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SOUTHEAST ASIA AND U S SECURITY  
Core Course Four Paper

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**South East Asia  
Seminar H  
(Stacy, Canovas, Bartlett)**

**I. U.S. National Interests**

- South East Asia's explosive economic growth, a growing U S dependence on international trade and a period of relative peace and stability in the region combine to make economic engagement a primary U S interest This interest is best be served by
  - acceleration of the trend toward a more open trading system which will afford the U S equitable access to markets, and,
  - a supportive environment for investment by U S companies
  - continued high-levels of economic growth in the region,
  - development of areas in the region which missed the first wave of development, e g , Vietnam, Laos, Philippines, Cambodia,
- The U S has an interest in regional stability, as well as broader, strategic security concerns
- Regional stability supports economic growth, makes U S strategic interests easier to protect and reduces the likelihood that U S forces will have to intervene in the region The U S has an interest in
  - peaceful resolution of border disputes (see Context),
  - friendly states' military modernization, short of starting a regional arms race,
  - local efforts to deal with simmering ethnic problems,
  - regional collective security and economic arrangements that include the U.S as a key participant,
  - strong bilateral military and diplomatic ties, and,
  - the Indo-Chinese nations becoming better integrated in the regional community
- The U S 's strategic security concerns include
  - maintaining sea lines of communication (SLOC),
  - maintaining a forward presence in order to preserve U S influence,
  - containing possible Chinese, Indian, Japanese other nations attempts to establish hegemony,
  - avoiding a regional arms race, and,
  - supporting non-proliferation of WMD and missile technology
- The U S has an interest in working with the states of S E Asia to address the following "transnational" problems
  - drug production and trafficking (the "Golden Triangle" is a major source of illicit drugs),
  - uncontrolled migration, such as that represented by the Vietnamese boat people, and,
  - pollution, global warming and deforestation

- The Clinton Administration's National Security Strategy identifies promotion of human rights and democracy as an important U S interest There clearly are benefits to be derived from promoting our core values, but only if this is done in a low-key manner Previous attempts to promote our values without regard to cultural context have proven counter-productive Values we have an interest in quietly promoting include
  - free market economies,
  - representative government (this need not be classical western democracy, but we should encourage government structures which rely on broad public consensus for their legitimacy). and,
  - basic human rights

## II. Context

- Historically, U S involvement in the region formed around three events
  - the Spanish-American war of 1898 which made the U S a colonial power in the Philippines,
  - America's entry into the war in the Pacific following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, and,
  - our post-war commitment to containing communism in S E Asia (e g Vietnam)
- S E Asia has experienced explosive economic growth Accompanying this growth has been an equally impressive deepening of the economic ties between the region and the U.S The highlights include
  - S E Asia is a market of 450 million people with a collective GDP of \$1 35 trillion
  - ASEAN states collectively are the U.S 's fifth leading trading partner, trade with the region has grown by 17 percent in the last decade
  - in 1990 U S trade with ASEAN exceeded trade with South America, with the Middle East, with Africa, and with the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe
  - U S private sector investment is substantial and has continued to grow For example, U S investment in Indonesia far exceeds that of any other country except Japan U S investment in each of the other ASEAN countries (except Brunei and Vietnam) exceeds that in Taiwan and South Korea
- Diversity among the 10 states of the area may impact their ability to act in a cohesive fashion Ethnic and religious fissures, although currently contained, often simmer just below the surface A variety of influences, many of them external, are at play in the region
  - five major religions -- Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Confucianism -- have shaped the cultural landscape,
  - two modern waves of immigration have swept the area -- Chinese in the early 17th century and Indian in the 19th century,
  - a number of different powers (English, Dutch, French, U S ) have exercised colonial rule,
  - the region has been unified only once -- Japanese occupation during World War II,
  - regional governments run the gamut from monarch, to military authoritarian, to communist, to multiparty democracies,

- attempts to manage ethnic tensions (such as the post-colonial power-sharing "Bargain" in Malaysia and an informal military-Chinese alliance in Indonesia) have not always prevented ethnic violence, and *may* mask a more serious problem,
- Japan, with its World War II legacy, and China, with a history of support for communist insurgencies and conflict with Vietnam, are too large and too near-by not to loom over the S E Asian security situation India, although not currently a significant player, wishes to exert influence in the region in the not too distant future At the same time, there is a growing apprehension about U S staying power and the possibility that a U S departure would create a vacuum other aspiring hegemony would seek to fill

### III. Challenges, threats and opportunities

- With few exceptions (e.g. the Khmer Rouge insurgency in Cambodia) the region's governments are secure, its societies relatively stable, its economies expanding rapidly (Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and the Philippines possibly excepted) and external powers pose no immediate threats There are excellent opportunities for increased U S participation in the region's economic growth, and in the development of stronger bilateral and collective security arrangements
- There are, however, potential sources of concern
- Three of the world's five remaining self-described Marxist-Leninist states are in S E Asia
  - There are ongoing insurgencies in Cambodia and the Philippines,
  - China, Vietnam, and Laos are becoming "*Market-Leninist*" states, but the degree to which they can continue to open their economies while preserving the Communist Party's monopoly on political power is uncertain,
  - Vietnam has joined ASEAN, but whether communist states in the region will inhibit S E Asian unity in the economic and security spheres is still an open question
- Ethnicity is a significant source of tension, although it has been muted by economic growth
- There are a large number of outstanding territorial disputes The most significant involves the Spratley Islands in the South China Sea Multiple claims, strong nationalistic interests, and the possible presence of oil and gas deposits will complicate attempts at a peaceful resolution Major disputes include
  - the Spratley Islands, claimed by China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines,
  - the Philippines' claim to the Malaysian state of Sabah,
  - Malaysia and Singapore claims to the Pedra Branca Island
  - Malaysia and Indonesia dispute the islands of Sipadan, Sebatik, and Ligitan,
  - Malaysia and Thailand differ over their land border and offshore demarcation line,
  - boundary disagreements between Indonesia and Vietnam over offshore demarcation lines,
  - an outstanding boundary dispute between Cambodia and Vietnam, and,
  - a dispute between Malaysia and Brunei over Limbang and offshore boundaries

- Military modernization being undertaken by a number of states largely as a result of a perceived threat from China and concerns about an eventual U S pullback from the region is a potential source of future instability if not carefully managed
- China is a potential problem and a major source of anxiety in S E Asia Among the concerns China raises are
  - possible Chinese hegemonic aspirations,
  - Beijing's claim to virtually the entire S China Sea as territorial waters and its refusal to disavow the use of force to back up those claims,
  - China's growing influence in Burma,
  - China's potential as a significant economic competitor, particularly in the low-wage niche, and,
  - China's modernization of its military, particularly plans to acquire such power projection tools as SU-27 fighters and, possibly, aerial refueling and aircraft carrier capabilities
- Japan and probably India will likely also seek to increase their influence in the region, creating the potential for future large-power tensions within the region
- The biggest challenge, given the diversity of states in the region, may be to develop successful multilateral institutions that can build common interests, policies and peaceful patterns of cooperation
  - ASEAN, the ARF and APEC are a good start, but may depend on member state's ability to peacefully resolve or set aside their territorial disputes and China's willingness to engage in multilateral fora, rather than continuing its current policy of bilateral engagements
  - There may also be attempts to create additional regional groupings which exclude the U S (e g the East Asian Economic Caucus -- EAEC)

#### **IV. Means to Promote U.S. Interests**

- The U S forward presence in S E Asia is a major source of leverage in the region This resource may come under increasing pressure as the defense budget shrinks If we act with care, however, we can use this leverage to help promote our access to markets
- Diplomatically, the U S can seek to further develop regional multilateral organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) U S engagement in these regional fora, as well as global organizations such as the UN and WTO can be used to promote stability and encourage further market liberalization
- The U S maintains bilateral security commitments with Thailand and the Philippines Other existing military arrangements with states in the region include access to ports for refueling and repair of ships, joint exercises, port visits, IMET training, conferences and high-level visits and exchanges

- Traditional bilateral diplomatic and public diplomacy efforts are effective in the region. The growing U.S. private business presence is a frequently overlooked diplomatic resource. As in China, however, deepening U.S. economic ties can be a two-edged sword that can also limit U.S. policy flexibility.
- The U.S. market is also a lever, but is declining. Only 21% of S.E. Asian exports now go to the U.S.
- The U.S. has a reservoir of goodwill to draw on in the region derived from the perception of the U.S. as a neutral guarantor of security with no territorial aspirations, a generous provider of foreign aid in the postwar years, and a supporter of the region's economic development. U.S. leadership and interest in the region can also act as a deterrent to other would-be hegemony.

#### **V. U.S. policy toward the region.**

- While there is no immediate security threat to the S.E. Asian region, there is also no lack of potential problems down the road, e.g., the economic and military growth of China and its aspirations for regional hegemony. U.S. policy must be both flexible and focused on anticipating future problems. It must be able either to deter and contain potential threats, or if appropriate, engage the same nations. The policy must also be able to respond appropriately should a key state experience internal instability, or if any of the numerous border disputes flare up. Finally, the policy must reassure regional states of the U.S.'s willingness to remain a major player in the region while at the same time aggressively promoting our economic interests.
- Specifically, the U.S. should
  - maintain its forward military presence in the region. This presence supports many of our most important objectives -- guaranteeing the security of our SLOC, deterring armed conflict, preventing the development of other regional hegemony, providing U.S. leadership and influence in the security and economic areas. The present policy of "places not bases" is acceptable, but we should keep open the possibility of re-establishing a permanent naval facility in the region. In the mid to long-term, if the U.S. force structure continues to shrink, we will have to examine creative options to maintain a forward presence, e.g., pre-positioning of equipment, use of long-range air power (B-2) to project presence. The dissolution of the U.S.-Japanese security treaty and/or the reunification of the Koreas would likely impact our ability to maintain a forward presence in the future.
  - maintain the U.S.-Japanese security treaty. The S.E. Asian countries do not want a direct Japanese security role in the region. As long as the U.S.-Japanese security treaty remains viable, Japan will not have a major interest in expanding its military reach. Japanese rearmament would not only have the potential for destabilizing S.E. Asia, it would also likely stimulate a destabilizing Chinese reaction.

- promote a larger role for ASEAN and the ARF as multilateral fora for discussing and resolving regional security issues In the long-term, explore a security role for APEC
- maintain our existing bilateral patterns of cooperation This includes existing security relationships with Thailand and the Philippines as well as ties we are developing with other ASEAN states, e g , regional access through our "places not bases" policy, joint exercises, IMET and other mutual training arrangements, intelligence exchanges, high-level visits, and ship visits
- begin to set the stage for burdensharing discussions with ASEAN states There will be a need to proceed carefully, but anticipated U S budget cuts may soon make some burdensharing essential
- work to better integrate the Indo-Chinese states into the region This may start with expanding cooperative relations with Vietnam An economically strong Vietnam might serve as a buffer against China At some point in the future the U S might be interested in access to Cam Ranh Bay
- support military modernization of moderate states in the region This would include support for U S arms sales Modernization of the moderate states' militaries is justifiable given the interest of these states in defending their 200 km economic exclusion zones Care must be taken not to encourage an arms race, but this should not be problem if regional security mechanisms such as the ARF and a pattern of peaceful resolution of disputes takes hold Appropriate military modernization might help deter China from attempting military coercion as means of resolving disputes
- use APEC, the WTO, other international organizations, U S business groups and companies, and bilateral diplomacy to promote U S economic interests Our primary objective is to provide a level playing field for U S exporters, and a secure and equitable environment for U S investors The importance of economic access can be mentioned in discussions of security issues The possibility of expanding NAFTA, or establishing a closer trading relationship with the EU may also be used as leverage We should push global free trade, be willing to consider participating in a regional free trade area as a fall-back position, and actively oppose any regional trading block that would exclude U S participation or disadvantage U S interests
- work bilaterally, and through international organizations such as Interpol and the UN to help the region's states address transnational issues such drug trafficking, pollution and global warming Resources will be needed for drug programs aimed at addressing the problem at the source, in transit, and in the U S
- soft-pedal human rights and promotion of democracy in the region The mood in several S E Asian states suggests that overt U S pressure may be counter-productive We should be sensitive to cultural differences, keep our rhetoric on these issues low, press our agenda

out of the public eye, and keep these issues delinked from other programs that are otherwise in our interest, e g , continued provision of IMET

- In developing U S policy, we should also recognize that there are issues that are not appropriate for U S intervention Arms buildups, territorial disputes, ethnic conflicts (with the possible exception of gross human rights abuses) are issues best resolved among the states of the region U S policy should be aimed instead at helping to develop mechanisms that can assist in addressing regional security concerns