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ASEAN AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE 21st CENTURY

BY

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United States. Economically, the rapidly rising importance of all of the Pacific Rim countries, with ASEAN representing nearly 300 million people, will be economically involved to a great degree in the international economic battlegrounds of the 21st century. The combination of the political and economic leverage that could be exerted by ASEAN may make them a formidable ally, or adversary. Recognizing this, Japan is already courting ASEAN with a strategic (economically speaking) eye to the future. Great developmental interplay by the United States has not been as strong as some ASEAN member countries would have. The time is right for the United States to begin to develop the political support that would insure such rapidly developing nations, such as found in ASEAN, are aligned with U.S. long term goals.

I have conducted a review the political interplay of the U.S. with ASEAN, often comparing it with Japanese involvement. It appears from some readings that the U.S. is being typically shortsighted in investing in and developing a very firm political relationship with what could be a key Pacific alliance. Such relationships could be cornerstone to our future Pacific security. Yet in the overall measure of things, the U.S. may already be doing exactly the right things that will meet our long range goals perfectly. We are still in a good political and economic position with those countries of great importance now and influence for the long term. If this current status is a result of policy of the past and is a consideration in our long term strategies, we may be in a good strategic position in the Twenty First Century.

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ASEAN AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE 21st CENTURY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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Abstract

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For 21 years the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been a model organization for regional cooperation among developing nations. It has provided an example to all South Asian Nations whom are themselves moving toward closer ties of cooperation as in SAARC--The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Important aspects of this trend are the development of economic and security cooperation agreements that will likely have great impact on the political alignments of the 21st century. Given the non-communist stance of ASEAN it should be a key element in the long range security plans of the United States. Economically, the rapidly rising importance of all of the Pacific Rim countries, with ASEAN representing nearly 300 million people, will be economically involved to a great degree in the international economic battlegrounds of the 21st century. The combination of the political and economic leverage that could be exerted by ASEAN may make them a formidable ally, or adversary. Recognizing this, Japan is already courting ASEAN with a strategic (economically speaking) eye to the future. Great developmental interplay by the United States has not been as strong as some ASEAN member countries would have. The time is right for the United States to begin to develop the political support that would insure such rapidly developing nations, such as found in ASEAN, are aligned with U.S. long term goals.

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ASEAN AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) originated in 1967 with five charter members, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, to provide a more unified regional voice. This voice would speak for the development of the member states and their economies while maintaining a zone of peace in the region. (This does not allude to a defense pact per se because military relations in ASEAN are bilateral only.) ASEAN began to show real effectiveness of purpose in the mid seventies and has been touted as a success story since the early eighties. This success was measured in greatly expanding export markets; new industry and significant per capita GNP increases. Additionally, the member states, now six with the addition of Brunei, present the rest of the world with a market of 300 million new consumers.

The member states also straddle critical sea lanes that support shipping to major economic partners. The maintenance of stability and security in the region is thus of direct interest to more than just local trading partners.

With the advent of ASEAN's economic growth coupled with the security aspect, those countries that would be regional powers view ties with ASEAN as part of their own long range goals. The United States and Japan as well as China and the Soviet Union must each be considered as having vested security interests in the region. Economically, the U.S. and Japan each appear to be cultivating a long term alliance with ASEAN. Such alliances can be fragile however and other nations could also compete strongly for ASEAN affiliation. Certainly in the fragmented geo-political make up of Southeast Asia, ASEAN presents a relatively stable force of large proportion with prospects for an even more organized association 21st century.

While both Japan and the U.S. work with ASEAN in this context an image of trilateralism takes form. Is this trilateralism going to continue to be satisfactory to all three? Or is the new economic superpower of Japan going to economically dominate the region to the detriment of long term U.S. goals? These questions represent a concern of mine for the long term prospects of the strategic posture of the United States in the Pacific. This posture includes strategic, economic and

political factors that together allow us to shape our
strategy in the long term.

CHAPTER II

THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

-Origin -

The United Nations Charter, Chapter VIII provides for "Regional Arrangements" to resolve international issues with a distinctly regional character. In the 1960's such regional groupings for both security and economic reasons began to exist throughout the world. In Asia, some U.N. inspired regional organizations blossomed then wilted in the confusion of the Vietnam War. Among them were SEATO--Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, ASPAC--Asian and Pacific Council and CENTO--Central Treaty Organization. Other regional economic cooperatives sprang forth but were equally short lived or ineffective. They included ASA--Association of Southeast Asia, MAPHILINDO--Association of Malaya, the Philippines, and Indonesia and RCD--Regional Cooperation for Development. ASA became the parent of ASEAN after an ASA internal bi-lateral dispute (Malaysia vs the Philippines in 1963) was resolved in 1966. ASEAN came into existence officially in 1967 but developed few outward signs of vigor until

the latter half of the 1970's.

The charter member nations of ASEAN were Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei was to join in 1984. The basic charter was to strengthen existing bonds of regional solidarity and cooperation. This was presented to the world as the Bangkok Declaration or the ASEAN Declaration. Included in the declaration were the more specific regional needs of "ensuring stability and security [of the region] from external interference; accelerate the economic growth; social progress and cultural development; [and to] settle regional problems through peaceful means." (1) Although somewhat vague, the charter speaks to a very comprehensive alignment of nations for political and cultural growth while reversing the trend of hegemony in the Pacific region by First World Countries.

- Purpose -

Much information indicates that the anti-hegemony issue has primacy over all other reasons for the Association. It was not too long ago that the Japanese dominated the entire area at considerable cost lives and

freedoms. The U.S. support to South Vietnam was at full swing in 1967 with implications that future ideological battlefields could be the member states of ASEAN. Certainly the vacuum created by the U.S. pullout from Vietnam must have caused concern in the region and indeed Laos and Cambodia were soon a testimony to the validity of any concern. The real unknowns however, were Russian and Chinese intentions and thus the stressing in ASEAN's charter of regional and national stability. As the association matured a more sophisticated declaration was to be forthcoming when in November 1971 the Ministers of Foreign affairs met in Kuala Lumpur and "advocated the establishment of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality" (2) in a broad spectrum of treaties and agreements ranging from denuclearization of the zone of neutrality to conclusion of treaties of non-aggression by external powers.

All of this is not to say that ASEAN was constituted as a defense pact for quite the contrary is true. In fact the first fields of mutual cooperation were economic, scientific and cultural. However, before looking at ASEAN, US / Japan interaction and long term

goals a little more of ASEAN'S political impact is relevant.

Besides the continuing war in Cambodia, there has been relatively little territorial dispute in southeast Asia in recent years. The Spratly Islands appeared to be the most prominent conflict but did not inspire any country to enter into extended warfare. Considering the long borders and archipelago spread of most of the ASEAN area, that is noteworthy. Yet the member states all perceive vulnerability and have been shown solidarity on key issues in the United Nations. ASEAN moved early on the Cambodian issue in the U.N. and condemned the "Vietnamese military occupation and refused to unseat the Pol Pot delegation." (3) This situation resulted in China, a charter antagonist of ASEAN, to become a political bedfellow of the young organization because of the greater enemy, Vietnam.

China, friendly or not, weighs as a key to the long range imperatives of ASEAN. Because of its history, its immensity and its development, ASEAN members are probably still wary of their United Nations "ally".

Lastly, in the mutual security area, is the subject

of the relationship with the United States. "All of the ASEAN states perceive the United States as a friendly power, probably less reliable than desirable, but a friendly power nevertheless." (4) This intimates that the US is a risky partner but on balance making a better friend than an enemy. Also, the world economy is dominated by and much of the technological growth still issues from fortress America. Therefore, in the short term, the ground for establishment of close long term relations between the U.S. and ASEAN is rich and ready from the perspectives of both sides.

- Structure -

The organization and especially the operation of ASEAN does not appear as structured and formal as, for example, the United Nations. Decisions are consensus-based and generally the result of ad hoc consultations. (5) Principally, the Foreign Ministers Meetings in June of each year are supplemented, as required, by decision-level meetings which provide direction politically. The principal meetings are chaired by the Foreign Minister of the Host Country, a function that passes around on a

rotational basis between member nations. Economic Ministers Meetings usually take place twice per year. It is in these Economic Ministers meetings that far reaching economic decisions are hammered out before being referred to the foreign ministers for approval. Additionally, member country ministers for Labor, Social Welfare, Education and Information meet regularly. Standing committees that perform the majority of the nuts and bolts exchanges are established on Food, Agriculture, and Forestry; Trade and Tourism; Industry, Minerals and Energy; Finance and Banking; Science and Technology; Social Development; and Cultural and Information. The backing of a strong central coordinating authority is by mutual agreement of the member states. The Secretariat is located in Jakarta and functions as a headquarters.

- Effectiveness -

The Southeast Asian region has forged ahead of other developing nation areas in recent years. ASEAN has provided for the majority of that growth with its market-oriented growth strategies. (6) Except for

Singapore, the member countries are predominantly agricultural, but minerals and raw materials are rapidly growing exports as well. The effect of this is that of six member countries, all but Singapore are generally in competition with each other based on like exports. Thus, Intra-ASEAN trade is minimal, negating a real need for a common-market arrangement. (7) Economic relations for ASEAN are favorable worldwide. A good example is ASEAN's status as the fifth largest trading partner of the United States in 1986, with four times the trade in dollars of a decade ago. The general effectiveness of the organization did suffer some measure of a setback in 1988 however. Those problems arose with the general concern for the internal security of the Philippines and frustrations with the Cambodian issue. (8) However, these problems cannot be considered much more serious than routine business at this point however. Therefore I consider ASEAN to still be an effective organization, robust and healthy. It will likely wield even more power in the region by the early twenty first century. Japan seems to recognize the long term implications of a healthy relationship with ASEAN

and can be looked upon as competing with the U.S. for a preeminent economic relationship with ASEAN.

ENDNOTES

1. Jun Nishikawa, Asean and the United Nations System, p.4
2. Ibid. p.6
3. Dennis Duncanson, Strategic Tensions in Southeast Asia. p.17
4. Robert O. Tilman, Southeast Asia and the Enemy Beyond. p.138
5. United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, ASEAN Background Notes. p.4
6. Ibid. p.5
7. Hiroko Yamane, "Japan as an Asian/Pacific Power," Asian Survey, Vol 27, No 12, Dec 1987, p 1302-1308.
8. "ASEAN", Asia 1988 Yearbook, pp.73-74

CHAPTER III

JAPAN'S POSTURING

"Southeast Asia has four big powers in contention, the United States, Russia, China and Japan. There is at present no power balance among the four regarding their roles in Southeast Asia." (1) Japan could operate in this void and has several current imperatives that directly involve the ASEAN member states and thus the organization itself. Being highly industrialized, Japan has several basic needs; the primary need being natural resources, in which it is poor. Among these resources are the tin, oil, rubber and lumber found in Southeast Asia. Some of these ASEAN resources have hardly been tapped and portend a great future source of trade.

For Japan, critically dependent on imports and exports, safe passage of shipments through the Straits of Malacca is critical. Probably the most dominating need is an "eminent domain" factor, as it were, that had led Japan to try to militarily dominate the region as it industrialized and modernized more rapidly than other nations in the region. Additionally, the long term economic growth prospects of Japan call for the

same level of growth of trade and shipping that is currently enjoyed. To ensure this, it would be of great use in the long run for Japan to be the economic power of Southeast Asia. This does call, however, for Japan to juggle the greatly disparate economic interrelationships of the countries of Southeast Asia when none of them is influential enough to reduce confusion in bargaining. ASEAN provides Japan (or the United States for that matter) somewhat of a negotiating handle on the Southeast Asia portion of the region with regard to trade and investment. Lastly, as a market itself, ASEAN is huge and has great long range potential as a consumer for commodities produced in Japan. ASEAN, therefore is an ideal long range economic partner of consequence to Japan.

Serious courting of ASEAN by Japan began in 1977 at the Prime Minister level. The resultant Fukuda Doctrine put the amount of U.S. one billion dollars into complementary industrial projects to be undertaken by ASEAN member states. (2) Such support from Japan has been consistent and Japan already wields great influence in the economic workings of ASEAN. In 1982 Japanese

firms surpassed American firms by the amount of direct investment in ASEAN countries. "These countries have been a test case for a more aggressive style of Japanese diplomacy that is made possible by Japans economic superpower status." (3) However, "To the degree that Japanese firms can demonstrate that the ASEAN countries have no alternatives to heavy dependence on Japan" the more secure the Japanese position. (4)I feel that ASEAN member states are showing an acumen for or a sophistication in strategy development that will challenge any Japanese long term plans that do not support a general balance of trade. If this is the case ASEAN's sophistication would somewhat hedge against an economic domination by Japan and this favors U.S. goals.

ENDNOTES

1. K.S. Nathan and M. Pathamanathan, Trilateralism In Asia. pp. 36-37.
2. Ibid. p.39.
3. Lawrence B. Krause, U.S. Economic Policy toward the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. p.69.
4. Ibid. p. 34.

CHAPTER IV
U.S. INVOLVEMENTS

- Historical -

The United States, since World War II, has occupied an important position in the eyes of most Southeast Asian nations and, in fact, many of those countries hold similar views toward the U.S. Their view of the U.S. as a vast industrialized, superpower with inexhaustible wealth and military might is generally common. Yet, the fact that the U.S. was not a major colonial power in Asia has allowed the U.S. to appear in a generally favorable historical light. Japan, and the old European colonial powers of the area do not enjoy such a history in the region. Thus, without a lot of historical baggage, it has been relatively easy for the U.S. to achieve an early dominance, as it were, in trading with the ASEAN nations and general favor in all dealings.

- Economic -

Now, with the advancing industrialization of the Pacific Rim, attention must continually be paid to ASEAN trade by the U.S. if it does not want to find;

- a) its share of trade reduced to insignificant levels
- b) economic dominance of ASEAN by another player, for example Japan, and
- c) political dominance of ASEAN by elements not supporting long term U.S. goals and security.

In fact, recent inroads have been noted in ASEAN purchases of machinery and transport equipment which heretofore had been purchased from the U.S. Japan has now supplanted the U.S. as the principle supplier of such items. Interestingly, exports to the U.S. have continued on a steady climb, leaving Americans as buyers of more than one quarter of ASEAN exports in 1985. (1) This places ASEAN as the fifth largest group trading partner of the U.S.

These economic relations can be expected to undergo the typical ups and downs of market changes. Currently, for example, Thailand, one of the six member states, has real problems with the U.S. marketing of subsidized sugar and rice. Yet overall, ASEAN is successfully courting the rest of the economic world and the United States' position is not unlike it has always been. The U.S. has historically proffered a strong commitment

in support of ASEAN economic development. The six member states often express unofficially however, that the U.S. is not doing enough or not actually putting its money where its mouth is. Although this may be somewhat the case, a count of Third World countries that also need greater U.S. Economic trade and support would prove fairly exhaustive; and long term objectives also need to be met with each of these constituents.

- Assistance -

U.S. assistance to ASEAN, both economic and military, has more than doubled between the mid 1970s and the mid 1980s. This includes both assistance direct to ASEAN as an entity as well as to the six member states bilaterally. (2)

- Political Relations -

ASEAN and U.S. policy towards resolution of the Cambodian (Kampuchea) problem has been generally mutually supporting' in the United Nations. The U.S. Secretary of State or his representative have met annually with the ASEAN foreign ministers. The

Cambodia/Vietnam refugee issues have been greatly eased by ASEAN/US/European cooperation. In sum, U.S. ASEAN relations are still substantially sound.

ENDNOTES

1. United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, ASEAN Background Notes. p.1.
2. Ibid. p.7.

CHAPTER V

OTHER ALIGNMENTS

- Countries -

Apart from member states' bilateral relations and United Nations specific relationships, ASEAN as an entity, has developed its own international relationships. Regular dialogues at the foreign minister level now occur with the U.S., Japan, Canada, the European Community (EC), Australia and New Zealand. Of these, the U.S. and Japan are the greatest trading partners as noted earlier.

- Organizations -

ASEAN, in order to gain the most benefit from close coordination afforded by the association itself, has representation in the form of lobby groups and organizational membership has been capitalized upon. Following is a partial listing showing the scope of ASEAN international impact:

- The ASEAN Washington Committee composed of the six ASEAN ambassadors to the United States,

- The ASEAN-U.S. Business Council: joins private sector leaders of ASEAN and the U.S. (1)
- ESCAP-Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: Regional forum for developing countries in U.N. system. (2)

ENDNOTES

1. United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, ASEAN Background Notes, p. 8.
2. Jun Nishikawa, Asean and the United Nations System, p. 67.

CHAPTER VI

DEVELOPMENT OF LONG TERM U.S. STRATEGY

- U.S. Strategy toward ASEAN -

The world population will nearly double between now and the year 2025. However, the geo-political-economic changes will probably be even more dramatic. Out of this change, U.S. policies would want to insure a continued effective security strategy. Looking at the U.S. National Security Strategy for 1988 (1) it can be presumed that similar broad policy will be issued annually in the ensuing years. That strategy as published for 1988, specifically addresses the following ASEAN related issues: ASEAN with regard to the Cambodian issue before the United Nations; Thailand with regard to the Cambodian and VietNam issues; The Philippines with regard to international problems; and Japan as a regional economic and defense power.

Strategy: "continue our strong endorsement of ASEAN's quest for a political solution-----under our initiative on regional problems at the United Nations, we are prepared to play a constructive role in efforts

to achieve a Cambodian settlement." (2) If successful, regional stability will be greatly enhanced; communication between the U.S. and Vietnam may begin to normalize; and Thailand may be able to turn more forces towards the drug problem in northwest Thailand.

Strategy: "we will continue our close security cooperation to deter any political aggression and maintain support of our eligible refugees." (3) Our military ties are through the Manila Pact. Thailand has also cooperated with many countries on the refugee issue while bearing the brunt of the problem. Thailand is a strong ally with a population of over 50 million.

Strategy: (Philippines) "We are determined to help this important Pacific ally to overcome these problems so it can.....counter the threat of a virulent communist insurgency, and strengthen democratic government." (4) Here we have strategic basing in a populous country with long historical ties to the U.S. It is going to be difficult for the Philippines to stabilize internally, but to allow failure would be a strategic disaster for the U.S. We must stay involved.

Strategy: "Japan should undertake the primary responsibility to defend its homeland.....out to 1000 nautical miles." also, "a recent positive development is Japan's significantly increased expenditure on foreign assistance." (5) Japan is the biggest factor with regard to ASEAN and the entire region. Japan is again becoming a regional power in every sense of the word. Balancing Japan's influence over ASEAN with that of the U.S. may be key. Can we function trilaterally?

- Anticipated Regional Changes -

While ASEAN is a success economically it is not a regional military power. The Soviet Union and China as well as Vietnam and Japan are now, or are rapidly becoming, regional military powers. The future influence of these powers in the region can only be speculated upon, but their general desires can be reasoned out in terms of likelihoods. An ability to generate, for example, a local instability could at sometime be useful given that the region of ASEAN, with its resources and SLOCs, is of strategic importance. ASEAN

functions as a political/economical handhold on an area that is in many ways diverse and fragmented; thus it could become an economic or geographic tool of instability. As an entity, it would be contrary to U.S. goals to simply allow changes in the status between the U.S. and ASEAN to develop if they did not support our long term goals.

- Conclusion -

Is the Strategy working? Since the inception of ASEAN the U.S. has verbally supported that grouping in international forum. Development aid has been provided to the member states by the U.S. and also to ASEAN as an entity. Economically, each member state has improved its lot and now has a well-heard, collective voice in many arenas. It is common, however, to find information that one or another member of ASEAN is dissatisfied with U.S. policy or more so, U.S. practice. The most recent examples are of Thailand's displeasure with U.S. sugar and rice subsidies. (6) Yet, as hurt as it may be over these new problems, Thailand certainly will not

ignore its own overwhelming successes, and the United States' position of support over the last decade. My point, euphemistically, is that these countries have shown themselves to be too sophisticated to "throw out the baby with the bath water". They will, on the other hand, look closely at trends in our performance, and the U.S. must continue to pay close attention to these trends as well. To this point, it appears the U.S. is not making any major or "strategic" errors in its support of ASEAN. In the area of long term goals, the approach has to be one of continuous evaluation with regard to our future position with ASEAN. This includes a constant analysis of the other regional powers as each element of power of those countries develops in the region.

Although ASEAN member states may appear a little frustrated with the U.S. at times, they also appear to look at the total picture in a proper time context, historically, in the present and future. The U.S. has a respectable history in the region. At present there is stability and continuing improvement. We would seem to

have an advantage over the rest of the world in solidifying our long term prospects with ASEAN. It is all working for us at present. But, a caution, ASEAN's importance in the world will very likely continue to rise and its value as a partner to U.S. could be beyond what we currently envision. Looking to the future, ASEAN should be nurtured and supported as an entity of great potential, an ally for the 21st century.

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1. The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States, pp. 30-32
2. Ibid, pp. 30-32.
3. Ibid, pp. 30-32.
4. Ibid, pp. 30-32.
5. Ibid, pp. 30-32.
6. Evelyn Colbert, " United States Policy in Southeast Asia," in U.S. Army War College Selected Readings, Course 5, Regional National Security Strategies, Asia, Vol. 6, p. 69.

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