this agreement Pol Pot's organization not only dominated the coalition but also retained its right to the Democratic Kampuchea mantle in the event of the coalition's collapse. whereas Thailand, Singapore and even Malaysia were optimistic about the coalition's potential for advancing the cause of Democratic Kampuchea, particularly if its non-communist factions were given military assistance, Jakarta adopted a much more cautious attitude towards the whole enterprise. The Suharto regime was particularly concerned that ASEAN should not become involved in arming the resistance coalition or its factions: it had no wish to become more directly a party to the Cambodian conflict.


The Hazards of the Cambodian Stalemate

By the second half of 1981, the Cambodian conflict appeared to have attained a state of equilibrium. The level of conflict seemed tolerable to all parties involved. Heng Samrin's regime and the Vietnamese military presence may not have been very popular with the Cambodian people, but they were more acceptable than the alternative -- the resistance coalition dominated by the bestial Khmer Rouge.72 Meanwhile, the PRK administration had, with Vietnamese assistance, gone a long way towards rebuilding Cambodia's economy and society.73 Vietnamese military expenses in Cambodia were apparently rather low by most standards: the occupation force was manpower intensive, with little sophisticated weaponry. Ammunition was probably supplied as grant aid by the USSR and Moscow may have supplied Vietnam with free fuel for military purposes.74 Vietnam was apparently not being "bled white" in Cambodia, as Beijing had hoped. But neither was there evidence to suggest that the Cambodian resistance was likely to be defeated in the foreseeable future.

The costs of the Cambodian conflict were also bearable for the external powers involved. For the Chinese the low intensity war was

73 Nayan Chanda, FEER, 19 December 1980.
74 Paul Quinn-Judge, FEER, 19 November 1982, pp. 11-12.
an inexpensive but effective means of maintaining pressure on Vietnam. For the Reagan administration, the conflict provided a low risk theatre in which to challenge "Soviet expansionism" by backing ASEAN's line. For Moscow, support for Vietnam in Cambodia provided an opportunity to exact greater strategic advantages from the relationship with Hanoi while maintaining a second front in the confrontation with China.

There were strong pressures on the ASEAN governments to tolerate the continuing stalemate. But it is arguable -- and was argued by some politicians and officials in the region (and particularly in Indonesia) -- that the ASEAN states' individual and collective policies towards Indochina in the testing strategic environment created by the invasion of Cambodia did not always operate in the best interests of their security, and were possibly counterproductive.

**ASEAN Cohesion**

The most obvious (though perhaps not the most serious) danger for the ASEAN governments stemming from their Cambodian policy was the threat posed to ASEAN cohesion by intra-ASEAN differences of opinion over the best course to take in relation to Indochina. Within ASEAN there was a wide spectrum of viewpoints on the Cambodian problem. At one end of the spectrum were Thai right-wing military and business circles (which effectively formed the constituency of the Prem government) and the Singaporean government; at the other end were those elements in the Indonesian armed forces who favoured a compromise settlement of the issue making very substantial allowance for Hanoi's interests. But ASEAN's policy was based on an acceptance
by all its members of Thailand's wish to resist the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. In the absence of a diplomatic or military capability to influence the situation independently, ASEAN had to cooperate with the Cambodian resistance and China. Those who wished for a more conciliatory line had only a marginal impact on ASEAN's policy. In particular, Indonesia's loyalty to the ASEAN line forced Jakarta to defer its aspiration to regional leadership.

The strain in ASEAN after the invasion of Cambodia -- reflected particularly in the Kuantan declaration -- contrasted with the greater unanimity of the 1975-78 period, but it seemed unlikely that ASEAN's unity was immediately threatened as a result. ASEAN's decisions had always been based more on consensus than unanimity: only the Malaysian government, for example, had been totally enthusiastic about ZOPFAN, but it had nevertheless been adopted in modified form as an ASEAN goal. Moreover, although the Indonesian and to a lesser extent the Malaysian and Philippine governments might have wished for a rather different policy on Cambodia they were anxious not to jeopardize the wider advantage which ASEAN's diplomatic success over Cambodia had brought them. ASEAN's role in the van of diplomatic opposition to the Vietnamese role in Cambodia had significantly boosted the international status of the Association and its members. ASEAN was also important to its members in terms of its role in keeping in abeyance the disputes which had plagued their relationships with each other in the 1960s.

Pressure from certain institutions (elements of the military, especially BAKIN -- the State Intelligence Coordinating Agency -- and the quasi-official Centre for Strategic and International Studies, in
Indonesia, the research section of the Prime Minister's Department in Malaysia\textsuperscript{75} and the President's Center for Special Studies in the Philippines) for a more conciliatory line towards Hanoi influenced their countries' attitudes to the Cambodian question and contributed to a continuous if not particularly fruitful moderating influence on ASEAN's collective policy. But the wider interests of these countries' heads of state (in terms of the success of ASEAN) and foreign ministries (especially in terms of equable relations with China) ensured that there was no serious breach of the united front which ASEAN presented. By late 1981, a breakdown in ASEAN cohesion seemed unlikely except possibly in the event of fairly radical domestic political change in Indonesia bringing to power military figures less influenced by the Foreign Ministry and more favourably disposed towards Hanoi.

Whither ASEAN?

The Cambodian crisis had a salutary result for ASEAN's international status. But critics of ASEAN's Indochina policy have argued that it also distracted the Association from its most important original aims -- the acceleration of economic and social development (particularly as a means of undermining the appeal of communism), and the use of resultant national and regional "resilience" as a foundation for both cooperative relations with communist Indochina and

\textsuperscript{75} According to academics from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Personal interviews, Kuala Lumpur, April 1981.
the exclusion of external power interference (especially in terms of military bases) -- as enunciated in Bangkok (1967), Kuala Lumpur (1971) and Bali (1976).

There is no conclusive evidence to support the views of some observers in the ASEAN region that ASEAN's concentration on diplomatic cooperation in relation to Cambodia distracted the Association from working towards economic integration. Indeed, it might be argued that the institutionalization of political cooperation within ASEAN as a result of the Cambodian dispute provided a helpful basis for greater economic cooperation in the longer term. In the meantime, ASEAN did make some progress on the economic front, particularly in its negotiations with extra-regional "dialogue partners".

Rates of economic growth in ASEAN continued to be amongst the world's highest and the balance of economic power in Southeast Asia remained very markedly in the ASEAN states' favour as Vietnam's economy stagnated. But gross disparities in wealth remained the four larger ASEAN states' most pressing economic problem. At the same time, the regional tension resulting from the Cambodian stalemate provided a justification for very substantially increased military expenditure in the ASEAN states, possibly at the expense of

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76 See John McBeth's interview with Pichai Rattikul, leader of Thailand's Democrat Party and a former Foreign Minister, FEER, 13 August 1982, p. 60. According to Pichai there was a need for ASEAN to achieve a greater balance between economic and political matters. See also Guy Sacerdoti's interview with David Sycip, Director of the ASEAN Finance Corporation, FEER, 13 August 1982, p. 85. Sycip called for a "working economic community" rather than "futile statements on Cambodia".

77 See Chapter 8, pp. 333-61 above.
development projects which would have helped to combat the socioeconomic inequities which encouraged insurgency, particularly in Thailand.

Although the abortive coup by the Thai "Young Turks" in April 1981 was not prompted by differences over the handling of relations with Indochina, the rebellion was rooted in middle-ranking officers' frustration with a regime that showed itself incapable of tackling the fundamental "economic and administrative problem which caused social injustice detrimental to the survival of Thai society". 78

While the Sino-Vietnamese dispute had weakened the armed communist movements in the ASEAN region, communist (and to a lesser extent, ethnic-separatist) insurgency was, objectively, still the principal security threat to ASEAN's governments. Yet these governments used the "Vietnamese threat" to justify the diversion of military resources away from counter-insurgency towards conventional forces. To some extent this trend was balanced by the development of paramilitary forces and the generally lower level of insurgent activity. But even the Secretary-General of Thailand's National Security Council warned that the emphasis on defence against Vietnam might weaken counter-insurgency capability. 79

The Cambodian stalemate also provided the ASEAN states' armed forces with an opportunity to press for a greater political role.


This was particularly true in Thailand, where even conservative academics pointed to the dangers of the "growth of militarism", in terms not only of rapidly increasing defence budgets, but also the retarding effect on political development. "The Thais are incapable of seeing their own bleeding...", according to Khien Theeravit, at one time a senior adviser to the Prem government.  

The Recession of Regionalism

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the subsequent diplomatic stalemate deferred the possibility of peaceful coexistence and fruitful cooperation across Southeast Asia's ideological divide. Although even Singapore and to a lesser extent Thailand — Hanoi's harshest critics in ASEAN — maintained limited trading relations with Vietnam, the Cambodian dispute severely restricted the possibilities for significant economic interaction. Not only did this contribute to Vietnam's increasing dependence on the USSR, and increasing Laotian and Cambodian dependence on Vietnam, but also frustrated business interests in ASEAN, and particularly Thailand. The continuing

80 See Khien Theeravit, "Thai-Kampuchean Relations: Problems and Prospects", Asian Survey, Vol. 22, No. 6 (June 1982), pp. 571-72, 575. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, an aristocratic Thai academic, raised similar points in FEER, 10 May 1984, p. 34.


82 Hanoi's interest in broader economic links with Thailand and the other ASEAN countries was stressed by the Counsellor at the Vietnamese Embassy, Bangkok. Personal interview, 10 March 1981.
participation of the Thai, Vietnamese and Laotian governments in the Interim Mekong Committee -- which held three sessions in 1981 and sponsored a wide range of activities connected with the development of land and water resources\(^{83}\) -- denoted a persistent interest on both sides in keeping open the possibility of regional economic cooperation.

Perhaps even more important than the restriction of economic links was the stymying of movement towards the self-management of Southeast Asian security by regional states themselves (which had been apparent briefly in 1977-78) and the intensification of the regional military interests of extra-regional powers. Although ASEAN leaders reiterated their commitment to regional neutrality as a long-term goal once the Cambodian problem had been resolved,\(^{84}\) in the mean time the corollary of their indirect involvement in the conflict was a renewed reliance on the security guarantees of extra-regional powers. Coupled with evidence of greater military cooperation between regional states, this may have fuelled Vietnamese fears that ASEAN was acquiring the attributes of an externally-sponsored military organization. Simultaneously, Vietnam's increasing dependence on the USSR allowed Moscow, after twenty years of effort, to acquire a strategic foothold in the region through its use of Vietnamese air and naval facilities. The prolonged Cambodian dispute was having the effect of polarizing

\(^{83}\) UN Committee for the Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin, Annual Report, 1981.

\(^{84}\) For example, President Marcos claimed in May 1980 that ASEAN's "objective of the decade" was to establish ZOPFAN. Hong Kong AFP in English, 0843 gmt, 27 May 1980 (FBIS-APA-80-105, 29 May 1980).
Southeast Asia along ideological lines and linking the region more closely to the global confrontation between China and the United States on one side and the Soviet Union and its allies on the other.

The Dangers of Alignment with China

Not only elements in the Indonesian and Malaysian governments were concerned at the possible dangers of ASEAN's cooperation with Beijing on the Cambodian issue. There were also serious reservations within the Thai bureaucracy (including the Foreign Ministry) and armed forces (particularly amongst officers, including both Prem and the Young Turks, who had spent years fighting the CPT) about the wisdom of moving so close to China and allowing Beijing to "bleed" Vietnam. According to the Secretary-General of the Thai National Security Council, the Thai regime did not wish "to sell our country to China" or to weaken Vietnam to the extent that it might "fall under to China or the Soviet Union", because in the long-term, "we are threatened by all communist countries" (that is, China as well as Vietnam).

There were grounds for concern that although China had reduced its support for the CPT, Beijing was building up new channels for its political influence by exploiting its links with the Thai military and with business circles which acted as the conduit for some of its aid to the Khmer Rouge. For example, the Mass Line Party led by the


86 Personal interview with Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, 20 March 1981.
demagogic General Sudsai Hasdin (who had been head of the Internal Security Operations Command before his retirement from the army in October 1980 and was subsequently appointed to Prem's cabinet) was alleged to maintain close links with the Chinese embassy. Moreover, Beijing still maintained links with Thailand's ethnic Chinese community and the CPT and could presumably resuscitate its material support to the latter if it wished. The CPT's declarations in 1979-81 that it was willing to join the Bangkok government in an anti-Vietnamese united front suggested that Beijing retained considerable influence with the Thai communists. Overall, the Cambodian conflict enabled China to strengthen substantially its political leverage in Thailand.

Beijing's frequent promises to aid Thailand in the event of a military challenge from Vietnam were greeted with caution in Bangkok as well as the other ASEAN capitals. Not only was it apparent that these promises were probably part of a Chinese effort to force Bangkok and ASEAN as a whole to take sides more decisively, but it was also doubtful if such guarantees greatly enhanced Thai and ASEAN security. If China did attempt again to "teach Vietnam a lesson", it would need to be a more impressive lesson than the 1979 invasion of Vietnam, which had been more a failure than a success militarily and had not

89 See, for example, Bangkok Post, 1 April 1979 and 16 July 1979.
90 Simon, The ASEAN States and Regional Security, p. 94.
affected Vietnam's policies in Cambodia. But any large-scale, new attack on Vietnam would risk not only aborting Beijing's fragile rapprochement with Moscow, but also a Soviet military response if Vietnam's economic heartland was seriously threatened (which it was not in the 1979 invasion): there were thus grounds for doubting the value of China's commitment to assist Thailand. Nevertheless, because of the need for the Chinese government to maintain its credibility, Beijing's repeated guarantees of Thai security might have necessitated some sort of military response against Vietnam in the extremely unlikely event of a large-scale Vietnamese military push against Thailand (such as an incursion aimed at neutralizing Cambodian resistance groups' support bases and supply routes well inside Thai territory).

If China did attempt a "second lesson", it might prove counter-productive, by bolstering the credibility of Hanoi's emphasis on the "Chinese threat" as a justification for its role in Cambodia, and by opening the way for a dramatic increase in Vietnam's reliance on Soviet support. To force Hanoi into greater dependence on Moscow (in the expectation that Vietnamese nationalism would eventually re-assert itself and propel Vietnam towards a rapprochement with China) was, of course, the aim of Beijing's strategy of "bleeding" Vietnam. But neither a Soviet-Vietnamese alliance nor an eventual Sino-Vietnamese entente were likely to benefit the ASEAN states' security. This was recognized even by Thai government officials, who stressed that Bangkok did not want a "weak Vietnam". 91 Indeed, the geographical

91 Personal interview with Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, 20 March 1981.
proximity of China, compounded by its emphasis on modernization (especially in a military sense) suggested that a strong Vietnam might act as a useful balancing factor in the medium-to-long term.

Costs and Benefits of Partnership with Washington

The ASEAN states were, with good reason, less apprehensive about the revitalization of American strategic interests in Southeast Asia in the 1979-81 period. Not only did the United States provide an offshore military presence that by far outweighed the USSR's minor air and naval deployments in the region, and substantial economic and military aid and diplomatic support on the Cambodian issue, but its strategic entente with China also went some way towards reassuring the ASEAN governments that its leverage in Beijing would prevent the Chinese from acting incautiously in relation to Vietnam. Bangkok had a special interest in using its alliance with Washington to balance Thailand's relations with China.

Although America's principal Asian security interests were centred in Southwest and Northeast rather than Southeast Asia, Washington (particularly once the Reagan administration took power) saw the ASEAN states as important allies and associates in its strategy of thwarting Vietnam's role as the spearhead of Soviet expansionism in a region straddling American and Japanese lines of communication with the Indian Ocean and the Gulf. Even before Reagan took office, Washington's renewed commitment was highlighted in November 1979 when its Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific (Richard Holbrooke) claimed that Thailand was "the key to
ASEAN and ASEAN is the key to Southeast Asia" and that "the US is in this region to stay". But although this statement was indirectly a response to Bangkok's attempts to gain more specific security guarantees from Washington after the invasion of Cambodia and even Indonesia and Malaysia appeared to encourage Thai and Philippine military links with the United States, there was also an awareness -- particularly in Jakarta -- of the important differences between American and ASEAN interests.

It was evident that the increased US military, economic and diplomatic aid was reinforcing "structural ties of dependence" between Thailand and the United States and reducing the flexibility of Thailand's foreign policy. It was also reasonably clear that US military assistance (upon which the Prem regime's credibility increasingly depended) would be drastically reduced if Bangkok moved towards accommodation with Hanoi. So Thailand and, by extension, its ASEAN partners were becoming locked into the role of regional proxies for Washington's worldwide confrontation with Moscow and its allies. Moreover, there was scant indication that the US was using its relationship with Beijing to moderate or otherwise influence

92 See Rodney Tasker's interview with Holbrooke, FEER, 16 November 1979, p. 15.

93 Suhrke, "Thai-Vietnamese Relations", pp. 11-14.

94 Ibid., p. 13.

95 A prime example of the alignment of ASEAN -- and particularly Singapore and Thailand -- with Washington's global outlook, in order to maximize diplomatic support from the West, was the attempt to link the issue of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan with Vietnam's role in Cambodia.
Chinese policy towards Indochina. Washington, particularly under Reagan, tended to look for an identity of policies with the People's Republic on non-critical issues such as Cambodia, effectively deferring to Beijing's judgement. For example, the US did not support the ASEAN states in their disagreements with China at the ICK.

The Thai political, military and bureaucratic elite forming the power base of the Prem government gained too much from close relations with Washington to worry openly about the relationship's broader implications. There was a current of Thai thinking that stressed the need for the government to avoid alignment with Washington and Beijing on the Cambodian issue, but such views were not influential in Bangkok in 1981. However, there was serious concern in Indonesian official circles that ASEAN's closer strategic alignment with Washington was drawing the region dangerously closer to the superpower confrontation as well as further undermining Indonesia's regional leadership. Moreover, there was no indication that Washington took serious notice of Indonesian and Malaysian concerns over aspects of the Sino-American relationship such as the possibility of US arms sales to Beijing. Overall, the relationship with Washington compromised ASEAN's vision of a reduction in great power interference in the region.

96 Personal interviews at Thammasat and Chulalongkorn Universities, March 1981.

97 Barry Wain, AWSJ, 23 June 1981.
Danger of Instability on the Thai-Cambodian Border

The use of the Thai-Cambodian frontier for resupply and sanctuary by the Cambodian resistance was not totally beneficial to Thai security. The main concern for the Thai military was that it would be unable on its own to repel a large-scale Vietnamese military incursion into Thailand aimed at destroying the Cambodian resistance's bases in the frontier zone. Mainly because it might increase the risk of a major Vietnamese cross-border attack, the Thai military was unenthusiastic in 1981 about supplying arms to the non-communist Cambodian resistance factions. There was further concern that increasing the resistance's firepower might also increase its independence, endangering Thai security by allowing less Thai influence over the conduct of its operations. Thailand's ASEAN partners also had reasons to fear any major escalation in tension on the border, because their political stake in ASEAN's cohesion would require them to render Bangkok diplomatic and possibly military support. In Malaysia's case there was the additional concern over counter-insurgency in the Thai-Malaysian frontier zone.

The Refugee Problem

The Cambodian stalemate also ensured the continued existence of a refugee problem for the ASEAN states, particularly in terms of land refugees in the Thai-Cambodian frontier area. But the effective

98 Simon, The ASEAN States and Regional Security, p. 104.
economic isolation of Vietnam and Laos from the West and non-communist Southeast Asia contributed to continuing refugee flows from these countries also. The ASEAN governments' exaggerated the impact of the refugees on their countries' security, but there can be little doubt that, on balance, they would have preferred to be without the problem.

The Future of Cambodia

Despite its success as a mechanism for maintaining broad international support for Democratic Kampuchea, there was little evidence to suggest that the Cambodian resistance coalition, which was still dominated by the highly unpopular Khmer Rouge, was likely to secure a sufficient degree of legitimacy within Cambodia to make it a credible alternative to the Heng Samrin regime. Although some reports in 1981 indicated that popular support for Son Sann's KPNLF was growing inside Cambodia,99 there was no reason to suppose that the political or military balance of power within the resistance coalition would move decisively against the Khmer Rouge in the foreseeable future.

There were also reasons for doubting that the impact on the ASEAN states' security of the restoration to power of a Democratic Kampuchea regime would be entirely beneficial. Unless this took place in the context of a broad settlement of the Sino-Vietnamese dispute (which was not in prospect in 1981) it seemed likely that Beijing would persist in using its influence over the Khmer Rouge to exert pressure

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on Vietnam. A renewal of Chinese interference in the region was clearly not desired by the Indonesian and Malaysian governments, and the likely detrimental effect on regional stability of continued Sino-Vietnamese rivalry in Southeast Asia was contrary to the interests of all the ASEAN states. Moreover, there was no guarantee that relations between Thailand and a more nationalistic successor regime in Cambodia would not be plagued by the bilateral frontier disputes which were characteristic of both the Sihanouk and Khmer Rouge periods. So in some senses, firm Vietnamese control over Cambodia was arguably beneficial to the ASEAN states.

Was There an Alternative?

ASEAN's diplomatic initiatives on Cambodia in the 1979-81 period were intended essentially to ensure the continuing illegitimacy (in terms of international recognition) of the Heng Samrin administration rather than to provide a basis for serious negotiations with Hanoi over the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces. But it is possible to make a plausible case that the ASEAN states would have had much to gain if they had changed their collective policy towards Indochina from confrontation over Cambodia to an emphasis on the common interests of communist and non-communist Southeast Asian countries in finding a compromise solution to the problem. Thailand's security --

100 See John McBeth, FEER, 20 August 1982, pp. 32-33.
the touchstone for ASEAN's Cambodian policy -- and, indeed, the wider security interests of ASEAN as a whole might have been better served by a much greater recognition of Vietnam's security concerns. Despite the failure of the Kuantan initiative in 1980, in mid-1981 there was still a strong undercurrent of opinion within ASEAN policy-making circles, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia but even in Thailand, which looked to a greater recognition of the legitimacy of Vietnam's interests in Cambodia as the key to breaking the stalemate.

Vietnam's central concern in relation to Cambodia was that it should not be controlled by a pro-Chinese regime. It is possible that Hanoi might have proved unwilling to make significant concessions on its military presence in Cambodia, particularly in view of assertions by Vietnamese spokesmen in mid-1980 that their forces would remain in Cambodia while the "Chinese threat" in its broadest sense persisted and that this threat was "eternal". But although these hyperbolic claims may have been intended to provide a justification for Vietnam's role in Cambodia, they did not necessarily portend an indefinite military occupation of Cambodia irrespective of changes in strategic circumstances. ASEAN had never made an intensive effort to investigate Hanoi's precise conditions for military withdrawal from Cambodia, so it was by no means clear that it was impossible to


103 Interview with General Von Tien Dung, Pravda, 11 June 1980 (FBIS-SU, 18 June 1980). This was reportedly also Nguyen Co Thach's line in negotiations with his Thai counterpart in Bangkok, May 1980. Quoted by Khien, "Thai-Kampuchean Relations...", p. 569. See also Sydney Morning Herald, 21 June 1980.
negotiate concessions from the Vietnamese government on Cambodia. Indeed, although Hanoi was unwilling to tolerate a return to power by the Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese were apparently prepared to consider the possibility of accepting a more broadly-based administration in Phnom Penh, including non-communist elements providing they did not challenge Vietnam's suzerainty. Bearing in mind the extreme unpopularity of the Khmer Rouge within Cambodia, a regime based on the Heng Samrin administration would possess considerably more domestic legitimacy than one based on the Democratic Kampuchea coalition.

Although Vietnam would probably see a requirement to support its political hegemony in Cambodia with a military presence (as in Laos), Hanoi appeared willing to restrict both the deployment and size of this presence if this could be accomplished without risking a return to power by the Khmer Rouge. Until late February 1979, when China invaded Vietnam and it became clear that the Thai authorities had decided to provide logistic support to the Khmer Rouge (both these phenomena exacerbating Hanoi's fear of a Chinese attempt at strategic encirclement), the Vietnamese authorities attempted to respect Bangkok's security concerns by keeping their forces at least 10km from the Thai border. Although the Indochinese foreign ministers' "Vientiane proposal" in July 1980 suggested the demilitarization of

104 Age, 10 May 1980.
both sides of the border, it did indicate that Hanoi was potentially willing to respond to a cessation of Thai aid to the resistance by pulling back its forces again. According to Nguyen Co Thach, Hanoi was also willing to reduce the size of its forces in Cambodia if the military threat from the Khmer Rouge was reduced. Although the political and economic costs of maintaining a large army of occupation in Cambodia were tolerable, this did not mean that Hanoi would not welcome the political and economic benefits (particularly in terms of aid from the West and Japan) which might be gained by a large-scale reduction in its military presence.

It is impossible to postulate with any great accuracy the precise course of events if the direction of Thai and ASEAN policy on Cambodia had been fundamentally altered to involve an acceptance of Vietnamese suzerainty by recognizing a broadened version of the Heng Samrin regime and ceasing to give diplomatic and logistic support to the Cambodian resistance. But it may plausibly be argued that the security of Thailand and ASEAN as a whole would have benefited from such a reorientation. In such circumstances, it seems likely that Hanoi would have substantially reduced its military deployment in Cambodia and concentrated its residual forces away from the Thai border. The reduction in border tension as a result of the cessation of Thai support for the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese military stand off would have minimized the immediate threat to Thai security from

106 Age, 4 August 1980.
107 Age, 9 and 10 May 1980.
Vietnamese military incursions. Moreover, with peace restored in Cambodia a large part of the Cambodian refugee population in the Thai border region would probably have wished to return home, eliminating another major Thai security concern. There would also have been less need for the ASEAN countries to divert resources to their defence sectors and within these sectors towards conventional warfare capability, so resources for both developmental and military counter-insurgency could have been restored. Bangkok could have used its newly equable relationship with Hanoi to forestall the possibility of the reestablishment of any potentially dangerous nexus between the CPT (or a CPT faction) and the Indochinese communists, just as amicable government-to-government relations with China had undermined the CPT's links with Beijing. The inclusion of non-communist elements in a broadened Phnom Penh regime might have further minimized the possibility of Vietnam using its assured hegemony in Cambodia as a basis for supporting Thai insurgents. 108

Recognition of an overarching Vietnamese political suzerainty in Cambodia need not have implied an end to Thailand's role as a competitor for influence there. One component of Thailand's continuing quest for influence in Vietnamese-dominated Laos after 1975 was an alliance with anti-communist Laotian resistance groups, but after the Kriangsak government's accord with Vientiane in early 1979 this approach yielded to one based on political and economic cooperation. The economic aspect of the relationship was particularly important in helping Vientiane to avoid complete dependence on Hanoi.

In theory at least, the 1975-80 phase of the Bangkok-Vientiane relationship could have provided a model for Bangkok-Phnom Penh links. In the longer term Bangkok might have been able to take advantage of any move by the Phnom Penh regime to assert its independence of Hanoi by intensifying its links with third countries: the potential for the development of a more independent foreign policy by the PRK regime was demonstrated in 1980-81 by its ardent interest in constructing and autonomous relationship with Moscow. Although the PRK and Thai regimes were ideologically opposed, culturally and linguistically Cambodia was closer to Thailand than to Vietnam. Ultimately, as it became clear that if there was no longer a possibility that the Khmer Rouge might recapture power, and if Cambodian nationalism reasserted itself, it is possible that Hanoi might have been prepared to downgrade its hegemony over Cambodia to a level comparable with the Soviet-Finnish relationship. By way of contrast, a continuing stalemate necessarily involving the dependence of the Phnom Penh regime on Vietnamese support, could only minimize the possibilities for reassertion of Cambodian autonomy.

Another advantage of conceding Cambodia to Hanoi's sphere of influence (at least in the short term) might have been that this would have lessened Vietnam's economic, political and military dependence on the USSR, in turn limiting Moscow's ability to extract concessions from Hanoi in the form of naval and air facilities. The limitation of Soviet regional influence and presence might ultimately have

109 Ibid., loc. cit.
contributed to a reduction in Southeast Asia's importance as an arena of Sino-Soviet competition.

These arguments suggesting that a fundamental change of policy on Cambodia might have benefited the ASEAN states were, however, balanced by the possible dangers of recognizing the Heng Samrin regime and severing links with the Cambodian resistance. Having invested so much political capital in resisting Vietnam's domination of Cambodia, ASEAN's international credibility would almost certainly have been dented -- if not quite seriously damaged -- if the Association had fundamentally revised its stance on the issue. Although at times ASEAN's cohesion on the Cambodian issue appeared fragile, the same issue had also been instrumental in engendering much of the Association's unity. Deprived of the Cambodian problem, ASEAN might have lost much of its impetus for cooperation in other areas.

Moreover, in the absence of rapprochement between Beijing and Hanoi, any movement by ASEAN towards a profound change of course on Cambodia would have seriously risked alienating China. Although a major change of policy on Cambodia would represent a repudiation of Chinese influence by the Thai government, in such circumstances it is likely that Beijing would have used its residual leverage in Bangkok (through it links with Sino-Thai business circles, sympathetic elements in the military leadership, and movements such as Sudsai's Mass Line Party) to exert pressure on the regime to adhere to its established policy on Cambodia, even if this resulted in Thailand breaking ranks with some or all of its ASEAN partners. If such Chinese pressure had failed to achieve its objectives, it is possible that Beijing would have attempted to exert additional leverage against
Bangkok by reviving material support for the CPT and terminating economic concessions (such as the supply of oil at advantageous prices). Although Thailand might bear the brunt of China's reaction, ultimately it was highly likely that all the ASEAN states would face the prospect of a deteriorating relationship with China, possibly including a revivified security threat from Beijing's links with the region's communist parties, coupled with a strategic military challenge resulting from the extended reach of the Chinese armed forces.

If Bangkok had withdrawn its cooperation in resisting Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, it is unlikely that Beijing would have relinquished its support for the Cambodian resistance. As well as continuing to resupply the Khmer Rouge by way of islets off the Cambodian coast, the Chinese might have continued to funnel material to the resistance through Thai territory, assisted by the CPT. In order both to contain the security threat posed by the spectre of a revived CPT linked to the Khmer Rouge, and to convince Hanoi that the Thai regime was wholehearted in its change of policy on Cambodia, it would probably have been necessary in these circumstances for Bangkok to divert military resources to interdicting these supply lines, possibly in joint operations with the Indochinese governments' forces.

Another potential drawback to a change of course on Cambodia would be its likely impact on the ASEAN states' relations with the United States. The increase in American military aid -- particularly to Thailand -- from 1979 was predicated on Washington's wish to bolster the stability of friendly anti-communist nations in the face of the threat to their security supposedly posed by actual and
potential Soviet-backed Vietnamese aggression. If the ASEAN states had reached their own understanding with Hanoi, it is likely that this aid would have been drastically reduced. Although much of the military component of the US aid was increasingly diverted towards the acquisition of sophisticated weapons for conventional warfare -- which would probably have been redundant if a change of policy on Cambodia helped to improve the ASEAN states' relations with Vietnam, such aid cuts would also have impaired the ability of ASEAN governments to counter (by both military and socioeconomic means) their problems with insurgency -- and this at a time when insurgency might increase as relations with China deteriorated. Substantial cutbacks in US aid were also potentially damaging to the ASEAN governments' domestic political legitimacy, particularly in Thailand and the Philippines.

Conclusion

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia effectively dashed hopes within ASEAN of managing security concerns with Indochina by constructing a framework of cooperative relations across Southeast Asia's ideological divide. Although Indonesian and, to a lesser extent, Malaysian strategic perspectives allowed a more tolerant view of Vietnam's role in Cambodia, the invasion forced Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur to place their interest in maintaining both ASEAN's cohesion and the credibility of their own and ASEAN's vision of regional order before their interest in developing closer relations with Hanoi. Although the Indonesian and Malaysian governments searched for a formula which would satisfy both Thai and Vietnamese security
requirements in relation to Cambodia and thus remove the major obstacle to a more satisfactory regional order, intransigence on the part of both Hanoi and the new Prem administration in Bangkok ensured that the "Kuantan declaration" of March 1980 was not the starting point for a compromise solution to the problem. Nevertheless, slightly waning international support for Democratic Kampuchea and Jakarta's continuing impatience with the Cambodian stalemate inspired a new ASEAN strategy involving efforts to improve Democratic Kampuchea's acceptability by broadening its political composition and to work for a negotiated solution through the medium of a conference of all interested parties, in the first instance.

The failure of the ICK and the Cambodian resistance coalition to break the deadlock highlighted the dangers of a continuing stalemate for the ASEAN states. It was arguable that ASEAN's Cambodian policy threatened the Association's cohesion, was distracting the grouping from its original aims (particularly the construction of national and regional resilience), contributed to the growth of militarism, damaged the prospects for peaceful coexistence and cooperation in the region, increased Chinese influence and Soviet interference in the region, fostered a dangerous level of dependence on the United States, risked a major military confrontation with Vietnam, exacerbated refugee problems, and did not promise a post-war settlement in Cambodia which would necessarily be in the interests of the ASEAN states.

But although there were drawbacks in the stalemate fostered by ASEAN's established Cambodia policy, a radical change of course promised new dangers and only uncertain benefits. In particular, an alignment by ASEAN with Vietnam raised the possibility of a new
confrontation with China. In mid-1981 the disadvantages of the current deadlock still appeared tolerable even to the Indonesian and Malaysian authorities, particularly as these drawbacks were balanced by the benefits for regime (if not national) security of ASEAN's new international stature and closer political and security relations between the ASEAN states and with the United States.
CONCLUSION
From the time of the victories of the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian communists in 1975, observers in the West and in the ASEAN region (in both academic and journalistic spheres) tended to take at face value the frequent claims of the ASEAN governments that the communist Indochinese states posed a variety of sometimes serious threats to "security" and "stability" in non-communist Southeast Asia. Not only did Vietnam, particularly after it invaded Cambodia and entered into a close military alliance with the Soviet Union in 1978-79, allegedly present a direct, strategic military threat to Thailand and perhaps the other ASEAN states, but Hanoi and Vientiane (not to mention Phnom Penh from 1975-78) were also said to support insurgent communist movements in the ASEAN region. The flow of refugees from Indochina (and particularly Vietnam from 1978) was supposedly another aspect of the threat from Indochina.

The conventional wisdom regarding security issues in Southeast Asia also stressed that the expansion and modernization of the ASEAN states' armed forces were largely precipitated by developments in Indochina. Overall, the ASEAN governments were portrayed as having coped successfully, despite significant differences in their international outlooks, with the threats posed by communist Indochina, especially in the way in which they coordinated their political responses to the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia.¹

This thesis suggests that, while they were by no means totally misleading, these widely-held viewpoints were seriously flawed.
Threat Assessments and their Manipulation

In the first place, the evidence presented in Part 2 of the thesis makes it clear that the ASEAN governments' declarations regarding their security concerns with communist Indochina did not always reflect objective threat assessments. The 1975 communist victories in Indochina and the later Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia did significantly alter the strategic environment of the ASEAN states, and the Thai authorities often had legitimate reasons for feeling insecure in the face of military incursions by communist Indochinese forces, Pathet Lao and (until 1978) Khmer Rouge support for Thai communist insurgents, and large-scale cross-border refugee flows. But the indications are that the ASEAN governments often exaggerated and misrepresented these threats.

Some relatively recent theoretical work on threat perception in international politics is helpful in explaining this exaggeration and misrepresentation. According to D.G. Pruitt, "systematic distortions in the perception of evidence", may lead to "possibilistic thinking in which future events are seen as probable that should only be seen as possible". According to Pruitt, these distortions are caused by


"predispositions" affecting the interpretation of evidence concerning another state's capability and intent to do harm. Klaus Knorr reached similar conclusions, and recognized "intervening predispositions" which might lead to an underestimation of threat, facilitate or obstruct threat perception, and encourage misperception. Raymond Cohen went further than either Pruitt or Knorr: as well as highlighting the crucial influence on threat perception of "intervening predispositions" relating to a state's geopolitical and domestic political environments, he went on to analyse "the nature of the cognitive process of appraisal" which he saw as central to the perception of threats. After examining a number of historical examples, Cohen concluded that

The crucial inference, central to the appraisal of threat, is found in the recurrent argument that the opponent had in some way betrayed a trust or undertaken an illegitimate and unpermissible action -- that he had somehow infringed a norm of behaviour -- and that, as a consequence of this, he had ceased to be bound by existing restraints and was to be considered as bent on a policy of aggressive domination gravely damaging to the interests of the observing actor.

To some extent, the findings of this thesis coincide with those of Pruitt, Knorr and Cohen. In Parts 2 and 3 of the thesis frequent

3 Ibid., pp. 399-407.
reference is made to the influence on the ASEAN states' threat perceptions of the "background factors' discussed in Part 1. In terms of the ASEAN states' perceptions of security threats emanating from communist Indochina, certain of these background factors fulfilled roles analogous to Knorr's "intervening predispositions". Thus, for example, it may plausibly be argued that the Thais' historical experience of conflict with the Vietnamese predisposed Thai governments in the 1975-81 period to view a united, communist Vietnam as a threat. Moreover, the tendency of military commanders to make "worst case" assumptions concerning the intent of neighbouring states reinforced the predisposition of successive Thai governments (which were all dominated by the armed forces after the October 1976 coup) to see developments in Indochina as posing threats to Thailand's security. Equally important as an influence on the ASEAN governments' threat perceptions was the behaviour of the Indochinese communist states. Cohen's "crucial inference" that the infringement of "accepted norms of international conduct governing relations between the involved parties" (in Thomas Schelling's words, "the rules of the game") is critical in triggering threat perceptions is clearly relevant to the way in which a series of pronouncements and actions by the Indochinese governments in the 1975-78 period heightened the ASEAN governments' concern over security threats from Indochina. The most blatant example of such infringement of behavioural norms was, of course, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia only three months after Hanoi's Prime Minister had assured the ASEAN governments that Vietnam's intentions were entirely peaceful.
But "intervening predispositions" and the frequently disturbing behaviour of the Indochinese communists do not, by any means, provide a totally satisfactory explanation for the ASEAN governments' often hyperbolic statements concerning threats from communist Indochina. Indeed, there is evidence that certain of the ASEAN governments -- or at least factions within them -- purposely manipulated various types of security threat related to Indochina, to fulfill their own domestic and international political objectives.

The notion of "garrison ideology" is particularly apposite to an assessment of the way in which certain of the ASEAN governments sometimes manipulated their security concerns with Indochina. According to David Brown:

A garrison ideology may be defined as the assertion and proclamation by governments of a real or incipient crisis such that, for the time being at least, internal disagreements must be put to one side if the society is to survive intact. The existence of the crisis demands, it is argued, that political disagreement and criticism of the regime, which might otherwise be regarded as legitimate, must now be regarded as illegitimate, since it is imperative that all stand together for the duration of the crisis. Support for the regime is thus identified with commitment to the society and its survival.6

Brown goes on to note:

6 David Brown, The Legitimacy of Governments in Plural Societies (Singapore: Singapore University Press for the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore, Occasional Paper No. 43, 1984), p. 7. Although Brown emphasized the manipulation of ethnic factors, his assessment of "garrison ideology" clearly also had a wider significance.
However, the regime is unlikely to be able to get away with inventing a crisis... They may indeed be able to exaggerate and dramatize the spectres threatening the society; and thus to inject an element of lie or myth into the language of politics, but... it is the social and political realities which provide the regime with the symbols which it may then manipulate.7

It is impossible to discern, with a high degree of confidence, the precise extent to which the various ASEAN governments consciously exploited putative security threats from Indochina for their own purposes. Nevertheless, there are some quite clear examples where extreme responses to what were objectively not critical security threats from Indochina coincided with recognizable domestic political motives for exaggerating them. The most striking case occurred in Thailand where senior military officers and extreme right-wing politicians justified their seizure of power from a democratically-elected government in October 1976, and the subsequent imposition of harsh and repressive rule, on the grounds that Thailand faced a serious domestic and external communist threat. As well as threatening Thailand with direct invasion, the Indochinese communists were allegedly providing assistance to student radicals in Bangkok and using Vietnamese refugees in northeast Thailand as a "fifth column". According to Brown, the invocation of such bifurcated threats is a typical ploy of Third World governments seeking to enhance their legitimacy: the alleged external threat "gives force to the demand for internal unity", while the domestic threat gives "dramatic immediacy to the external danger".8

7 Ibid., p. 8.
Although the evidence that ASEAN governments manipulated threats from Indochina for domestic political purposes on other occasions is generally not so persuasive as in the example of the Thanin regime, there were fairly strong indications that such manipulation did occur. To some extent the Kriangsak and Prem administrations' sometimes alarmist pronouncements on the Vietnamese threat after the invasion of Cambodia might be excused as the result of not only important "intervening predispositions", but also the "infringement of behavioural norms" evident in Hanoi's occupation of a traditional buffer state. On the other hand, elements in the Thai government sometimes appeared willing to exploit what they may have genuinely perceived as a threat for domestic political purposes, as when Kriangsak called on the Thai people to unite behind the three institutions of "nation, religion and monarch" in January 1979. The Prem government's tough responses to the Vietnamese cross-border incursion into Thailand in June 1980, the series of border incidents in early 1981, the emergence of a new Vietnamese- and Laotian-backed Thai communist group, and the inflow of Indochinese refugees may have been partly aimed at distracting the Thai populace's attention from a deteriorating domestic economic situation, and directing the energies of politically ambitious "Young Turk" army field commanders towards their professional role.

Brown's work on the Malaysian and Singaporean governments' articulation of "siege mentality" concentrated on their exploitation

of ethnic insecurities, and in this sense is directly relevant to the analysis in Chapter 7 of these administrations' responses to the Indochinese refugee crisis. But it is likely that the Singaporean government, in particular, saw potential domestic political benefits in exaggerating threats other than the communal issue. As Brown says

... the present political leaders are undoubtedly worried that [complacency and liberalization] might indeed become the mood of the next political generation; and so they continue to depict "success" in terms primarily of struggle and challenge.10

So there are good reasons for suspecting that official Singaporean pronouncements regarding the seriousness of the threat posed to national and regional security by Vietnam's role in Cambodia and alliance with the Soviet Union from 1979, suggesting that Singapore's leaders took this threat even more seriously than their Thai and Malaysian counterparts, were partially intended to maintain the "siege" component of the legitimacy of the ruling People's Action Party. Indeed, it seems plausible that as domestic security threats became less credible as justifications for maintaining an authoritarian political atmosphere as the 1970s progressed, developments in Indochina fortuitously provided a new complex of threats for the PAP leadership to manipulate.

9 Ibid., pp. 990-1001.
10 Ibid., p. 997.
Some of the ASEAN governments also exaggerated and misrepresented the various threats from Indochina for reasons connected with their international relationships. As Peter Polomka observed, the ASEAN regimes sometimes perceived security threats and rivalry between major powers "not only in terms of danger but also opportunities to extract economic and military resources and security promises from rival interests". 11 From early 1979, Thailand and Singapore attempted, with a large degree of success, to link the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia to broader Western concern over "Soviet expansionism". The Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs' booklet From Phnom Penh to Kabul was one clear manifestation of this strategy aimed at securing greater political, military and economic support from the United States and the West. More particularly, elements within the Thai military leadership used Thailand's role as the "front-line state" facing the "Vietnamese threat" as a justification for requesting Washington to supply highly sophisticated and expensive weapons systems to the Thai armed forces. There is also persuasive evidence that the Thai and Malaysian governments, in particular, exaggerated the security implications of the inflow of Indochinese refugees in order to encourage Western countries to expand and accelerate their resettlement programmes.

One additional point needs to be made in relation to the ASEAN governments' manipulation of threats from Indochina. In exaggerating

and misrepresenting some of these threats, the regimes in question ran risks. One Jakarta-based diplomat had this to say about one effect of the Indonesian regime's exaggeration of security threats for political purposes:

"The more they talk about threats, the more New York bankers pick up the phone and anxiously check with the US Embassy here about future investment prospects." 12

Although the threats in question were primarily domestic, this observation was clearly also relevant to the manipulation of Indochinese threats by Jakarta and its ASEAN partners. Such manipulation had the potential to undermine the confidence of not only foreign investors, but also the local population. Indeed, the ASEAN governments' awareness of such risks may help to account for their reluctance to stress one important factor which might have been expected to figure as a major element of their security concern with Indochina in the immediate aftermath of the communist victories: the threat posed by communist Indochina's potential to act as an alternative developmental model. That the Indochinese communists, owing largely to the eruption of the Third Indochina War, but also because of the cessation of US, Japanese and other economic assistance to Vietnam, bad planning and poor management, 13 would fail to perform as impressively in the post-1975 "peace" as in the preceding war was

12 Quoted by Peter Rodgers, "Behind Jakarta's Threat Syndrome", National Times, 23-29 November 1980.

essentially unpredictable in 1975. At the time of the communist victories, the emergence of a radical new political order and, potentially, an alternative developmental model in Indochina implicitly posed a serious challenge to the somewhat fragile political, economic and social status quo in the ASEAN states. If this threat was manipulated by the ASEAN governments, the manipulation occurred only in vague pronouncements (particularly from Jakarta) on the need for "national resilience" and "regional resilience": the ASEAN governments had no wish to highlight more precisely their own countries' fundamental domestic political, social and economic weaknesses.

More generally, it was sometimes apparent that the desire of one element of an ASEAN government's bureaucracy to exaggerate or otherwise manipulate some aspect of the threat from Indochina was in stark contrast with another department's wish to reassure foreign investors and/or the local population. This phenomenon was evident in both the Thai and Singaporean governments' initial responses to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in early 1979. (In the Singaporean case, at least, there was no evidence of significant divergence in threat perceptions within the government, so the ambivalent response at this time lends credibility to the idea that the threat was sometimes consciously manipulated for ulterior political motives.)
Coping with threats from Indochina: how successful were the ASEAN governments?

Although the ASEAN governments evidently sometimes manipulated for ulterior motives various security threats emanating from communist Indochina, it is clear that they did also genuinely fear the consequences for their countries' security of various Indochinese developments. Sometimes these perceptions were erroneous -- the results of "intervening predispositions" or alarming actions by the Indochinese states. At other times there was a more firm and objective basis for the ASEAN governments' threat assessments. Often it was impossible for an observer to discern the precise motivation or combination of motivations for particular pronouncements by ASEAN governments about their security concerns with Indochina. Nevertheless, it is possible to come to some overall conclusions about how the ASEAN governments coped with what they perceived -- or claimed to perceive -- as threats from their communist neighbours. Probably the most important question to answer is whether the ASEAN governments' handling of their security concerns with Indochina enhanced or damaged their countries' security in relation to Indochina and more generally.

In the 1975-78 period, the ASEAN governments were broadly successful in containing and managing their security concerns with Indochina. This success was not, however, indicative only of skillful diplomacy on the part of the ASEAN states. Rather, it was largely the result of the failure to materialize of the serious threats from Indochina anticipated by many observers in 1975. Hanoi continued to lambast the ASEAN states whenever their policies appeared to be
running counter to Vietnam's security interests (as in the case, for example, of Thailand's continuing military links with the United States). But Hanoi displayed an ever greater willingness, particularly after the Fourth National Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in December 1976, to cooperate with the ASEAN countries as a means of expediting Vietnam's post-war reconstruction. Laos remained suspicious of, and basically hostile towards, Thailand throughout the 1975-77 period, but without Vietnamese backing did not pose a serious threat to Thai security. Democratic Kampuchea, chivvied by Beijing, strove for a working relationship with Bangkok for not only economic reasons, but increasingly also as a geopolitical counter to Vietnamese encroachment. To be sure, there were persistent border clashes between Thailand and its two communist neighbours, and evidence of continuing Pathet Lao and Khmer Rouge backing for the Thai communist insurgents. However, official Thai support -- at least at the local level (and, under the Thanin regime, from Bangkok) -- for anti-communist resistance groups operating into Laos and Cambodia was a prime reason for these phenomena.

The ASEAN states' "success" in managing their security concerns with Indochina from 1975-78 was reinforced by the generally unexpected development of a serious intra-communist dispute, and temporary balance of power, within Indochina, which made all parties to the Indochina conflict more willing to enter into more harmonious relationships with non-communist Southeast Asia. Not only were the ASEAN states able to secure guarantees that Vietnam and Laos would not support insurgencies in the region, but there also seemed even less likelihood than in 1975 of any serious conventional military threat to
the ASEAN region from Vietnam. The flow of refugees was certainly disturbing, but it did provide evidence of the social, economic and political weakness of communist Indochina.

Although extremely serious domestic political, economic and social problems in the four larger ASEAN countries indicated that "national resilience" and "regional resilience" in non-communist Southeast Asia remained long-term objectives rather than realities, it was very clear by the time that the Vietnamese swept the Khmer Rouge from power at the end of 1978 that Indochinese communism could not, for the foreseeable future, threaten the ASEAN governments by presenting their citizens with an attractive alternative political and developmental model. As Singaporean Foreign Minister Rajaratnam claimed at the time, the "dominoes" were falling "the other way".\textsuperscript{14} But this state of affairs had arisen without the ASEAN governments having to exert themselves to solve their own countries' extremely serious social, economic and political problems. Similarly, the fact that the ASEAN governments found themselves involved in reasonably equable working relationships with the Indochinese communist regimes in 1978 was not primarily the result of their own exertions, but rather of the outbreak of renewed conflict in Indochina.

There is a strong case that the higher profile which the ASEAN governments adopted towards the management of their security concerns with Indochina in the 1979-81 period ironically had, on balance, a

Deleterious effect on their countries' security, both in relation to Indochina and more generally. At first glance, this argument appears difficult to justify: after all, the ASEAN states were surely successful in coordinating their policies to lead diplomatic efforts to deny international legitimacy to the Vietnamese-installed regime in Phnom Penh, while keeping alive an alternative (ultimately in the form of the tripartite Cambodian resistance coalition) to Vietnamese domination. Moreover, the Thai authorities were able to drive home very successful counter-insurgency operations against domestic communist insurgents, who were both demoralized and effectively denied external support by the outbreak of the Third Indochina War.

But by 1981 the Cambodian problem had evolved into an uneasy stalemate which showed few signs of being resolveable on terms compatible with ASEAN's diplomatic posture on the issue. Indeed, the final chapter of this thesis argues that this stalemate, to which ASEAN's policy contributed, was detrimental to the security of the Association's members in a number of ways. ASEAN's emphasis on upholding its "prescription for regional order",\(^{15}\) by so stalwartly opposing Vietnamese domination of Cambodia, overshadowed and arguably circumscribed the Association's originally equally important conception of "security... in terms of developmental goals, with corresponding attention given to an underpinning political stability".\(^{16}\) As enunciated in the 1967 Bangkok Declaration and

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\(^{15}\) The phrase is Michael Leifer's. See "ASEAN under stress over Cambodia", *FEER*, 14 June 1984, p. 34.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., loc. cit.
subsequently, this view of security required policy action on three planes -- international, intra-regional, and domestic. At the international level, ASEAN's policy had involved an attempt (admittedly not supported with equal enthusiasm by all the Association's members) to move towards excluding unwelcome political and military intrusions by extra-regional powers, and greater self-management of regional security by regional states themselves. At the intra-regional level, there were attempts to contain and resolve disputes within ASEAN, and between the ASEAN and Indochinese states. At the domestic level, the intention was to reduce and hopefully eliminate the impetus given to insurgency by socioeconomic inequity and political unresponsiveness. Progress towards the realization of "national resilience", "regional resilience" and ZOPFAN was by no means spectacular in the 1975-78 phase, but at least some progress was made towards reducing suspicion and tension between the ASEAN and Indochinese states. But in the 1979-81 phase, ASEAN's policy on Cambodia was arguably counter-productive in relation to the requirements for security based on "resilience" at each of the three levels.

At the international level, ASEAN's Cambodian policy contributed to an intensification of the political and military involvement of the major extra-regional powers in Southeast Asia. Although the region remained low in superpower (that is, Soviet and American) priorities, the prolonged Cambodian stalemate effectively enmeshed Southeast Asia in the Sino-Soviet dispute. As their stake increased, with China extending its support to not only the Khmer Rouge but also the non-communist Cambodian resistance and Thailand, and the Soviet Union
reaping the benefits of its support for Hanoi (in the form of access to Vietnamese naval and air facilities), it seemed ever less likely that the Cambodian conflict could be resolved without the imprimatur of both Beijing and Moscow. A fundamental improvement in Sino-Soviet relations might thus be necessary before any such resolution could occur.

At the intra-regional level, the Cambodian stalemate had the effect of hardening the division between the Indochinese and ASEAN halves of Southeast Asia. Thailand's provision of sanctuary and resupply facilities to the Cambodian resistance provoked not only incessant low-intensity conflict and instability on the Thai-Cambodian border, but also provided the basis for apprehension in Bangkok and the other ASEAN capitals that the Vietnamese army might cross the border in strength to erase the resistance bases once and for all. Less directly, the ASEAN states' policies towards Indochina played a significant role in stimulating the continuing outflow of Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian refugees. The Cambodian dispute also severely restricted the development of economic and other forms of cooperation across the region's ideological divide.

As a result of the way in which it helped to prevent peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the region's communist and non-communist states, ASEAN's Cambodian policy brought to the surface important intra-ASEAN differences in security perspective, particularly between Bangkok and Jakarta. In the interest of ASEAN's cohesion, the Indonesian regime was forced to subordinate its desire to build "a regional balance of power incorporating Vietnam and
directed against China" (one form of "regional resilience") to Thailand's requirement that Vietnam's unilateral revision of the regional order should be contested. But, as Chapter Nine stresses, it was evident from an early stage that Jakarta was apprehensive that ASEAN's Cambodian policy might eventually damage the security of both Indonesia and the ASEAN sub-region as a whole. Similar doubts were evident within the governments of the other ASEAN states, especially Malaysia.

At the domestic level, it is arguable that the Cambodian issue distracted the ASEAN governments from what were rightfully their principal security concerns. It appeared that the spectre of a "Vietnamese threat" or less precisely defined "regional instability" occasioned by the conflict in Cambodia was providing a rationale for armed forces' leaders in the ASEAN countries to press for higher defence expenditures and more sophisticated military equipment. Even before the invasion of Cambodia, one analyst had speculated that Vietnam

... might one day embark on a deliberate policy of military bluster against its Southeast Asian neighbours, forcing them to divert financial resources from economic development to military preparedness, in the hope that a slowdown in economic growth might help radicalize their populations and give a boost to local communist parties.18

The irony was that there were good grounds for arguing that a trend in this direction was evident, especially from 1979, even without Hanoi

17 Ibid., p. 36.
18 David Jenkins, FEER, 24 June 1977, p. 15.
needing to embark on a "deliberate policy" to this end. There was no evidence that increasing expenditure on defence was directly damaging the ASEAN states' economies, but as one writer observed, the ASEAN states' rising defence budgets in the late 1970s and early 1980s coincided with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund drawing attention "to the relative decline in amounts set aside -- particularly in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand -- for development purposes, for health and welfare".\(^{19}\) Moreover, within the defence sector the ASEAN governments' defence policies sometimes diverted resources away from counter-insurgency.

The prolonged confrontation with Indochina also had the potential to retard the development of stable and responsive political systems in the three largest ASEAN states, particularly Thailand, by providing a justification for the armed forces to continue claiming a key role in government.

Systemic Security or Regime Security?

Although "security" is a widely-used core concept in the study of International Relations, there is a relative paucity of conceptual discussion of it in the literature. Something similar is true of official use of the term, which governments throughout the world cite as a justification for an extremely wide range of policies and actions.

However, one recent contribution to the literature of Strategic Studies and International Relations provides a relatively

comprehensive and satisfying analysis of what "security" is, and how it might be achieved. Buzan's central arguments are that the "national security problem" cannot be understood without reference to factors at three levels of analysis (the individual, the national and the international), and that "a full understanding of security at each level can only be gained if it is related to the other two". For practical purposes, Buzan suggests that durable security at all three levels could be best achieved if governments consciously adopted a "systemic security policy" based on

... a multi-layered approach. This could start with territorial defence strategies, which would ensure individual and local participation in national security. On top of this could come a national security policy based on devising self-help solutions to conspicuous vulnerabilities in the social, political, economic or military sectors of the state. Beyond that could exist a variety of security arrangements among groups of states. These might include alliances and defence communities, formalized security communities and zones of peace, arms control agreements, dispute settlement procedures, arms production and purchase agreements, and such like.

Buzan's proposals are interesting in the context of the ASEAN states as they tally very closely with the concepts which, until the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, dominated ASEAN's official collective line on security. ASEAN's declaratory consensus still stressed the building of "national resilience" and "regional resilience", the

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21 Ibid., p. 245.
22 Ibid., p. 254.
amelioration of relations with Indochina, and (as formulated in ZOPFAN) the exclusion, as far as was practically possible, of the military and political influence of the great powers. Although the governments of the three larger ASEAN states did not make significant progress towards ameliorating their very serious domestic social, economic and political problems, none of the ASEAN regimes generally responded to Indochinese developments in the 1975-78 phase by stressing their implications for "security" in solely a narrow, military sense.

Why it was that after the invasion of Cambodia, the ASEAN states (including Indonesia, the main proponent of what amounted to a "systemic security" approach) were willing to allow their "prescription for regional order" effectively to eclipse their earlier, and arguably much more judicious holistic conception of security is not entirely clear. Certainly, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia drastically changed the strategic environment of Thailand and, to a lesser extent, the other ASEAN members. Moreover, Chapter 9 discussed a variety of factors which militated against a change in ASEAN's policy of attempting to prevent Hanoi from consolidating its hold on Cambodia. But on their own, these reasons do not provide a totally satisfying explanation for the ASEAN governments' willingness to tolerate the detrimental effect on "national resilience" and "regional resilience" of ASEAN's policies towards Indochina from early 1979.

An additional explanation might be that, like most of their counterparts throughout the world, the ASEAN governments were primarily concerned with "immediate problems of management and
survival" in both domestic and international spheres. Because of the problems which they encountered in maintaining their domestic political legitimacy, the ASEAN governments were sometimes as much or more concerned with promoting their own security in power in the short term as with enhancing the more broadly-defined longer term security of their countries, let alone of the ASEAN community or the region as a whole. So when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, the ASEAN governments had good reasons for calculating that in the short term at least, the benefits of adopting a policy of confrontation towards Vietnam would outweigh the costs.

The successful implementation of the policies which would have been necessary for the achievement of "national resilience" and "regional resilience" might well have been incompatible with the security in power of at least the three largest ASEAN countries' regimes. A credible commitment to the realization of "resilience" at the national level would have necessitated a fundamental redistribution of resources towards the rural poor, the decentralization of governmental power to regional and local authorities, an increase in popular participation in the political process, and an eschewal of high levels of defence expenditure (and particularly the purchase of sophisticated military equipment from overseas) in deference to the need to concentrate government spending on development programmes. At the international level, such a commitment would have necessitated a willingness to deemphasize

23 The phrase is Christopher Clapham's. See his Third World Politics: An Introduction (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 182.
historical and ideological differences with the Indochinese in order to reduce intra-regional tension and to construct a broad-based working relationship between non-communist and communist Southeast Asia. Ultimately, it would also have been necessary for the ASEAN governments to reduce their political and military links with the United States: in particular, the US bases in the Philippines would need to be phased out.

These measures would have involved the ASEAN governments in making some extremely unpalatable sacrifices in relation to the instruments they used to maintain their own security in power. For example, any significant amelioration of the three (or perhaps four) largest ASEAN countries' domestic social, economic and political problems would have risked alienating the narrow, elitist power bases of the regimes in power. The political role or influence of the military in the four largest ASEAN states militated against any serious attempts to restrain increases in defence expenditure. Downgraded links with the United States would have been unwelcome in view of the reliance of the ASEAN governments (particularly Bangkok and Manila) on substantial political, military and economic support from Washington. But also, rapprochement with Indochina would have deprived the ASEAN governments of some extremely important elements of the panoply of security threats which they sometimes manipulated both to extract greater benefit from their relationships with extra-regional powers and to enhance their domestic political legitimacy.

On the other hand, in the short-term at least, the benefits accruing to the ASEAN governments from their policies towards the new crisis in Indochina from 1979 were considerable, extending beyond the
mere denial of Vietnamese control over Cambodia. The new Indochina crisis, in all its aspects, assisted the ASEAN governments to maintain their domestic legitimacy and external support. However, while this suggests that the desire to maintain or enhance their own security in power may have been an important influence on the ASEAN governments' adoption of a confrontational posture towards Indochina after the Vietnamese invasion, it does not imply that the effective abandonment of a "systemic security" approach would continue to yield net benefits in the medium to long-term. Indeed, by the time of the International Conference on Kampuchea in July 1981 a range of side-effects which were clearly detrimental to "security" in its wider sense were already evident. Moreover, there were indications that, despite the short-term benefits, important elements in the ASEAN governments doubted the wisdom of policies which concentrated so exclusively on one of Buzan's threee "levels" of security -- the national level.
APPENDIX 1

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND: IDEOLOGICAL DEBATES AND EXTERNAL ORIENTATION, 1975-81

In early 1976, General Saiyud Kerdphol, Deputy Director of the Thai government's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), suggested that the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) had been unable to convene a Party Congress because of an internal power struggle between pro-Chinese and pro-Vietnamese factions. Similarly, Martin Stuart-Fox has asserted that between 1976 and 1978 Chinese- and Vietnamese-backed CPT factions competed for control of "key areas" in Thailand's north and northeast: this was the latest phase of allegedly long-standing competition between Hanoi and Beijing for control of the Thai insurgency. While these arguments probably exaggerated the situation, it does seem that the late 1970s saw an eruption of ideological debate and factional infighting within the Party, following precedents set earlier in the Party's internal history.

The removal of the Thai military government by a student-led uprising in October 1973 prompted an intense debate in the CPT over...

Bangkok Post, 7 February 1976.


its revolutionary strategy. By 1975 the current orthodoxy of a "hard-line" strategy based on an essentially Maoist rural-based armed struggle was being challenged by some within the Party who argued for a "soft-line" based on the premise that the CPT could benefit by supporting the now reformist parliamentary system. At this stage, there was apparently no evidence of any correlation between the views of these "revisionists" and their ethnicity or external orientation. Indeed, the Poliburo member who had initiated (or at least publicized at an early stage) the revolt against the Maoist underpinnings of the CPT's strategy was a Bangkok-based Sino-Thai. But although the disputes within the CPT centred on revolutionary methods rather than external allegiances, the "revisionist" line coincided broadly with Hanoi's post-1973 view that urban political struggle was more likely to succeed than rural guerilla warfare.

Superficially, the accretion to the CPT after the October 1976 military coup of perhaps as many as 4000 left-wing students, intellectuals and other dissidents represented a tremendous boost to the movement's strength. But this massive influx of new recruits also accentuated the Party's identity crisis. The radicals who fled to the jungles in late 1976 and 1977 came almost entirely from urban areas,

5 Ibid., pp. 317-18.
6 Chatchai Yenbamrong, Straits Times, 21 January 1981. Morell and Chai-anan ("Thailand's Revolutionary Insurgency...", p. 293) quote a police estimate of "2000 to 3000".
and predominantly from Bangkok. Their view of Thai society, and hence their political attitudes, were profoundly at odds with those of the rather narrow, rural-based CPT orthodoxy. As Girling has pointed out, their idea of a correct revolutionary strategy for Thailand was closer to the Leninist model of the urban-based Bolshevik revolution than to Mao's protracted rural guerilla warfare.\footnote{John Girling, \textit{Thailand: Society and Politics} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 276.} Initially in private only, the newcomers opposed the CPT's foreign policy orientation towards Beijing and away from Hanoi and Moscow. So the CPT's new recruits, while providing it with a vastly expanded pool of potential leaders, also heightened tension within the Party.

In September 1977 the party formed the Coordinating Committee of Patriotic and Democracy-loving Forces (CCPDF), including representatives of the Socialist Party, the Socialist Front Party, the farmers', students' and labour movements, and the mass media, as well as the CPT itself.\footnote{David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, \textit{Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution} (Cambridge, Mass.: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981), p. 297.} The Laos-based CCPDF seems to have been intended as a united front mechanism to accommodate the newcomers, who were not yet Party members. But after toeing the Party line for perhaps a year\footnote{John McBeth, \textit{FEER}, 8 February 1980, p. 32.} the Front began openly to criticize mainstream CPT ideology, and apparently called for a new approach to revolutionary strategy in Thailand, in the light of Vietnam's experience.\footnote{Ibid., 8 June 1979, p. 19.}
Vietnamese influence over the CCPDF at this time is not clear, but efforts were apparently made by Hanoi and Moscow to encourage this germ of a more accommodating CPT attitude towards relations with Hanoi. For example, it was reported that Moscow deposited substantial funds (equivalent to US$10 million) in Vientiane for Thai students who wished to study in the Soviet Union.11

Deteriorating Relations between the CPT and Hanoi

The delicate balance that the CPT maintained in its relations with China and Vietnam was threatened increasingly by external developments as well as by tension within the Party. Even before the Indochinese communist victories of 1975 there had been friction between the CPT and Hanoi: according to a CPT document, the Vietnamese removed arms from a shipment from China to the Thai communists.12 Manipulating its greater ability to use material aid to the CPT as a lever after Chinese assistance to the Thai communists diminished with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bangkok and Beijing, from 1975 Hanoi tried to force Soviet weapons rather than the preferred US arms (available to the Vietnamese in


great quantity from stocks captured from the Saigon regime) on the
CPT, in a move interpreted as an attempt to foster dependence on
Moscow. Moreover, according to a subsequent CPT allegation the
Vietnamese charged that the CPT had missed an opportunity to seize
power at the time of the student uprising and overthrow of the
military regime in October 1973; that the CPT's essentially Maoist
strategy of rural encirclement was inappropriate to a country so much
smaller than China, and hence that the Thai communists should
emphasize revolutionary struggle in Thailand's plains and cities as
well as in mountain and jungle areas; and that the CPT opposed the
Soviet notion of proletarian internationalism -- which was supported
by Hanoi.

This last point had come to the fore in late 1977 or early 1978
when Hanoi proposed, through Vientiane, joint military efforts by the
CPT and Pathet Lao (and perhaps the Vietnamese army) aimed at
"liberating" at least some of Thailand. Having previously turned

14 "On the conflicts...", loc. cit.
15 "Operation Indochina", interview with a leading CPT cadre
concerning the Indochina situation and past relations among
"fraternal" parties, in Northern Star ("a publication of the
CPT's northern branches"), Vol. 1, No. 7 (January 1980), quoted
by Santi, p. 15. The Vietnamese party's last public greeting to
the CPT (in December 1977) stressed the need for the Thai
communists to hold high "the banner of national independence"
(that is, to avoid close ties with Beijing) and to form "a joint
national and democratic united front", and expressed the hope
that the "militant solidarity" of the Vietnamese and Thai parties
"based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian
internationalism" would "become even stronger and more
consolidated". Hanoi radio in Thai, 0500 gmt, 1 December 1977
16 "On the conflicts...", p. 3; "Operation Indochina", pp. 20, 23.
down a CPT request for arms and ammunition, Hanoi offered (again through Vientiane) weapons to the party's Laos-based northeast regional committee (which included a large proportion of Vietnamese-trained cadres) at the same time that military cooperation was suggested. This was perceived, probably correctly, by the CPT's regional and central leadership as an attempt to split the party.\(^1\) The regional committee rejected the idea of direct Vietnamese or Laotian involvement in its struggle: not only did such "cooperation" threaten to split the Thai communist movement, and alienate the Party from the Thai people, but it also augured ill for the independence and integrity of a future communist-ruled Thailand.\(^\) These moves to subvert the CPT's northeast regional command may have been linked to shadowy Vietnamese and Laotian plans -- if such ever existed -- to detach Thailand's northeastern provinces to form a "protectorate" on the west bank of the Mekong.

When the CPT rebuffed Hanoi's approach on the matter of military cooperation, the Vietnamese made it clear that they would not welcome back to Hanoi the CPT's representative -- who was then in Vientiane.\(^\) This rift between Vietnam and the CPT came at a time (1978) when Hanoi's conflicts with Cambodia and China as well as its domestic problems were intensifying. As the year progressed, Hanoi saw a need to enhance its position in these disputes by breaking out of what it

\(^{17}\) Interview with "Comrade Paitoon", a member of the CPT's northeast regional committee, \textit{FEER}, 19 September 1980, p. 44; Santi, p. 15.

\(^{18}\) Santi, p. 15.

\(^{19}\) John McBeth, \textit{FEER}, 19 September 1980, p. 44.
perceived to be diplomatic isolation in the region: the Vietnamese leadership decided that it was important to improve their country's relations with the ASEAN states.

Having reached a deadlock in relations with the CPT, it was presumably felt that there would be little to lose if both the Vietnamese government and communist party disowned this bugbear of the Thai government. In this way, Hanoi would be able to outmanoeuvre Beijing, which had made it clear that it would maintain "party-to-party" links with regional communist movements, a practice that was widely seen as duplicitous in the ASEAN capitals. When the Vietnamese Prime Minister (Pham Van Dong) visited Bangkok in early September 1978, he and Kriangsak signed a communique including a pledge to refrain "... from interference in each other's internal affairs and from both direct and indirect subversion...". But there was nothing fundamentally novel about this statement of mutual good intent: indeed, the communique was said by the two leaders to be a reaffirmation of the principles included in the Thai-Vietnamese joint communique of August 1976.

Although the CPT apparently took an initially optimistic view of the Kriangsak-Dong communique, viewing it as a "pragmatic" ploy by Hanoi, and strove "to maintain a positive image of Vietnam", its distrust of Vietnam was heightened by the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese friendship treaty in November: Moscow had been viewed by

20 Bangkok home service, 1300 gmt, 10 September 1978 (SWB FE/5913/A3/6, 11 September 1978).
21 Ibid.
22 Santi, p. 15.
the Thai communists as "revisionist" since the late 1960s. But despite attacking the Soviet Union's international policies, the VOPT radio station at this stage avoided directly criticizing Hanoi or its relationship with Moscow. The CPT was probably still anxious to avoid an absolute and open split with Hanoi (and Vientiane) for fear of the effect that the loss of its Laotian sanctuaries would have on its operations. Material aid from Indochina apparently all but ceased in the last few months of 1978, although some Chinese supplies were still being conveyed through Laos.

But the scene was now set for the final breach between the CPT and the Vietnam-Laos axis. In December 1978 Vietnamese forces invaded and occupied Cambodia, depriving the CPT units on the Thai-Cambodian border of the sanctuaries that they had been able to use in Democratic Kampuchea. An unknown, but noteworthy, number of CPT guerillas in the area joined their Khmer Rouge allies in resisting the Vietnamese army. Others went to southern Laos, but the majority had fled across the border into Thailand by early 1979. But the CPT did not openly denounce the Vietnamese invasion.


25 Ibid. This report was confirmed by CPT cadres interviewed by Nayan Chanda of Far Eastern Economic Review in February 1981. Personal interview with Chanda, Canberra, August 1982.
Thai-Laotian Detente and the CPT

While Vietnamese forces were consolidating their hold on Cambodia in January 1979, the Thai Prime Minister travelled to the capital of Vietnam's ally, Laos, for an official visit. When in Vientiane, Kriangsak joined his Laotian counterpart, Kaysone Phomvihan, in signing a communique which included a renunciation of subversion across the Thai-Laotian border. Like the Kriangsak-Dong communique of the previous September, the Kriangsak-Kaysone accord was a reiteration of principles agreed in August 1976. But the breakdown in relations between the CPT and its Vietnamese and Laotian allies, coupled with the deepening crisis in relations between Vietnam and Laos on one hand and China and Cambodia on the other, motivated a new sincerity on Vientiane's part in relation to this effective disavowal of support for the CPT. Moreover, the Laotians probably hoped that by abandoning the CPT they could induce the Thai authorities to cease support for the resistance inside Laos.

In January 1979, more or less simultaneously with the Kriangsak-Kaysone communique, the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) ordered the CPT to vacate its long-established sanctuaries in Laos by the end of the year. The reason given by the Laotians for this move was that there were differences

26 Also, in March 1978, Vientiane had attempted to reassure its non-communist neighbours (Thailand and Burma) that it would "never allow itself to be used as a launching pad for aggression". Straits Times, 27 March 1978.

between the political lines of the CPT and LPRP: specifically, CPT cadres were accused of criticizing Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and role in Laos. It seemed initially that the Laotian expulsion order might have been intended as a coercive measure aimed at forcing the CPT to cooperate with Vientiane and Hanoi, and to distance itself from Beijing. But subsequent reports and events revealed that the Laotians were in earnest. Udom Srisuwan, a member of the CPT Politburo who was chairman of the CCPDF and the Party's senior official responsible for liaison with Vientiane, revealed on his defection in 1982 that after the Laotian order to quit the country, Vietnamese troops had surrounded the CCPDF's headquarters camp. Udom was disarmed by Pathet Lao troops and escorted to the border with Thailand before being released. The CPT claimed that 500 tons of Chinese arms intended for its forces were withheld by the Laotians and that requests for the return to its control of thousands of northeastern Thai youths mobilized for the Pathet Lao before 1975 were ignored.

Laotian pressure on the CPT did not end with the expulsion notice of January 1979. In April, Kaysone visited Bangkok, and with Kriangsak signed a further, more detailed communique. The new accord included an agreement to

... adopt necessary and effective measures to prevent and smash all movements of terrorists using the border areas as hiding places to carry out operations to

29 Ibid., loc. cit.
disturb the peace of the peoples of both sides of the border...30

In the light of the hardening of official Thai attitudes towards Vietnam because of the invasion and occupation of Cambodia, it seems extraordinary that Bangkok should have been willing to pursue such close cooperation with Laos, Hanoi's close ally. But, on the other hand, it is not surprising that Bangkok seized the opportunity to strike a severe blow against the CPT presented by this government with Vientiane on active cooperation against cross-border insurgency. By June there were reports of attacks by Pathet Lao forces on CPT units in border areas.31 The Thai military authorities in the northeast confirmed that the Pathet Lao were cooperating with them against the CPT, and had provided information on the disposition of CPT bases.32 According to the governor of Thailand's Nong Khai province (on the border with Laos) a large number of guerillas expelled from Laos were later captured "thanks to the friendly relations between Thailand and Laos and their cooperation in exchanging information".33

30 "Joint Communique between the LPDR and the Kingdom of Thailand", Bangkok domestic service in Thai, 1300 gmt, 4 April 1979 (FBIS-APA-79-067, 5 April 1979).

31 See, for example, Vientiane domestic service in Lao, 0400 gmt, 22 June 1979 (FBIS-APA-79-124, 26 June 1979).

32 See statement by Major-General Arthit Kamlang-ek, Commander of the 2nd Army Region's 3rd Division, Agence France Presse (Hong Kong) in English, 0957 gmt, 15 June 1979 (FBIS-APA-79-118, 18 June 1979); Santi, p. 15.

It seems reasonably clear that the Laotian moves against the CPT were the result of pressure from Hanoi, which could no longer tolerate the Thai Party's fundamentally pro-Chinese stance -- especially as this was maintained after China's military attack on Vietnam in February and March 1979. According to one Laotian diplomat, "we have agreed to support the Thai government in eliminating communist insurgents because they are backed by China". Vietnam's increasing dependence on Moscow may also have intensified Hanoi's difficulties in continuing relations with the anti-Soviet CPT. Beijing's support for the Khmer Rouge resistance in Cambodia may have provided an additional reason for Laos to side with the Thai authorities against the CPT: there was a danger that the Thai Communists would assist the Chinese in providing logistical assistance to Pol Pot's forces.

The CPT's Breach with Hanoi

By August 1979 Hanoi was attacking the CPT in such terms as "Peking-armed terrorists" and "Maoist bandit groups led by Peking henchmen". Vietnam's deputy foreign minister, Phan Hien, asserted in November that there were no links left between the CPT and Hanoi or Vientiane. In early 1981, a senior Vietnamese diplomat based in

34 Sunday Mail (Brisbane), 8 April 1979, quoted by Stuart-Fox, p. 194.
35 Stuart-Fox, p. 194.
37 Bangkok Post, 5 November 1979.
Bangkok reiterated Hanoi's claim that the "Maoist" CPT had no chance of succeeding in its struggle against Bangkok: political change in Thailand would hopefully occur through gradual, constitutional evolution. By making it clear that it had washed its hands of the CPT, Hanoi hoped to focus Thai attention on China's continuing assistance to the Party -- rather than on the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia -- as a security threat. This was made explicit in March 1981 when the Vietnamese army newspaper Quan Doi Nhan Dan claimed that the Thai authorities might be using attacks on Hanoi's role in Cambodia to divert the Thai people's attention from the activities of CPT guerillas "armed and commanded by Peking".

The trauma of being abandoned by Vietnam did not lead the CPT immediately to attack openly its erstwhile allies. Rather, there were five months of intense debate within the Party -- and even then it seems that there was difficulty in evolving a consensual approach to the Party's foreign policy in the light of the new regional circumstances. This may have indicated that elements within the CPT preferred to keep open the possibility of renewed links with Vietnam and Laos. The CPT may also have been waiting until all its forces were safely evacuated from Laos before criticizing Hanoi openly.

Criticism of Vietnam by the CPT's principal public relations medium, the China-based Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT) radio station, was at first oblique. From mid-May 1979 the VOPT repeated

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38 Personal interview with senior Vietnamese diplomat, Bangkok, 10 March 1981.
39 Quoted by Bangkok Post, 2 March 1981.
statements from elsewhere in Southeast Asia (including the Thai government) criticizing Vietnam for its creation of a refugee problem, its invasion of Cambodia, its role as a Soviet surrogate, and the threat that it posed to Thailand's security. The first criticism of Vietnam that could be said to be sponsored by the CPT came in early June, when the VOPT broadcast the text of a paper entitled "Real dangers which Thailand is facing", by Si Inthapanti, a journalist member of the CCPDF. Si accused Vietnam, backed by the Soviet Union, of planning to invade Thailand, and made allusions to Vietnamese attempts to subvert or split the CPT, alleging that "Attempts have been made to set up a puppet united front and a puppet army" as a cover for such an invasion. Si portrayed the CPT as more ready than the Thai government to defend Thailand's sovereignty against Vietnamese military incursions.

The VOPT continued indirect attacks on Vietnam until 10 July, when it broadcast the text of an article entitled "The Thai people must totally destroy the aggressor enemy". While Vietnam was not named as "the enemy" in the statement, it was nevertheless the most forthright attack on Hanoi so far. It was also the VOPT's last broadcast, being followed immediately by an announcement that the station would "temporarily suspend its broadcasts from 11 July".

40 See, for example, the following VOPT broadcasts in 1979 (all at 1000 gmt): 13 May (SWB FE/6118/A3/1, 17 May 1979); 17 May (SWB FE/6118/A3/2, 17 May 1979); 16 May (SWB FE/6119/A3/6, 18 May 1979); 18 May (SWB FE/6121/A3/13, 21 May 1979); 19 May (SWB FE/6121/A3/13, 21 May 1979); 20 May (SWB FE/6124/A3/5, 24 May 1979); 23 May (SWB FE/6125/A3/14, 25 May 1979).

41 VOPT, 1000 gmt, 7 June 1979 (SWB FE/6140/A3/2-5, 13 June 1979).

42 Ibid., 1000 gmt, 10 July 1979 (SWB FE/6165/A3/7, 12 July 1979).

43 Ibid.
The CPT in Crisis

The reason for the cessation of VOPT broadcasts was not made public by the CPT, and remained unclear. But it appears most likely that closure of the radio station was a result of improved relations between Bangkok and Beijing, as well as continuing doubts and conflicts within the Party concerning its external orientation. While the CPT's criticisms of Hanoi ultimately appeared attuned to the current Chinese line (to the extent of not mentioning "US imperialism" as an enemy), this was due as much to the CPT's own experience of Vietnamese policies as to pressure from Beijing.\textsuperscript{44} In postulating a direct and immediate Vietnamese military threat to Thailand the CPT was probably being disingenuous: it seems far more likely that the most serious threat that it saw from Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia was actually to the Thai communist movement's own long-term independence. Indeed, the CPT leadership was apparently convinced that the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia were motivated principally by Hanoi's intolerance of any nearby revolutionary movement opposing the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{45} The CPT's warnings that Vietnam posed a threat to Thailand's security were probably aimed largely at winning popular support within Thailand and contributing to the construction of a broad united front: like the Thai government, the

\textsuperscript{44} See Martha Winnacker, "Another view of the crisis", Southeast Asia Chronicle, No. 69 (January-February 1980), p. 19.

\textsuperscript{45} Santi, p. 13.
CPT attempted to manipulate the "Vietnamese threat" by being seen to be concerned about it.  

The Vietnamese and Laotian renunciation of support for the CPT and the Thai communists' loss of sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, coupled with a drastic cut in Chinese assistance as a consequence of Beijing's improved relations with Bangkok, resulted in a marked decline in communist insurgency in Thailand's eastern and northeastern border provinces in 1979. Before September 1978 the CPT was reportedly growing at a rate of between six and ten per cent each year, and fielded perhaps as many as 13,000 guerillas, backed by perhaps 100,000 sympathizers. But the crisis of 1978 and 1979, including the improvement in China's relations with the Thai and US governments (the CPT's two main enemies), had a traumatic effect on the morale of the Thai communist movement.

The fierce statement by Si Inthapanti condemning Vietnam in June 1979 was widely seen (perhaps incorrectly) as an official and definitive declaration of CCPDF views. The fact that it was the CCPDF

46 See John McBeth, FEER, 19 September 1980, p. 44. Most strikingly, the CPT claimed that its own forces, rather than the Thai army, were the first to clash with Vietnamese troops who made an incursion into Thailand in June 1980. Tony Davis, Asiaweek, 7 August 1980, p. 36.


which had spearheaded criticism of the CPT orthodoxy in the 1977-79 period and had appeared to favour a closer relationship with Hanoi highlighted the fact that the Front was riven with ideological conflict.

Although an amnesty for CPT members and associates declared by Kriangsak in early 1978 (apparently as a result of pressure from the army's "Young Turks") had little effect at first, by the end of 1979 there had been reportedly over two and a half thousand defections from the four thousand or so radicals who had associated themselves with the CPT after the October 1976 coup. This figure may be an exaggeration, but it seems clear that there was profound disillusionment in the Front's ranks with the strict Maoist line of senior CPT cadres, the Party's refusal to accept Vietnamese and Soviet aid, the lack of attention paid to the specific nature of Thai society in developing the Party's revolutionary strategy, and the paucity of democracy within the Party.

51 Morell and Chai-anan, Political Conflict in Thailand..., p. 303.
52 Chatchai Yenbamrong, Straits Times, 21 January 1981.
53 John McBeth, FEER, 22 August 1980, pp. 30-32. It is not absolutely clear whether those critical of the Party leadership's stand on Vietnamese assistance would have been willing themselves to accept such aid, bearing in mind the "strings" (direct Vietnamese and Laotian military intervention on the CPT's behalf in northeast Thailand) attached: but it seems likely that the critics within the CCPDF were less averse than the Party elders to such an arrangement.
Vietnam, Laos and an Alternative Thai Revolutionary Movement

Not all those who defected from the CPT and CCPDF returned to the mainstream of Thai society. As well as being disillusioned with the CPT's overwhelmingly rural, Maoist approach to building a revolutionary base, many Front members had objected to the way that the CPT's leadership took sides with China in its dispute with Vietnam, and had urged a more detached stance. Some, believing that continued Vietnamese and Laotian support was important for the CPT, had even supported Hanoi's intervention in Cambodia. When CPT units were expelled from Laos in early 1979, about two hundred CCPDF members who could no longer tolerate the CPT's pro-Chinese orientation were reportedly allowed by the Laotian authorities to move to Vientiane from their base near the border with Thailand. According to Thai security sources, this revolt caused the partial collapse of the CCPDF.

The CCPDF members who detached themselves from the CPT included important figures such as Thongpak Phiengkat (a former United Socialist Front Member of Parliament), Therdphum Chaidee (a labour activist and member of the CCPDF's nine-strong executive), and Boonyen Wothong (a former Socialist Party of Thailand MP, who was also a

54 Christian Science Monitor, 25 July 1979; Chatchai Yenbamrong, Straits Times, 21 January 1981. Some CPT soldiers, low-ranking cadres, and perhaps even a member of the Party's northeast regional committee were also among the renegades, according to John McBeth, FEER, 27 July 1979, pp. 30-31.

member of the CCPDF executive). There is no evidence that they held any great affection for Hanoi, but it seems that they saw a brighter future for the Thai revolution (and perhaps their own political careers) if they accepted Vietnamese tutelage. It also seems logical that Hanoi might have wished to compensate for its almost total loss of influence over the CPT by sponsoring an alternative Thai revolutionary movement. Vietnamese moves in this direction may have begun as early as October 1978, when Boonyen and Therdphum allegedly visited Ho Chi Minh City and possibly Hanoi.

It seems that Hanoi and Vientiane were from the start not wholeheartedly enthusiastic about supporting the new Thai revolutionary movement (often referred to as the Thai Northeastern Liberation Party or TNLP), which was apparently formed in Laos by CCPDF defectors in 1979. Hanoi's primary objective with regard to Thailand after intervening in Cambodia was to secure Bangkok's eventual acquiescence in Vietnam's role there, to prize apart the community of interest that had developed between Beijing and Bangkok and, in the meantime, to discourage the Thais from taking practical measures to support the Khmer Rouge. It was necessary, therefore, to allay Thai fears that Vietnam represented a security threat best countered by alliance with China and the Cambodian resistance. Vietnamese commentaries stressed Hanoi's allegedly peaceful

58 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
intentions, emphasizing "Beijing's long-term plan to push Southeast Asia into a chaotic situation so that it may profit from its... collusion with imperialism".\footnote{Hanoi international service in English, 1000 gmt, 27 June 1979 (FBIS-APA-79-126, 28 June 1979).} It was also necessary for the Laotian government -- which denied that it was harbouring Thai revolutionaries\footnote{Winnacker, p. 19.} -- to maintain a reasonably amicable working relationship with Bangkok, in the hope of minimizing both the threat from right-wing Lao resistance groups supported from Thailand and disruption to Laotian trade (which would be drastically curtailed if Bangkok closed the border as a result of guerilla incidents).

According to one report, the lack of attention that the "new" Thai revolutionary party received from the Vietnamese and Laotian authorities was the reason that many of its members ultimately decided to defect for a second time -- this time across the Mekong to surrender to the Thai government.\footnote{Chatchai Yenbamrong, Straits Times, 21 January 1981.} These defections did not spell the end of Vietnamese and Laotian links with Thai revolutionaries, however. In August 1980, Vientiane radio broadcast\footnote{Vientiane home service, 0001 gmt, 5 August 1980 (SWB FE/6491/A3/5, 7 August 1980).} a statement by the "Democratic Alliance of Thailand" (possibly another name for the TNLP) condemning the Thai government for provocations against Laos across the Mekong.

As one senior adviser to the Thai government pointed out in early
1981, quite apart from the Thai radicals remaining in Laos, there were still elements in the CPT itself which were not unsympathetic to Hanoi, and who acted as "agents of influence" for the Vietnamese. Certainly, ideological debate within the CPT did not cease after the break with Vietnam and Laos in late 1978 and early 1979. Although Beijing was the CPT's only external source of assistance after the loss of support from Indochina, there was profound disillusionment with China amongst the upper-echelon Party leadership as well as lower-level cadres and remaining CCPDF members. There was alarm at the remarkable changes that had occurred in Beijing's foreign policy since the mid-1970s. China's opening to the West (particularly in terms of its alignment with the United States against Moscow) and its policy of trying to maintain friendly relations with Third World governments (including the Thai regime and its ASEAN counterparts) whatever their political hue, were especially disturbing. Many within or associated with the CPT were not satisfied by Beijing's argument that such compromises in foreign policy were necessary in order to counteract "Soviet expansionism".

Although Beijing continued to give limited moral and political

63 Personal interview with Dr Kramol Thongthammachat (Dean, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University), Bangkok, 13 March 1981.

64 This claim corresponded with an averral by the CPT leadership that CCPDF members who criticized the Party's links with China were "Soviet agents". Morell and Chai-anan, p. 305.

support to the CPT, material assistance had diminished to a trickle by 1979. While the Chinese stressed that relations with the CPT were still maintained on a "party-to-party" basis, and did not go as far as Hanoi and Vientiane in promising to curb involvement with the CPT, when Deng Xiaoping visited Bangkok in November 1978 he claimed that a "satisfactory understanding" had been reached on this issue with the Thai government.\textsuperscript{66} Perhaps as a result of this "understanding", the CPT came under increasing pressure from Beijing to subjugate its struggle against the Thai government to the requirements of China's principal strategic objective in Southeast Asia of bolstering opposition to what it saw as Hanoi's attempts to impose "regional hegemony".\textsuperscript{67} Certainly the CPT's desire to be seen as concerned was probably insufficient to explain its announcement in early 1979 that it was willing to ally itself with "any parties" (including the Thai government) to fight any Vietnamese attempt to invade Thailand. The closure of the VOPT radio station in July 1979 may have resulted from a refusal by the CPT's Central Committee to accept restrictions that Beijing wished to impose on the station's transmissions.\textsuperscript{68} According to Thai military sources,\textsuperscript{69} in 1980 Beijing warned the CPT not to

\textsuperscript{66} David Bonavia, FEER, 17 November 1978, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{67} For example, on 20 October 1979, Chinese Vice President Ji Pengfei told the editor of the Bangkok Post that the CPT ought to join the Kriangsak government in opposing "Vietnamese hegemony". Winnacker, p. 20. Fearing to bolster the CPT's credibility, however, the Thai government rebuffed repeated overtures from the CPT. See Tony Davis, Asiaweek, 7 August 1981, pp. 34-35.

\textsuperscript{68} Chatchai Yenbamrong, Straits Times, 21 January 1981.

\textsuperscript{69} Quoted by John McBeth, FEER, 22 August 1980, pp. 30-32.
continue working in urban areas. These were all indications that the Chinese were trying to reduce the threat posed by the CPT to the Thai government, as an expedient measure to maintain Bangkok's support against Vietnam's role in Cambodia.

The CPT Redefines its Strategy

The fact that the CPT was profiting little by its relationship with China spurred efforts by senior figures within the Party to redefine its foreign policy position in more independent terms. The CPT's relationship with Democratic Kampuchea had been based essentially on mutual opposition to both Washington and Moscow, and the Thai communists' use of Cambodian sanctuaries. Although the CPT publicly condemned Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia, an official document circulated within the Thai Party in 1979 criticized the Khmer Rouge on a wide range of issues, including the abandonment of united front policies after victory in 1975, the abolition of money, the forced evacuation of towns, the refusal to accept foreign aid, a failure to conduct propaganda abroad and an insistence on settling its disagreements with Vietnam by war -- implying at best a lack of realism on the part of Democratic Kampuchea and at worst that the Khmer Rouge was the aggressor. 70

From 1980, the CPT seemed to be trying to communicate (particularly to its own membership and potential recruiting base)

that it was not subservient to Beijing. Whereas China's principal adversary was the Soviet Union, the CPT's main enemies remained the Bangkok regime and "US imperialism". Unlike Beijing, the CPT opposed ASEAN, particularly in view of the cooperation between the Association's members against communist insurgency (for instance, in the Thai-Malaysian border area).

Reflecting exasperation with the fickleness of external allies, concern over the number of desertions from the CPT and CCPDF, and awareness of the threat posed to the Party by the Prem government's increasing emphasis on political development as a counter-insurgency device, the CPT embarked on a drive to become more inward-looking and self-sufficient, as a means of survival. It seems that CCPDF intellectuals were partially successful in their attempts to force a redefinition of the CPT's revolutionary strategy not only towards greater self-sufficiency but also to some extent away from its essentially Maoist approach and rural bias, towards a greater concentration on fostering urban revolution. This redefinition may have been assisted by the increasing criticism of Mao and his policies

71 Santi, p. 17.

72 John McBeth, FEER, 19 September 1980, p. 43.

73 According to CCPDF Secretary-General Thirayudh Boonmee, who later defected himself, the authorities were "using democracy to fool and sabotage the struggle of the people". John McBeth, FEER, 19 September 1980, p. 46.

74 Santi, p. 16. These two principles were emphasized in a directive issued by the Central Committee on 1 December 1980, according to Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General of the Thai government's National Security Council. Personal interview, Government House, Bangkok, 20 March 1981.
in China.\textsuperscript{75} The Party also made efforts to decentralize and democratize its decision-making processes. Of particular importance was a decision to establish a "National Democratic Front" to broaden the CPT's political appeal and support base: in the words of a member of the CPT's northeast region committee it was necessary for the Party to "... win over all classes of people"\textsuperscript{76} -- including the urban middle class, and former members of the CCPDF who had defected at the height of the CPT's internal wrangling in 1978-79 but remained committed to revolutionary change. But these moves to enhance the "Thai-ness" of the CPT could not disguise the fact that the Party's key leadership positions were mainly still occupied by Chinese-trained Sino-Thai cadres,\textsuperscript{77} whose background militated against any absolute break with either Beijing or a primarily Maoist revolutionary strategy. The continuing failure of the CPT to find a solution to its factional disarray was evinced by its failure to hold its Fourth Party Congress, which had originally been scheduled for October 1979.\textsuperscript{78}

The Thai authorities were not slow to exploit the CPT's internal weaknesses and loss of important external support. Between 1974 and 1979 there was a steady increase in the number of armed incidents initiated by the CPT. But from February 1979 CPT military activity


\textsuperscript{76} Interview with "Comrade Paitoon", \textit{FEER}, 19 September 1980, p. 47.


declined. Following the expulsion of Thai People's Liberation Army units from Cambodia and Laos, Thai government forces began a series of offensives in northeast Thailand, forcing a reported 60-70 per cent of the CPT northeast regional command's forces to flee to more remote, mountainous areas in the north of the country. Bangkok also intensified psychological warfare and propaganda against the CPT, taking advantage of the communists' loss of the VOPT. Reports of splits in the CPT, the formation of a new party in Laos and defections by well-known radicals were emphasized by Thai military and intelligence sources in view of the demoralizing effect that such accounts might have on communists still in the jungle. According to a high-ranking Thai security official, in 1980 nearly 1800 CPT guerillas were neutralized by death, arrest or defection. By early 1981 the CPT's strength was alleged to have fallen to about 10,000 (from a total in 1978 of 13,000).

An official Thai claim that "communist insurgency is breathing its last in Thailand" was no more accurate than an assertion by an

79 Ibid., 27 July 1979, p. 31.
80 John Laird, Bangkok Post, 5 March 1981.
81 Winnacker, pp. 19-20.
82 Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General of the National Security Council, quoted by John Laird, Bangkok Post, 5 March 1981.
83 Bangkok Post, 28 February 1981. The correct figure may have been even lower, in the light of a Thai general's assertion as early as December 1979 that there were 9900 "communist terrorists" in Thailand. Lieutenant-General Abhichart Dhiradamrong, "Political-Military Dimensions of Southeast Asian Security" (Paper presented at Conference on New Foundations for Asian and Pacific Security, Pattaya, Thailand, 12-16 December 1979), p. 145.
observer sympathetic to the Thai communists that "CPT military activity against the government has continued unabated". The Thai security forces did make substantial gains in their fight against the CPT (especially in the northeast) from 1979, particularly in a series of offensives in early 1981. But at the same time that the CPT was suffering reverses, Bangkok was having to cope with problems of its own, including economic difficulties (leading to the ouster of the Kriangsak government in February 1980), the refugee influx and an attempted coup in April 1981. For these reasons, the Kriangsak and Prem regimes were not able to devote their full energies to tackling the problem of insurgency. Moreover, the deep-seated local socio-economic grievances -- such as rural poverty, maladministration and corruption -- which formed the basis of the CPT's appeal, did not diminish significantly. Indeed, the CPT's increasingly "Thai" approach to revolutionary strategy, coupled with a more autonomous international line, probably enhanced the party's appeal. In these circumstances, the CPT was able to survive as a substantial fighting force. External assistance had definitely helped the CPT, but at no time in its history had it been dependent on Indochinese or Chinese backing.

84 Winnacker, p. 20.
85 Bangkok Post, 1 March, 5 March and 13 March 1981.
86 This was emphasized even by CPT and CCPDF members who surrendered. Straits Times, 21 January 1981.
APPENDIX 2

BACKGROUND FACTORS IN THE ASEAN STATES' MILITARIZATION

Domestic Political Factors

Of crucial importance to an understanding of the process of military expansion (and at times contraction) in certain ASEAN states is an appreciation of the salience of domestic political factors, particularly in terms of the position and role of the armed forces in the political system. Governments or regimes led, dominated or heavily influenced by senior military officers may display a greater propensity than civilian administrations to emphasize defence as a political and economic priority. This is partly due to the tendency of military leaders to base their security assessments on "worst case" assumptions and to underrate the usefulness of political instruments as tools for maintaining security in either the domestic or the international environment, but also to military leaders' wish to justify and maintain their own power and influence by presenting seemingly rational explanations for an inflated expenditure on, and political role for, the armed forces. This hypothesis certainly seems to be borne out by the experience of several of the ASEAN states.

Thailand

During Thailand's "democratic interlude", from October 1973 to October 1976, the democratic governments of Sanya Thammasak and of Kukrit and Seni Pramoj did not generally place a great declaratory emphasis on defence as a national priority, despite the radical
changes in Thailand's strategic environment resulting from the enunciation of the Nixon doctrine, the US military withdrawal from mainland Southeast Asia (including Thailand itself) and the seizure of power by communist regimes throughout Indochina. But after a four-year period (1971-74 inclusive) during which annual defence expenditure had remained roughly constant (fluctuating around US$300m per annum at 1973 prices), military spending rose in real terms by about 10 per cent in 1975 and over 20 per cent in 1976.\(^1\) It may reasonably be suggested that the impending and actual collapse of non-communist Indochina, coupled with the US withdrawal, were important factors in the Thai government's decision to increase military spending.

The Thai military apparently exerted strong pressure on the civilian government to increase defence spending after the fall of non-communist Indochina, but this pressure was not entirely successful in overcoming the resistance of civilian politicians who saw diplomacy as a preferable (and less expensive) means of coping with the new regional balance of power. In February 1976, Prime Minister Kukrit announced a "military build-up" partly aimed at enabling the armed forces to take over and operate the military facilities (including a number of large air bases) from which US forces were withdrawing.\(^2\) But four months later the government forced the Defence Ministry to reduce its planned budget by 55 per cent.\(^3\) Indeed, although defence

\(^1\) See Table 1, in Chapter 8, p. 334 above.

\(^2\) Bangkok Post, 28 February 1976.

\(^3\) Bangkok Post, 20 June 1976.
expenditure rose considerably in absolute real terms, and remained roughly constant as a proportion of gross national product, it fell as a proportion of total government expenditure (to 18 per cent from 25.7 per cent in 1975) as the government diverted a greater share of its resources towards developmental and social areas of spending. 4

The right-wing regime (which termed itself a "war-time government"), 5 installed by the military after the October 1976 coup ended Thailand's democratic experiment, attempted to justify the reversion to authoritarian rule largely in terms of the supposed internal and external threats to Thailand's security, with a special emphasis on the danger posed by communist Indochina. In view of both this stress on Thailand's insecurity and the military's wish to ensure the armed forces' prestige and "combat readiness", which it had assessed as under threat before the coup, it was not surprising that the Thanin regime placed a renewed emphasis on the military means of ensuring Thailand's security.

Soon after acceding to power, the new government made a series of statements outlining how it intended to counter the threats that it claimed Thailand was facing. Thanin announced that "the conscription rate would be increased from 80 to 100 per cent", 6 although neither this initial declaration nor subsequent developments clarified whether

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5 Bangkok Post, 8 December 1976.
this meant a greater mobilization of young men eligible for national service or (as some sources suggested) that the armed forces would be boosted to full establishment. In concert with his regime's emphasis on the danger of "communist infiltration" from outside, Thanin also announced that the Border Patrol Police would be expanded and that "more modern weapons" would be acquired for the military. The formation of village defence and paramilitary units was accelerated. To finance this programme of military expansion, which was planned to come to fruition over a five-year period, the government sought and secured 20,000 million baht (approximately US$1 billion) worth of loans from foreign financial sources.

The emphasis on the importance of allocating resources to defence continued through 1977. Even after Kriangsak's ouster of Thanin in October 1977, the government continued to stress a policy of "beefing up" Thailand's military strength. Defence spending continued to increase in real terms, and although it was cut back as a proportion of government expenditure, this proportion was higher than it had been in 1976 under the "democratic" regime. The Kriangsak government was

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11 See, for example, *Bangkok Post*, 21 February 1977.
13 See Table 4, in Chapter 8, p. 335 above and Peter Fish, *FEER*, 1 September 1978, pp. 79-80.
still dominated by the military, ensuring that the armed forces' requirements received priority in the allocation of resources. This factor remained an important permissive factor in the development of the Thai armed forces throughout the Kriangsak period and into the premiership of Prem Tinsulanond.

Malaysia

The communal riots of May 1969 may have had a more profound, long-term effect on the Malaysian military's claim to increased resources than is generally realized. The principal origin of the disturbances was a feeling on the part of many Malays that the political hegemony of their race (which had traditionally counterbalanced domination of the economy by ethnic Chinese) was under threat. In the aftermath of the riots, one obvious way to reassure the Malay population that the Malay-led government was doing its best to ensure the paramountcy of Malay rights was to reinforce the state's Malay-dominated coercive institutions -- the army and the police.

Although the army included a number of multi-ethnic units but it was still built around a core formed by the Royal Malay Regiment (RMR), which was exclusively Malay in its ethnic composition. During the riots, RMR troops had apparently been more successful in keeping

14 But even non-RMR army combat units remained largely Malay in their ethnic composition, mainly because of the reluctance of non-Malays (particularly Chinese), who were generally more highly educated, to pursue non-technical military careers. The air force and navy, on the other hand, included substantial proportions of non-Malay personnel.
order than the multi-ethnic police Federal Reserve Unit (FRU). Whereas the FRU had attempted to restore order in an approximately even-handed fashion, the RMR troops achieved greater success "in large part because the Malay rioters recognized them as an affirmation of Malay political superiority". According to one source, this "affirmation" included participation by individual soldiers in violence against Chinese civilians: it was generally quite clear whose side the Malay troops were on.

Moreover, military service provided young Malay men with important opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility. After the May 1969 riots, a government priority became the economic betterment of the Malay community: the creation of additional RMR battalions


helped to achieve this objective as well as to reassure the Malays of their political dominance.\footnote{By 1981, 75 per cent of officers and 85 per cent of the rank and file in the Malaysian armed forces were Malays. Harold Crouch, \textit{FEER}, 20 October 1983, p. 47.}

Close cooperation between the Malay-dominated government and the overwhelmingly Malay military high command in the aftermath of the riots was probably a permissive factor in the subsequent expansion of the Malaysian armed forces. For fifteen months after the disturbances Malaysia was governed by a twelve member National Operations Council (NOC) as well as the Cabinet. The NOC included, in addition to politicians and civil servants, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (a General) and the Inspector-General of Police, as well as an army Lieutenant-General acting as Chief Executive Officer.\footnote{R.S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, \textit{Politics and Government in Malaysia} (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, Rev. ed., 1980), p. 85.} This increased institutionalized contact between the military and the government almost certainly increased the ability of the former to influence defence policy-making in the longer term.\footnote{Enloe, "Civilian Control of the Military...", pp. 76-77.}

Singapore

In contrast to the situation in the other ASEAN states, the Singaporean military leadership wielded virtually no political influence during the period under consideration. Control of the Ministry of Defence, and of all defence planning (other than at
an operational level) was vested in the hands of politically reliable civil servants rather than military officers. Indeed, the government deliberately minimized the number of senior military officers, despite the fast growth of the armed forces, in order to prevent the growth of a powerful interest group with the potential to oppose or subvert the will of the ruling People's Action Party.  

Although the military rationale for the expansion of the Singaporean Armed Forces (SAF) was based principally on a fear of external rather than internal threats, the defence build-up incidentally served certain domestic political and socio-economic ends. The institution of military conscription not only overcame the high cost of employing regular personnel and the aversion of the Chinese community (which constituted the great bulk of Singapore's population) to military service, but also acted as a device for national integration (although Malays were largely exempted from service in the SAF's early years) and as a means of reducing a high rate of unemployment (which in 1966 affected 9.1 per cent of the labour force as a whole and 23 per cent of the labour force under the age of 20).  

Indonesia

In contrast to the other ASEAN countries' armed forces, the Indonesian military was a considerably smaller force in 1975 than it

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20 Personal interviews with Australian and British diplomats, Singapore, January-February 1981.

had been a decade earlier. In 1965, at the height of Confrontation, the personnel strength of Jakarta's armed forces was estimated to be
412,000;\textsuperscript{22} the corresponding figure for 1975 was only 266,000.\textsuperscript{23} But during Confrontation, Indonesia had received large-scale military aid from China and the Soviet Union; with the fall of Sukarno and the subsequent cessation of Confrontation this assistance ceased and Suharto's new military regime increased substantially its defence spending to maintain armed forces that were diminishing steadily in size and effectiveness. Thus from 1966 to 1967 military expenditure was reported to have more than doubled in real terms, and had more than doubled again by 1975.\textsuperscript{24}

Another effect on the Indonesian armed forces of the change of administration was the Suharto regime's probably justifiable suspicion that some military elements (notably within the air force and navy) continued to harbour Sukarnoist sentiments. This was one of several factors which acted to degrade the armed forces' combat capability under the new regime. Until the mid-1970s at least, it also reduced the political influence of the air force and navy and hence their ability to claim on the defence budget.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{25} Donald E. Weatherbee, "Indonesia's Armed Forces: Rejuvenation and Regeneration", Southeast Asian Affairs 1982 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), pp. 153-54.
According to the Suharto regime, military as well as ideological, socio-economic and political strength was necessary to maintain Indonesia's "national resilience" (which enabled the country to defend itself against subversion and exploitation) in the era of the "New Order". But this military strength was overwhelmingly directed inwards: the armed forces reverted to their pre-Confrontation posture of an orientation principally towards maintaining internal security. The main peacetime role of the armed forces became the suppression of internal dissidence and guarding against a revival of the Indonesian Communist Party. Under the armed forces' dwifungsi (dual function) doctrine, the military became intimately involved in the day-to-day running (or at least supervision) of most sectors of the Indonesian polity, society and economy. According to one source, in 1975 about one-third of the army (approximately 65,000 personnel) was involved in "civil and administrative duties".27

The Philippines

During the early and mid-1970s, Manila increased substantially both its defence budget and the size of its armed forces. This phenomenon was due mainly to the imposition of martial law by President Marcos in September 1972 and the regime's subsequent efforts

26 Indeed, Leifer characterizes national resilience as "an extension of the armed forces' doctrine of territorial defence". Michael Leifer, Indonesia's Foreign Policy (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 112.

to counter the Muslim rebellion in the south (which had been precipitated by the highly centralist outlook of the martial law regime) and the insurrection of the New People's Army. Military expenditure increased from Pesos 796m in 1972 to Pesos 1.271m in 1973. In addition to the effect on military expenditure and force levels of objective military requirements for intensified counter-insurgency operations, martial law significantly increased the political importance of the armed forces. Like their Malaysian counterparts after the 1969 riots, the Philippines' military leaders were thus able to exert considerably increased influence over government policy planning regarding security matters.

Economic Factors

The pace of expansion of the ASEAN states' armed forces was facilitated, and indeed influenced, by the high rates of economic growth that these states experienced during the 1970s. Even if all the other factors which contributed to the military build-up in the region had been present, it would not have been possible to pursue militarization on such a scale without detriment to other areas of government expenditure unless government revenues had been increasing.


29 According to one informed assessment, the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) was "dependent on martial law for its strength and influence". Richard Vokey, FEER, 30 January 1981, p. 28.
at least in proportion with the increases in defence spending. As it was, increasing military expenditure was accommodated within public expenditure programmes which were generally expanding fairly rapidly.

The figures in Chapter 8's Table 3 show that, in the 1973-81 period, defence expenditure as a proportion of total government spending in the ASEAN countries did not rise significantly but remained more or less stable or declined. Whether or not the ASEAN governments would have allowed their defence expenditure to rise so fast, all other factors being equal, if economic growth had been slower, is a moot point. But the indications are that there was a strong link between the overall dimensions of government spending and defence expenditure. This was not only true in terms of expanding revenue allowing greater spending on defence, but also in terms of declining revenue causing defence expenditure to be reduced as in 1981 when the Mahathir government decided to cut back Malaysian defence expenditure in the light of declining oil revenues.30

The development of Singapore's armed forces was influenced by a special type of economic factor -- the wish to reassure both local and foreign investors and traders, upon whom the city state's very existence depended, that its national integrity could withstand possible external threats. According to Lee Kuan Yew in 1969:

> Without adequate security forces of our own to make a significant contribution to joint security arrangements, investments may slow down. If people believe that we are weak and defenceless, even our own wealthy citizens will move part of their capital abroad.31

31 Address by the Prime Minister to the Economics Society of Nanyang University, Singapore, 12 December 1969 (Mimeographed).
Internal Security Factors

The need to maintain internal security in the face of challenges to state authority was the primary raison d'être for the armed forces of all the ASEAN countries except Singapore, forming an enduring backdrop to their expansion and development both before and after the 1975 communist victories in Indochina. As related in Chapter 6, there was some connection between Indochina and communist insurgency in the ASEAN region although this linkage was frequently exaggerated by the ASEAN governments. Communists in the ASEAN countries remained self-motivated and very largely self-sufficient. When they did receive moral and physical support from external sources, this generally came from China on a far greater scale than from Indochina. So although actual or potential Indochinese support for insurgency was almost certainly a factor taken into account in the development of the ASEAN countries' armed forces, insurgency unrelated to Indochina was probably a more important influence.

Thailand

In the 1975-78 period the emphasis in Thai defence policy continued to be on the armed forces' counter-insurgency role. Although many items of military equipment can be of equal utility in either counter-insurgency or conventional operations (and may indeed be acquired for this very reason), the lack of emphasis in Thai military procurement on acquiring anti-tank missiles and other weapon
systems of specific use against external, conventional threats several years after the events of 1975 reflected the fact that Bangkok's principal security concerns were overwhelmingly internal rather than external. The threat from the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was real and growing (particularly after the October 1976 coup in Bangkok) whereas, apart from relatively minor border incidents, any direct threat from Indochina was potential and long-term. Certainly, the picture was complicated by the material support and sanctuaries given to the CPT by Laos and Pol Pot's Cambodia. But although this constituted the most direct and potentially fruitful link between Indochina and a communist movement in non-communist Southeast Asia, the Thai communists remained essentially self-reliant.

Malaysia

Although there was no clear causal link between the two phenomena, a marked upsurge in armed activity by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) coincided with the communist success in Indochina in the mid-1970s. The Malaysian government attempted to counter this escalation in insurgency by military as well as economic and social means. Malaysia's third five-year plan, announced in July 1976,


33 See Chapter 6, pp. 194-221 above.

34 See section on "Vietnam and Communism in Malaysia..." in Chapter 6, pp. 222-27 above.
increased projected defence and internal security development spending to more than double the allocation in the previous plan: according to Prime Minister Hussein Onn this showed the government's determination to combat the CPM.\textsuperscript{35}

Singapore

In contrast to its ASEAN counterparts in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the primary operational mission of the Singaporean Armed Forces from the beginning was to operate in a conventional rather than an internal security role. Although Singapore had experienced quite serious communal disturbances as recently as 1964, an internal security threat in the sense of a potential armed insurrection led by communist cadres was virtually non-existent in the small island state's relatively easily-policed urban environment.

Indonesia

As well as suppressing communist remnants and other ideologically motivated dissenters, the Indonesian armed forces under the New Order continued their traditional role of countering regional secessionism. Low-intensity operations were conducted against rebels in Irian Jaya, northern Sumatra and elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago. In 1975, the armed forces took on a new internal security responsibility with the decision to use force to incorporate East Timor into

Due to the coincidence of the fall of non-communist Indochina with the build-up to the invasion of Timor at the end of 1975, and in the absence of official Indonesian declarations concerning the motives for various military developments at this time, it is not possible to assess with a high degree of confidence the relative importance of these two influences in spurring the Indonesian military build-up which began in the mid-1970s.

The serious liquidity crisis resulting from the inability of Pertamina, the Indonesian state oil corporation, to repay its huge debts in mid-1975 severely depleted Jakarta's exchange reserves and drastically reduced the funds available for overseas arms purchases.37 But when Suharto visited Washington in July 1975 he was apparently able to convince President Ford that Indonesia's security was potentially threatened not only by possible internal security problems but also by an increased vulnerability to "infiltration from overseas" as a result of events in Indochina. Together these reasons were sufficient to secure a sizeable increase in US military aid from just under US$20m in fiscal year 1975 (FY75, running from October 1974 to September 1975) to nearly US$46m in FY76, although the bulk of the increase was in Foreign Military Sales credits rather than grant

36 Leifer, pp. 154-60.

aid. But the widely expressed official Indonesian confidence that events in Indochina did not present Jakarta with any important heightening of either direct or indirect security threats suggest that a wish to enhance the armed forces' internal role (particularly in view of the possibility of operations to occupy East Timor) provided the main impetus for the Indonesian military to seek this aid.

Indonesian defence expenditure rose markedly in 1975 to US$586m from US$401m to 1974, at 1973 prices. Much of this additional military spending was directed towards the purchase of new equipment: major items ordered in 1975 included helicopters, transport and light close support aircraft and corvettes. The real operational utility of this equipment lay in its ability to improve the effectiveness and mobility of the armed forces in potential operations aimed at maintaining control in the far-flung Indonesian archipelago, to provide an increased capability to protect the country's maritime resources and to prevent the infiltration of arms. The emphasis was on what might be called "strategic internal security": in the absence of a serious, near term external threat, there was no need to attempt to provide a capability (such as a strategic air defence system or


anti-shipping missiles) aimed at deterring, or defending Indonesia against, such a contingency.\textsuperscript{41}

The build-up to, and execution of, the East Timor operation may have accounted for part of the increase in the 1975 defence budget. The continuing campaign there certainly reduced substantially the stocks of military supplies which had existed before 1976.\textsuperscript{42} But another, more important, impact of the Timor experience in Indonesian military policy seems to have occurred in the wake of the invasion. The operation exposed serious weaknesses in the armed forces' command procedures, morale, tactics and equipment.\textsuperscript{43}

Whether or not the flurry of orders for new military equipment which followed the invasion in the 1976-78 period was partly a result of the narrowly-missed military debacle in Timor is not entirely clear. But in the absence of official pronouncements regarding specific security threats to Indonesia, it seems reasonable to propose that the Timor operation (which continued through the late 1970s and into the 1980s as a low-intensity counter-insurgency campaign against

\textsuperscript{41} For example, in "guidance" given to the new Commanding General of KOWILHAN I (Regional Defence Command I, covering Sumatra, West Kalimantan and maritime areas extending to the Natuna and Riau Islands) in October 1977, Defence Minister General Panggabean stressed that the new commander's mission was to prepare his Command to cope with "covert wars" (including "subversion, insurgency and infiltration") and "definitely not open or "hot" wars". See "A Military Mission Indonesian Style", Indonesian Times, 19 October 1977.


Fretilin remnants) prompted a major reassessment of the armed forces' military effectiveness.\textsuperscript{44} Timor had shown that although the armed forces might be useful for riot control in Java, their performance was not so impressive when faced with determined, yet only lightly-armed and essentially amateurish guerillas. Such a revelation would have cast serious doubt on the armed forces' ability to ensure the integrity of Indonesia against potential threats such as large-scale regional secessionism or a clash with Vietnam in the South China Sea, unlikely as these contingencies may have appeared to an outside observer.

The Philippines

The threat perceptions of Philippine military planners were clearly reflected in the nature of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) expansion after martial law was declared in 1972. In 1972, the AFP (excluding the Philippine Constabulary) totalled 31,000 personnel: this figure had more than doubled to 67,000 by 1975, and more than tripled to 99,000 by 1978. The great bulk of this expansion accrued to the army, the strength of which almost quadrupled. The navy more than tripled in size, much of this increase being in the size of the Marines. By contrast, the air force -- the expansion of which would have been a key element in any effort to make

\textsuperscript{44} According to Weatherbee (p. 152), "Since 1976 a number of ABRI officers... argue that greater emphasis should be given to the conventional warfare capabilities of the armed forces".
the AFP a credible deterrent to determined, large-scale external aggression -- did not even double in size.\footnote{The Military Balance 1972-1973, p. 53; The Military Balance 1975-1976, p. 58; The Military Balance 1978-1979, pp. 66-67. In the 1972-78 period the strength of the fourth arm of the AFP, the paramilitary Philippine Constabulary, was increased from 23,000 to 40,000.}


Tensions within ASEAN

On a superficial level, the very formation of ASEAN in 1967 implied that the bilateral problems which had previously prevented
closer cooperation between the Association's members had been solved. In the mid-1960s certain of these problems had played important roles in the development of the Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian armed forces. In the case of Malaysia, the incorporation of the former British colonies of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak in 1963, Confrontation with Indonesia (1963-65) and the Philippine claim to Sabah (which was pressed in 1963-66) had all contributed to the expansion of the armed forces. Unlike its ASEAN partners, before 1965 Singapore neither existed as a sovereign state nor possessed a significant military force. Upon expulsion from Malaysia in that year, in the midst of Confrontation, the Singaporean government was faced with the task of expanding the 1,600 man Singapore Infantry Regiment into a credible national defence force. The requirements of Confrontation had led to a substantial increase in the size and capabilities of the already large Indonesian armed forces.

Beneath the surface calm of ASEAN unity, bilateral tensions continued to exist after 1967: certain conflicts of interest had been merely put to one side. Some of these differences resurfaced quite quickly: for instance, Manila reactivated its claim to Sabah in 1968-69. Other bilateral conflicts remained dormant, but nevertheless sometimes exerted a strong influence on defence planning.

Singaporean Threat Perceptions

As the Singaporean armed forces evolved, it became clear that they were intended to deter, and if necessary to defend Singapore against, external threats which might develop within the immediate region. Although relations with Indonesia and Malaysia were generally fairly cordial by the mid-1970s, beneath the surface there remained considerable political (and at times economic) tension between Singapore (with its overwhelmingly Chinese ethnic composition) and its two much larger and predominantly Malay neighbours. For example, Singapore's feeling of vulnerability was reflected in its refusal to endorse the Malaysian and Indonesian claim from 1971 that the Straits of Malacca were not international waters, and its failure to vote with its ASEAN partners against a UN General Assembly resolution critical of Indonesia's invasion of East Timor.\(^{48}\) Although the Singaporean leadership never officially indicated that either Indonesia or Malaysia posed a military threat, the feeling that such a threat might develop (perhaps as a result of radical political change in Indonesia or the ascendancy of Islamic fundamentalism in Malaysia) formed an important and enduring backdrop to the island republic's security policies from 1965 onwards.

From the beginning, the stress in building up Singapore's military strength was on developing a credible air defence capability, a short-range but sophisticated naval force with some amphibious capability, and an offensively-oriented army (with appropriate air

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\(^{48}\) Leifer, pp. 146, 158.
support) able to cross the causeway dividing Singapore from Malaysia and to hold a forward defence line about 30km deep into the Malaysian state of Johor (thus securing Singapore's water supply as well as a more easily defensible frontier). In 1966 advisers from the Israeli army -- noted for its prowess in conventional warfare rather than in counter-insurgency -- were hired to assist in the development of this essentially pre-emptive military capability.

The Philippine-Sabah-Malaysia Imbroglio

The issue of the Philippine claim to Sabah continued to sour relations between Kuala Lumpur and Manila throughout the 1970s. But the claim was not actively pressed, and indeed was renounced by President Marcos in 1977, and any military threat to Malaysia's hold on Sabah remained vague. There is no evidence that the Malaysian military reacted any more strongly to the vague possibility of conflict over the issue than developing contingency plans -- and the existence of even these cannot be proved.

The potential for conflict involving Sabah was felt more acutely in Manila than in Kuala Lumpur. Although the overriding security

49 Keegan, "Singapore", p. 519; Personal interviews with diplomats, journalists and academics, Singapore. January-February 1981. This strategy was congruent with Lee Kuan Yew's much earlier assertion (made before Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965) that "Militarily... Singapore and Malaya are one unit... He who conquers Malaya conquers Singapore. The Japanese proved it". Lee Kuan Yew, The Fixed Political Objectives (Singapore: People's Action Party, undated), p. 171.

50 Morrison and Suhrke, p. 183.
concern of the Philippine government (including the military leadership) in the early and mid-1970s was with internal problems, in the view of "Philippine military strategists" a significant external threat at this time was the possibility that Sabah might secede from Malaysia and lay claim to the Sulu archipelago: this was the mirror image of Manila's own claim to Sabah, based on the historical extent of the Sultan of Sulu's dominions.51

Already, since late 1972, the Sabah state government under Mustapha bin Harun had harboured a large refugee population of Philippine Muslims, which the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was permitted to use as a recruiting and support base.52 In the early 1970s the Philippine armed forces apparently lacked the capability to stem the flow of arms from external sources (notably Libya) by way of Sabah to the MNLF: it was clear that an independent and irredentist Sabah might pose severe problems for Manila's already overstretched forces.

Interactive Factors in Military Expansion

Perceptions of specific security threats of one sort or another (direct or indirect, originating domestically or emanating from Indochina or other ASEAN countries) were not the only factors involved in inspiring ASEAN governments to expand their military capabilities

51 Salvatierra, pp. 22, 25.

52 See section on "The Socioeconomic Impact of the Refugees" in Chapter 7, pp. 305-6 above.
in the 1970s. In Thailand and Indonesia the military were intimately involved in the political process; the political power of their Malaysian and Philippine counterparts had increased substantially after 1969 and 1972. This political role gave military leaders in four of the five ASEAN states varying degrees of ability to exert influence in the process of resource allocation to the defence sector.

There is a widespread propensity for military leaders to think in terms of "worst case" scenarios for military planning purposes and to desire to keep abreast of contemporary military technology (particularly as a result of technical or staff training in militarily advanced countries such as the US, Britain or Australia in the case of ASEAN's armed forces). Certainly there are indications that these factors, together with considerations of national prestige (as likely to be advanced by politicians as by military leaders), contributed to the military expansion programmes of the ASEAN states during the period under examination.

One symptom of the influence of such non-threat factors on military policies in the ASEAN states has been termed "interactive weapons acquisition". Ron Huiskens suggests that the acquisition by one ASEAN state of a class of weapon system not previously possessed by regional powers, or of a new generation of a system already present, may have precipitated other ASEAN countries into acquiring either similar systems or other weapons that could counter the newly-

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53 See Ron Huiskens, Arms Limitation in Southeast Asia: A Proposal (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 16, 1977), pp. 16-17.
introduced systems, despite the frequent avowals of good
neighbourliness within ASEAN. This process was partly a result of the
"worst case" assumptions of regional military leaders, and partly of
their wish to maintain morale within their forces, the standing of the
armed forces within their respective countries, and the prestige of
their countries within the region and the wider world. According to
Huisken, "... for each country, military developments in neighbouring
countries are among the most important factors determining the size
and composition of its own armed forces".54

The precise extent to which specific weapons acquisitions were
influenced by developments in ostensibly friendly neighbouring
countries will never be known. But it seems clear that interactive
acquisition played a role in certain instances. For example, it was
allegedly evident to the Indonesian military regime in the mid-1970s
that Jakarta's claim to regional leadership needed to be backed up by
a more impressive military capability.55 For example, by 1977
Indonesia was the only ASEAN country not possessing modern jet combat
aircraft: whereas the Singaporean, Malaysian, Thai and Philippine air
forces all operated supersonic F-5s, the Indonesian Air Force's most
advanced fighters were subsonic, ex-Australian Sabres. It seems very
likely that a desire to "catch up" with the other ASEAN countries in
terms of modernity of military equipment played a significant role in
development of the Indonesian armed forces in the late 1970s.

54 Ibid., p. 35.
55 Personal interview with Dr Kirdi Dipoyudo, Head, Department of
International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International
Studies, Jakarta, 7 April 1981.
Huisken argues fairly convincingly that the purchase of missile-armed fast attack craft by four of the ASEAN states' navies (beginning with orders placed by Malaysia in 1970) was partially due to a process of competitive acquisition. Kuala Lumpur's decision to purchase tanks for its projected armoured corps was apparently based largely on the rationale that Malaysia was "the only country in the region without tanks", a fact that "worried" the Malaysian army's leadership. Whether or not Kuala Lumpur's decision in 1978 to purchase a large number (88) of A-4 ground-attack aircraft was influenced by the ever-widening gap in size and capability between the Malaysian and Singaporean air forces in debatable: but at the time there seemed to be a lack of plausible military reasons for such a purchase.

Changes in the Military Presence of Extra-regional Powers

The importance of changes in the political interests and military presence of extra-regional powers in Southeast Asia as factors influencing military policies in the ASEAN countries from the late 1960s was considerable.

The British Withdrawal

The British military withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia, first announced in 1967, increased the urgency which the Singaporean

56 Huisken, pp. 49-52.

government attached to its already burgeoning military build-up, although under the Five Power Defence Arrangements (which were substituted for the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement in 1971) some British forces remained until 1976 and Australian and New Zealand forces even after that. Indeed, it seems unlikely that Singaporean military expansion would have processed so far and so fast had British forces remained in their previous strength. In particular, there would have been little incentive for the development of the Singaporean Air Defence Command (SADC) had the multi-role British Far East Air Force (FEAF) stayed in Singapore. Indeed, the first substantial growth of the SADC was made possible as FEAF assets (including three major air bases, a radar station, much other infrastructure and a squadron of Bloodhound surface-to-air missiles) were transferred to the Singaporean government.

The effect of the British withdrawal on the development of the Malaysian armed forces was not as decisive as in the case of Singapore, where the bulk of Britain's forces in the region were based by the late 1960s. The principal impetus for the Malaysian military expansion at this time was almost certainly more closely connected with the aftermath of the 1969 riots. Nevertheless, the gradual attenuation of Britain's political will and physical ability to defend Malaysia against external threats effectively forced Kuala Lumpur to give greater attention to providing for the country's external security. This was reflected in the air force's move towards the acquisition of an air defence capability from 1969, when Australia
donated a squadron of obsolete Sabre fighters; in 1972 a squadron of supersonic F-5Es was ordered. 58

The Chinese Threat

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ASEAN governments generally saw communist China as the principal external source of threat to their security: indeed, a common fear of the People's Republic was a significant factor in the formation of ASEAN in 1967. Although Sino-American detente and the moderation of Beijing's attitude towards ASEAN and its members in the early and mid-1970s (culminating in the opening of diplomatic relations with Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand) diluted these perceptions of China as a threat, this factor continued to influence the defence policies of some of the ASEAN states in the 1975-81 period.

For various historical and domestic political reasons, 59 the Indonesian regime's perceptions of a Chinese threat remained alive in the late 1970s. Although Jakarta's security concern with China was related mainly to Beijing's potential instigation of subversion using its links with the Indonesian Communist Party and the local ethnic Chinese community, as late as 1980 a standard scenario for conventional warfare used in Indonesian Armed Forces Command and Staff College (SESKOAD) exercises involved an invasion by China. 60 Although

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59 See Chapters 1, 3 and 4, pp. 11-12, 18-20, 80-1, 86-8, 114-15, and 128 above.

60 Suhrke, p. 23.
Malaysia was generally less concerned than Indonesia with a threat from China, after the outbreak of open conflict between Vietnam and the People's Republic in 1979, Kuala Lumpur reportedly shared Jakarta's concern that increasing Chinese interest in the South China Sea (evinced by a strengthened naval presence), coupled with a wish to punish Hanoi again for its occupation of Cambodia, might inspire Beijing to seize the five Vietnamese-held islands in the Spratlys group. It seems likely that apprehension over China's increasing interest and naval presence in the South China Sea exerted an influence on Indonesian, and perhaps Malaysian, defence policy in the maritime sphere from the late 1970s.

The American Withdrawal

The impact on defence programmes in the ASEAN region of the Paris peace agreements, the enunciation of the Nixon doctrine in 1971, and the 1973 withdrawal of US forces from Indochina (together with the related exodus from Thailand) is less easy to evaluate than that of the British withdrawal. This is mainly because the two phenomena of American withdrawal and communist success in Indochina were so closely linked, particularly in the minds of political and military leaders in the ASEAN states. But overall, the American withdrawal was probably of considerably greater and more widespread relevance to military developments in the region after 1975 than was the earlier British

pull-out. The essence of this impact was a widespread appreciation by regional governments that they would have to play a considerably greater role in their own defence.

The impact of the US military withdrawal on Thai military policy was not as great, in the event, as might have been expected. The possibly detrimental effects of the run-down of the US presence in Vietnam on Thailand's security in the early 1970s was, from the Thai government's viewpoint, counter-balanced by an increased US Air Force strength in Thailand. Although these US forces were related to the continuing conflict in Indochina, from the point of view of the Thai military government they were also symbolic of an American commitment to Thailand's security. Bangkok hoped that the US bases might ultimately be bargained away for Chinese and North Vietnamese assurances to respect the independence of Laos and Cambodia and to cease supporting Thai communist insurgents. The Thai authorities also used the bases to extract substantial military aid from Washington.62

The overthrow of the Thanom-Praphat regime in October 1973 gave greater rein to those in Thailand who questioned the value of the US military presence. Indeed, even before the change from military rule, Bangkok had pressured Washington into withdrawing some of its forces. Although the withdrawals were accelerated through 1974, it was not until the final Vietnamese communist victory in the spring of 1975 that the Thai leadership (with the exception of some senior military officers) was finally persuaded by the course of events that the US

62 Morrison and Suhrke, p. 127.
military presence no longer served Thailand's security interests. Indeed, it was increasingly clear that the US bases formed a serious obstacle to Thailand's adjustment to the political realities that were emerging on its doorstep. By July 1976 all US forces were withdrawn.63

Although the withdrawal of the US military presence from Thailand began in 1973, this did not immediately stimulate a significantly greater effort by the Thai government to improve the capabilities of the Thai armed forces. However, despite a continuing policy of emphasizing diplomatic accommodation rather than a military build-up as the principal means of coping with Thailand's new strategic environment, a substantial increase in defence expenditure was announced in February 1976. According to the Prime Minister (Kukrit) this increase did relate to the US withdrawal, in the specific sense of enabling the Thai military to take over and operate certain of the US bases. Apart from this, the US withdrawal had no other significant, distinct impact on the Thai armed forces.

The implications of the Nixon doctrine for America's role in Southeast Asia had a significant effect on Philippine defence policy from the early 1970s. The importance of the Philippines as a host for US military bases increased as Washington withdrew its forces from South Vietnam and Thailand in the early and mid-1970s, and it still seemed probable that US military intervention could be expected in the highly unlikely event of direct external aggression against the

63 Ibid., pp. 129-31.
Philippines. But the Nixon doctrine implied that in the "post-Vietnam" era it was far less likely that US forces would become directly involved in the event of the development of an internal security threat with which the Armed Forces of the Philippines could not cope. This factor contributed to Manila's emphasis, from May 1975, on military "self-reliance" -- a concept that attempted to make a virtue out of the necessary of improving the AFP's counter-insurgency capabilities.

Although the impact of the US military withdrawal on the defence policies of Malaysia and Singapore was not as immediately apparent as that of the earlier British military pull-out, the prospect of a military vacuum in mainland Southeast Asia does appear to have contributed to the momentum of these states' programmes of military expansion. It is also clear that "the prospect of the United States in a phase of strategic decline aroused profound concern" in Jakarta, but there is no way of ascertaining the extent to which this concern influenced Indonesian defence policy.

The Expanding Soviet Presence

The influence of the heightened Soviet political interest and, more particularly, the increased Soviet naval presence in the
Southeast Asian region in the late 1970s on defence policies and militarization is difficult to assess, largely because these phenomena were so intimately bound up with developments involving Indochina. Soviet interest in Southeast Asia intensified with the escalation of the United States' role in the Vietnam war in 1965, and again after the Vietnamese communists' victory in 1975, and it was Vietnam's effective political and economic isolation by the West and China in the 1975-78 period which provided Moscow with the opportunity to increase significantly its stake in the region through its November 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Hanoi. The Sino-Vietnamese conflict in early 1979 precipitated Hanoi into allowing regular Soviet use of Vietnamese naval and air bases. From this time onwards, the ASEAN states' perceptions of Vietnam as a security concern were complicated and heightened by the fact of Hanoi's increasingly close political and military relationship with Moscow.

Although some sources quote the changing balance of extra-regional powers' maritime forces in the region, and particularly "increasing Soviet naval activity", as a factor exerting an important influence on the development of the ASEAN states' navies, it is doubtful that there was any significant direct link between the two phenomena in the period under consideration. The Soviet naval presence remained minor compared to the US Seventh Fleet, which continued to use Subic Bay in the Philippines as a forward base and still effectively dominated the region in naval terms. Rhetoric

66 See, for example, P. Lewis Young, "Naval Developments in the South East Asian Region -- Current Trends", ADJ, 2/82 (February 1982), p. 14.
Aside, military leaders in the region were presumably well aware that US air and naval forces in the region would probably be able to neutralize the Soviet naval and air presence in Vietnam and the South China Sea in a general war. It was hard to conceive of any limited war context in which these Soviet forces would have been used against the ASEAN countries in isolation, as any such conflict would almost certainly have escalated to involve the United States. The evidence suggests that the ASEAN governments appreciated the importance of the remaining US naval and air presence in the region in relation to developments in the Soviet regional presence from early 1979, and partly for this reason exerted considerable pressure to ensure the continuation of Washington's role in Southeast Asia for the foreseeable future. The withdrawal of American naval and air forces from the Philippines might have caused regional states to consider expanding considerably their own naval, maritime air and air defence forces.

The missile-armed fast attack craft acquired during the 1970s would, in theory at least, have given ASEAN's navies a capability to take on Soviet navy surface combatants; the sinking of the Israeli destroyer Eilat by a missile from an Egyptian fast attack craft in 1967 had presumably been noted by regional naval staffs. But there was never any suggestion that consideration of such a specific role played a significant part in the decisions to procure these craft. Missile-armed fast attack craft were in quite widespread use in the ASEAN states' navies before 1979, and to a limited extent before 1975. Other factors such as the desire to modernize navies with effective yet affordable weapons systems, competitive acquisition, and a desire
to enhance the credibility of national claims to maritime territory and resources exercised far more decisive influence in the acquisition of these vessels. Similar comments may be applied to the procurement by the ASEAN states' air forces of high performance air defence and maritime reconnaissance aircraft: there were numerous factors influencing such developments, apart from the Soviet use of Vietnamese bases.

Maritime Security Issues

The importance of maritime resources and freedom of maritime movement in the ASEAN region -- and particularly the South China Sea -- increased markedly during the 1970s from the viewpoints of both regional and extra-regional powers. This escalating interest was paralleled by an increase in the potential for armed conflict, particularly between Vietnam and China or certain of the ASEAN states, over various islands and maritime territory.

While the possibility of conflict involving Vietnam in the South China Sea probably contributed to the development and operational employment of the ASEAN states' maritime forces, several issues less clearly related to Indochina also had an impact on naval developments in non-communist Southeast Asia. The increasing economic and strategic importance of regional waters was reflected in efforts by certain ASEAN governments to secure greater control over their local maritime environment. Since 1971, Indonesia and Malaysia had claimed the Malacca Straits as national waters: in theory the vessels of third countries passing through the Straits became subject to the
doctrine of "innocent passage", under which their innocence could be challenged by the Indonesian or Malaysian authorities by means of interception and searches. Moreover, Indonesia and the Philippines had both declared (the former as early as 1957) their belief in the "archipelago principle" with the result that all the sea area connecting the huge number of islands making up each of the two countries was defined as national waters. These extensions of national sovereignty in the maritime sphere, together with a heightened consciousness of conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea and the implications of 200 mile maritime Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) exerted considerable influence on the defence policies of various ASEAN states in relation to the development of important and growing responsibilities in terms of maintaining the integrity of territorial waters and EEZ, and in monitoring the passage of international merchant and naval shipping through these waters while at the same time encouraging ocean transit -- which itself was necessary for the development of the ASEAN states' own trade-oriented economies. But the low political status of naval staff in the ASEAN states militated against any great success on their part in


69 Simon, "Maritime Interests...", pp. 6-10.
competing with other elements of the armed forces (particularly the armies) for defence resources.

Nevertheless, the importance attached by the ASEAN states to the role of their maritime forces in protecting their stakes in the regional maritime environment was reflected in official statements regarding naval operational priorities, and in equipment procurement. Before the mid-1970s regional navies' capabilities had permitted them to operate only in an essentially short-range coastal mode. Developments in the mid and late 1970s enhanced these meagre forces, providing a greater (if still limited) capability for regional states to enforce their maritime national sovereignty. Most importantly, all the ASEAN states except Singapore (which already possessed such weapon systems) acquired missile-armed fast attack craft. Indonesia also ordered new mine counter-measures vessels and submarines in 1976-77.70

Official and semi-official sources emphasized the importance of securing territorial waters and protecting maritime economic interests against low-intensity threats in peacetime as well as in war. In particular, the declaration of 200 mile EEZ was frequently quoted as a reason for the enhancement of naval capabilities. According to one authoritative source, by 1981 the protection of Malaysia's EEZ in general and oil and natural gas drilling platforms in particular had become the principal operational role, and reason for continuing

expansion, of the Malaysian navy. EEZ and maritime protection also came to the fore by the early 1970s as a principal task of the Philippine, Indonesian and Thai navies.

Although there were important links between this emphasis on EEZ protection and developments in Indochina, given the overlapping of Hanoi's maritime claims with those of Jakarta, Manila and Kuala Lumpur, the dimensions of the issue subsumed more than just these latent conflicts with Vietnam. Not only were China and Taiwan also involved in competition with each other and with Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines in the South China Sea, but there were additionally maritime tensions between various of the ASEAN countries: Kuala Lumpur, for example, was seriously concerned at the implications of Indonesia's "archipelago principle" for uninterrupted sea communication between peninsular Malaysia and the Borneo states.

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73 For example, the Philippine government was concerned over the Chinese Nationalist base on Itu Aba in the Spratly group, and also by the illegal fishing activities of Taiwanese vessels. David Jenkins, FEER, 7 August 1981, p. 26.
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