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LT COL Michael Byers, USAF
CAPT R Willie Clark, Jr., USCG
James Sporn, DOS
Class of 1996
Dr Goodman

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INTRODUCTION

The Southeast Asia region consists of the following countries: Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. For the purpose of this paper, Southeast Asia also includes Australia and New Zealand.

The Southeast Asia region is impressive for its diversity and dynamism. Geographically, it embraces a broad swath of archipelagos and the mainland of Southeast Asia. Few characteristics link the region into a cohesive whole other than its geographic proximity and tropical climate/ecology. However, the countries in the region share other bonds: a colonial past, a postwar struggle for independence and modernization, a religious penetration of animism by Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, an emerging manufacturing economy and a local government based on a strong village culture. Its ethnic and religious diversity blends with some of the world's richest cultures. The region includes one of the last communist regimes in the world (Vietnam), as well as free societies such as Australia and newer democratically elected governments in Thailand, Philippines, and Cambodia. The influence of European colonialization had a major cultural and economic impact on Southeast Asia because every country was colonized with the exception of Thailand. Immigrants from China were brought in as workers and to help establish trade networks for the spices and natural resources. When the colonists departed, the Chinese became the ethnic business powerhouse in many of the countries in the Southeast Asia region.

What are US national interests in South East Asia?

The current version of the National Security Strategy document lists four vital interests. First, preserve the survival of the United States as a free and independent nation with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure. Second, advance a healthy and growing United States economy to ensure opportunity for individual prosperity and a resource base for national endeavors at home and abroad. Third, promote a stable and secure world, where political and economic freedom, human rights, and democratic institutions flourish. Last, enhance a system of healthy, cooperative and politically vigorous relations with allies and friendly nations. What geopolitical endstate in Southeast Asia would be the best for meeting these four vital interests?

From a Machiavellian standpoint and assuming that the United States could end up at war in Southeast Asia, the best endstate for the first vital interest (survival) would be a region with relatively weak countries. These countries should be technologically and economically inferior to the United States. Their militaries should not be capable of significant power projection. Each country in the region should

complement each other and be relatively equal with neighboring countries. The United States has an interest to avoid conflict with a technologically and/or economically equal or superior adversary.

The best endstate for the second vital interest (advance the U.S. economy) would be a region with economies that enable trade favorable to the United States. Trade barriers would be minimal or non-existent for goods in which the United States has a comparative advantage. Trade would be balanced or slightly in favor of the United States.

The best endstate for the third vital interest (promote human rights and democratic institutions) would be a region populated with people that have those positive values found in the United States. Countries in the region would be democratic, or at least be responsive to citizens' needs and respect those human rights deemed important in the United States.

The best endstate for the fourth vital interest (enhance relations with allies and friends) would be a region with countries committed to policies which require engagement and cooperation with the United States. These would include the political, economic, and military dimensions of cooperative ventures.

How should these vital interests be prioritized? The first two (U.S. security and domestic economy) are the most important. The last two (value projection and cooperative relations) serve to support the first two, but are not critical in themselves.

Southeast Asia is geostrategically important to the United States. As part of the Pacific Rim, it is the United States' largest trading partner. The region's need for oil from the Middle East makes the security of the sea lines of communications vitally important to the region. The United States shares an interest with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in preventing Southeast Asia from becoming an area of strategic competition among regional powers such as China and Japan.

Political, Economic, Social, Cultural and Military Trends

Impact on the Future of United States Statecraft

Political Trends

Historically, there has been a tendency for long-standing animosities, a lack of cohesion and recurrent confrontation and conflict between the major powers of Asia to have an influence on Southeast Asia. Sino-Japanese wars, the Sino-Soviet confrontation, Japanese military expansion in the 1930's and 1940's and the efforts of individual countries of the region to unshackle themselves from colonial masters have made for a tradition of political tension in the region.

That said, the last decade of the 20th Century has ushered in an era of peace and stability in the region heretofore unknown. Marxism-Leninism has been discredited. Good will amongst the countries of

the region and receptivity towards a military role for the United States as a guarantor of security characterizes the current climate. There are elements of tension between Southeast Asian countries which give pause for concern for future security in the region. There is a lingering insecurity due to the holdover of certain Communist movements (within Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). Ethnic nationalism and rivalries which have been put aside temporarily still lie beneath the surface. Problems such as those between ethnic Chinese and Indians in Malaysia and various territorial claims could come to the forefront in the mid to long term. Fear over the long term designs of both China and Japan continue to be felt in most areas of the region. Discussion of political and military issues have found a home in multilateral fora and associations (e.g., ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)). It should be noted that multilateral fora have provided only frameworks for discussions of these issues, treaties have not resulted from these efforts. Significantly, ASEAN admitted Vietnam to its ranks in 1994. Several countries in the region do not have established political mechanisms to transfer leadership. These transitions could have a major impact on security and stability in the region.

Economic Trends

The Asia-Pacific region is the most economically dynamic region in the world. Economic growth has been two to three times faster in Southeast Asia than in other regions of the world, for this reason it is critical to the future of American security. American prosperity has underwritten much of Asia's security since the end of World War II. The Pacific Rim is collectively America's most important trading partner. Asia and the Pacific Rim should account for about one third of the world's economic activity at the start of the next century. This economic prosperity is in turn vital to America's economic health and the world's security.

Economic growth rates in Southeast Asia (and Asia) have outpaced the rest of the world in recent years. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have grown on an average of over seven percent over the last five years. Within the Chinese mainland, the coastal regions have enjoyed a manufacturing boom and market-oriented growth and are increasingly orienting themselves with other economies, namely Hong Kong and Taiwan. The region of Southeast Asia is enjoying high rates of savings and a strong focus on education and worker training. As political stability continues, economic growth should continue. Southeast Asia is essentially a market friendly, foreign investment policy friendly area. Countries of the region invest heavily in human resources (health, education, training, etc.). Independence for the countries of Southeast Asia came at a period of economic liberalism. As a result, the economies became export dominated. These countries viewed making the United States a major export market. Much of the

economic growth in Southeast Asia has had a positive and direct relationship on the security environment in the region

Social-Cultural Trends

There is great diversity in the region. Three geographical regions characterize the area. The peninsula of Thailand-Malaysia, the archipelago of the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia and the continent of Australia, with its close-by neighbor, New Zealand. Historically, the movement of peoples in the region has been from North to South through the major river valleys. Many ethnic groups can find their origins among peoples in the Asian heartland and within Central Asia who found their way to Southeast Asia via the major river valleys. The nature of these isolated valleys led to the peoples which followed their courses to develop independent, culturally and linguistically separate civilizations. There was minimal coastal communication. The patterns of migration affected by the expanding Chinese population movements contributed to mutually unintelligible linguistic patterns. Southeast Asia experienced several different colonial influences (French, English, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish).

The populations of the region originally came out of China and Central Asia. Chinese Confucianism played a significant role in influencing the area. Hinduism came from India (still alive and well in Bali) and Buddhism remains a major influence in countries throughout the region. By the 13th Century, Islam had established significant outposts, especially in Malacca, where a Muslim sultanate still exists, overlaying the already existing Hindu culture. Roman Catholicism came late to the area when the Spanish colonized the Philippines. The advance of Islam was halted in Cebu but still remains an important force on the island of Mindanao.

In addition, the large number of ethnic Chinese overseas - a dominant part of the population base, brought with it cultural traits of hard work and Calvinist tradition with the Asian mindset. The economic engine of Southeast Asia has been the Chinese urban population. Culturally, the "Chinese Values Basket" of hard work, education, savings and "deferred gratification" have added healthy work ethics to the nations of Southeast Asia.

Military Trends

Military modernization is a common trend throughout the region. There is a general increase of military budgets within countries in the area relative to GDP. Countries in the region are increasingly self-conscious about security arrangements. There is lingering concern over Chinese intentions towards

Southeast Asia and Chinese posturing to acquire national territorial gains, namely islands in the South China Sea. The overt Chinese presence in Burma and Laos has increased somewhat in recent years and is cause for concern amongst countries in the region. While the United States has withdrawn from its former bases in the Philippines, other countries in the region have sought to cultivate security ties with the United States. Australia and Singapore, for example, as well as other countries in the area contribute to regional security by providing access for United States military forces. Asian countries also contribute significantly to global peacekeeping and development aid. The discussion of security issues in Southeast Asia has drawn multilateral attention. Treaties have not yet developed between participants in these discussions, but multilateral associations such as ASEAN have played useful roles in bringing nations together to review their security concerns.

Impact on the future of United States Statecraft

While many of the former sources of tension in the region have disappeared, there are lingering concerns over security matters. The complexity, diversity and growing economic power of the Southeast Asia region argue in favor of the United States being engaged as a player in the region. Maintaining the current state of peace in the face of the potential and traditional rivalries at a time when many states in the region are now capable of increasing their military might will be a major challenge for both the countries of Southeast Asia and the United States. The United States is the only Pacific power able to project global reach and provide a constructive and enduring influence. United States force forward presence is generally viewed by the states of the region as the most desirable security arrangement.

American military presence coupled with economic involvement and investment has contributed to Southeast Asia's economic growth. The United States commitment to spread democratic values has also contributed to stable political transitions in states within the region and the development of legal systems that honor commitments -- even when governments change.

Challenges & Threats to United States Interests:

Security

Relations among these nations are more stable today than they have been at any time in this century. Managing those interrelationships is, nevertheless, a key challenge in the years ahead. Maintaining a stable environment and keeping the peace in the region is one of the major challenges. The buildup of military equipment in the region could lead to an arms race if the stability of the region is threatened by hegemonic threats from outside the region (e.g., China, Japan or India). China, Japan and

India are all capable of filling the power vacuum that would be left if the United States were to reduce or remove its military presence from the region. This situation could lead to regional conflicts. China views the South China Sea as its Gulf of Mexico and continues to project its power there in an attempt to dominate events in the region. China's efforts have intensified the territorial disputes in the South China Sea region shared by China, Taiwan, Brunei, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Ethnic diversity and increasing nationalism could erupt into conflicts drawing many of the Southeast Asian countries into the fight. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia continue as a destabilizing factor. A weak Cambodia, with external aggressors and internal rebels threatening its very existence will be a challenge to stability in the Southeast Asian region. America will have to place new emphasis on advancing global issues such as narcotics control, population planning, AIDS prevention, and cooperation to curb international crime.

Economics

Free trade issues, intellectual property rights, environmental degradation, WTO standards, nepotism, and corruption in government are the economic battlegrounds that will strain relations. The region could become unstable if Southeast Asia's fast pace economic growth stagnated.

In many of the countries an ethnic Chinese minority controls the majority of the wealth. The Chinese were brought in by many of the colonial powers during their exploitation of the region and the Chinese established most of the trade businesses. This situation has built up animosity toward the Chinese and also has the potential of providing a conduit for P R C influence/leverage in the region.

Values

The region is enjoying prosperity and growth with some sectors of society remaining in grinding poverty. Sooner or later, these countries will be forced to address income disparities in its population. It is no coincidence that the poorest countries generally have some of the most repressive regimes, while the more affluent are among the most free. The cultural differences and autocratic governments within the region present a serious challenge to the spread of American-style democracy. Promoting freedom while balancing other objectives is the most complex challenge, conceptually and politically, that the United States faces.

United States Opportunities:

In an era of relative peace in the Southeast Asia region, the United States must focus heavily on ensuring that it contributes to and benefits from the dynamic economic growth of the region. Within the context of America's global efforts to promote free trade through the GATT and, now, WTO, the United States will have to continue to work bilaterally and regionally to remove barriers to trade and to ensure its

economic place and participation in the Southeast Asia community. The hopes for a peaceful and prosperous future are promising provided the United States stays actively engaged in the region.

The countries of South East Asia (with the exception of Australia and New Zealand) are strategically located around the South China Sea, where China has been attempting to project its military power. The United States must sustain its leadership role by staying engaged in the region and maintaining a military presence capable of underwriting its commitment credibility. The United States must continue its dialogue to foster new multilateral security in the region. By working with ASEAN the United States can help with the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which is the Pacific's first broadly based consultative body concerned with security issues. An inclusive group, not directed against any country or bloc, the ARF can play an important role in conveying governments' intentions, easing tensions, promoting transparency, developing confidence, constraining arms races, and cultivating habits of consultation and cooperation on security issues.

What are the objectives of current US policy in priority order?

The specific Southeast Asian security objectives found in the United States security strategy document for the region are:

1. Work with allies and friends to refocus security relations based on post-Cold War realities and in particular, work with ASEAN and others to explore new "cooperative security" approaches through the ASEAN Regional Forum. Comment: China, Japan, and potentially Indonesia will become regional powers. A multilateral security arrangement could enhance regional stability, yet provide the forum for the United States to remain engaged but with fewer resources. The difficulty may be ensuring that the decisions of a multilateral organization are compatible with the United States' desires.
2. Work closely with Australia to pursue common security objectives. Comment: Australia is becoming more interested in being viewed as a Southeast Asian nation. The United States also needs to continue dialogue with New Zealand to resolve United States naval port issues.
3. Work to halt the flow of narcotics.
4. Support efforts by countries in the region to strengthen democracy. Comment: this support should be passive and not interfere with efforts to achieve or maintain if a country is meeting more important economic and security interests.
5. Continue to seek the fullest possible accounting of those missing in action from the wars the United States has fought in the region in defense of others. Comment: this is a domestic political issue that is necessary to address to improve relations with Vietnam.

6 Prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction Comment this is not a major issue in Southeast Asia proper but could become a future issue depending upon the technological advancement of Indonesia.

The priority of objectives depends upon the sub-region or particular country in question For example, accounting for those missing in action applies to Vietnam Narcotics are a larger issue in the Golden Triangle (Thailand and Burma) than in Indonesia

Conclusion

The United States policy objectives in Southeast Asia should (1) maintain favorable alliances and promote cooperative security measures that encourage regional cooperation to deter potential threats, counter regional aggression, and help protect sea lines of communication both within the region and from the region to the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, (2) maintain access for United States military forces in and transiting the region, (3) encourage mutually beneficial trade and encourage economic growth, and (4) project values that foster the above