

Strategic parameters of Pacific Basin development

by Uwe Parpart-Henke

With the exception of the China policy issue and preoccupation with alleged unfair Japanese trade practices, Asian policy questions have commanded little public attention in the United States since the dramatic U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975.

The seemingly intractable Central America problem has moved to center stage and blocked out all else. High economic growth rates, partly sustained even during the current world economic depression and concomitant relative political stability have made it easy to forget that, less than 20 years ago, virtually the entire Asian theater was in the kind of political turmoil that makes the present Central America situation look almost benign by comparison.

Asia in the mid-1960s

By 1965, under the "able" policy guidance of McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, the Vietnam War had moved into its hottest phase; after the Chinese attack on India in 1962, the first Indo-Pakistani War delivered a second major shock to the Indian subcontinent; a Chinese communist-inspired insurrection in Indonesia cost the lives of several hundreds of thousands; Chinese communist-led insurgencies seriously destabilized Malaysia; and the Philippines had only recently come under control. Yet to come was the most brutal phase of the Vietnam War, the virtual destruction of Cambodia, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, and the Bangladesh secession.

The founding of the five-nation Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 and the extraordinary economic progress of these nations—Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore—as well as of Taiwan and South Korea, greatly assisted by the successful Japanese

foreign economic policy in the area, and the less spectacular economic progress of India, which finally solved its age-old food problem in the late 1970s, helped convert a dangerous war zone into a zone of stability and high economic growth with higher expectations in the future.

On the eve of President Reagan's visit to the area—he will visit Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia in early November—this relative stability is now again seriously threatened. Unrest in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines are only the highly visible outward signs of trouble. The root causes of this—much as in the 1960s—lie largely outside of Asia itself. There are few, if any, economic or security issues, which, *from the standpoint of the mutual sovereign nation-states' interests in the area*, could not be readily settled. The difficulty, as analyzed in depth in a major recent policy paper by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., "A 50-year

Basin," lies in the policies extraneous to the region pursued by contending *imperial* political factions and establishments in the United States, Western Europe, the Soviet Union, and China. The sovereign nations of Asia outside of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) find themselves in the unique world political circumstance of having to develop their own policies and of defending their very existence as integral nation-states in the center of a force triangle defined by two and a half imperialisms, as LaRouche has called them. These two and a half imperialisms are represented by first, the European oligarchy, its United States Eastern Establishment admirers, and the supranational financial institutions (International Monetary Fund [IMF], World Bank, and Bank for International Settlements [BIS] they control); second, the Great Russia imperial policies of the

present Soviet leadership; and third, the People's Republic of China, the junior ("one-half") imperial partner and sometime adversary of the former two. All problems arising for the Asian nations out of this constellation are greatly exacerbated by the total lack of a coherent grand strategy framework on the part of the Reagan administration for this part of the world, which by the end of the century will be inhabited by close to two-thirds of the world's population.

As a result of this strategic policy vacuum, two things are happening by default. First, since the present U.S. administration, specifically the White House, puts forward no coherent policy of its own, U.S. Asia policy becomes identified with the imperial policy designs of the Eastern Establishment, firmly entrenched in the State Department, and with IMF and World Bank policies. The resulting dissatisfaction and resentment in Asia, much as in other parts of the world, to such essentially neo-colonial policies then create immediate openings and opportunities for rival Soviet imperial moves.

Correlation of military forces

Ever since the 1979 invasion of Cambodia by forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the ouster of the murderous Pol Pot Khmer Rouge regime, and the subsequent Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, issues of military security, which had receded into the background after 1975, have again dominated policy discussion in the region. The subsequent allegedly retaliatory Chinese incursion into Vietnam exacerbated the situation. A difficult two-front military problem under desperate economic conditions has forced Vietnam to rely increasingly on Soviet military and economic assistance and to make greater concession to Soviet demands for the use of Vietnamese air and naval bases at Haiphong, Danang, Bien Hoa, and Cam Ranh Bay.

The resultant present military situation in Southeast Asia is as follows:

Out of 1.1 million Vietnamese troops, about 60 percent are now deployed between Hanoi and the Chinese border, and 20 Vietnamese divisions totalling approximately 180,000 troops are engaged in the occupation of Cambodia. Soviet fleet force levels in the area, including fleet-based aircraft, have increased dramatically in the last four years (see chart), though very recent exact figures are not available. Against this, on the ground, stand a total of less than 700,000 armed forces for the five ASEAN states combined, including elements of the U.S. Seventh Fleet operating in the region. And while the Soviet Pacific Fleet is still no real match for the U.S. Seventh Fleet, the regional ground force balance is so lopsided in Vietnam's favor that from the standpoint of actual military capabilities, ASEAN security, in particular the security of Thailand, the most exposed member nation, is virtually non-existent. Total Thai armed forces number less than 250,000 and are unit-by-unit no match for the battle-hardened Vietnamese army. Estimates given this writer by informed individuals in Thailand of how long Thai forces could hold off a concentrated Vietnamese attack ranged from 72

hours to six days, and the best protection for Bangkok was generally held to be the impenetrable late afternoon Bangkok traffic jam. Support from other ASEAN members would either come late or, more likely, not at all.

All ASEAN troops, including the great majority of Thai troops, have been equipped and trained primarily for counterinsurgency tasks, and the only battle experience which they have lies exclusively in that area. Large increases in military spending during the last four years by most ASEAN nations have done little to change the 1979-80 correlation of forces. The most immediate danger for direct military confrontation between Thai and Vietnamese forces is created by the massive post-1979 refugee problem along almost the entire length of the eastern Thai border. Several hundreds of thousands of refugees from Laos and Cambodia are crowded into camps near the border and Vietnam has claimed that they are used as recruiting grounds, staging areas, and sanctuaries for Khmer Rouge units. In 1980 a sizeable Vietnamese force crossed the Thai border in hot pursuit of such units and, given the outspoken Thai government support for the anti-Heng Samrin coalition of guerrilla forces which includes the Khmer Rouge, a replay or worse of 1980 is always a possibility.

These military realities, including the greatly increased Soviet presence in the region, define the boundary conditions which any responsible proposal for a resolution of the Indochina conflict must take into account; politically, of course, the Cambodian question is the central item. I will now briefly review the chronology of some of the most important Cambodia related events of the last decade and a half to provide a basis for judgment of present policy—U.S. policy in particular—with regard to Cambodia and of alternative policy proposals.

Cambodia 1970-83

In 1970 the United States, acting through various agencies, was at least complicit in the ouster of the neutralist Sihanouk regime and the installation of the pro-U.S. Lon Nol

U.S.-Soviet naval balance in the Pacific

	1978		November 1982	
	U.S.	U.S.S.R.	U.S.	U.S.S.R.
Submarines	43	120	52	124
Carriers	6	0	6	1
Surface combatants	85	67	92	88
Amphibious craft	31	9	31	10
Mine warfare craft	0	75	0	90
Support craft	55	420	42	440
Fighter/attack aircraft (includes land and carrier based aircraft)*	836	1350	982	2000

*Soviet aircraft presently confined to bases in Soviet Far East except for 20 aboard the recently deployed aircraft carrier. Non-carrier based U.S. aircraft distributed throughout bases in Japan, Guam, and Philippines.

Source: U.S. Navy.

government. The same well-known chain of events, which then, five years later, led to the forced final withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam, also, in the same month of April 1975, brought the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot to power in Phnom Penh. North Vietnamese and Chinese assistance were equally essential to the Pol Pot victory.

However, in short order, and certainly no later than by the end of 1976, Cambodia had been turned into an almost wholly dependent P.R.C. client state. Down to the battalion level, Khmer Rouge forces were advised and guided by Chinese military advisers, and a similar penetration occurred in the civilian administration, especially in the economic policy field. In 1975-76, a first wave of purges physically eliminated virtually all high- and intermediate-level civilian and military officials that had served the Lon Nol regime.

In 1977-78, this was followed by the full-scale implementation of the murderous Pol Pot-Chinese communalization, de-urbanization and "return to the countryside" policies. Virtually the country's entire intelligentsia was liquidated, and the most conservative existing estimates show that by late 1978 no less than 40 percent of the entire Cambodian population had fallen victim to a combination of deliberate massacres and mass-starvation induced by the Khmer Rouge policies. Simultaneously, in the second half of 1978, the great majority of Khmer Rouge military forces, under top-down Chinese military control, was shifted to the northern part of the country in the immediate proximity of the border with Vietnam. Some estimates hold that as many as 18 out of a total of 20 Khmer divisions were deployed in this fashion. Subsequent military developments provide high credibility for such estimates. In late December 1978, when Vietnamese troops, faced with an imminent two-front attack by Khmer Rouge and Chinese forces, pushed south into Cambodia, they faced little or no opposition on their march toward Phnom Penh after breaking through the initial *close-to-the-border* Cambodia deployment. By Jan. 7, Phnom Penh had fallen to Vietnamese troops.

The much broader strategic implications of the Vietnamese march into Cambodia are indicated by two events directly following the seizure of Phnom Penh—the late January 1979 visit of Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping to Washington, and the Feb. 19 Chinese invasion of Vietnam.

The Chinese dimension of the Cambodia issue

It was pointed out above that no Asian policy or military conflict can be adequately analyzed without full consideration of the U.S.-Soviet-China force triangle. It must be recalled, therefore, that by 1978 the Carter administration under Zbigniew Brzezinski's policy guidance had elevated the process of normalization of U.S.-P.R.C. relations to the status of a new geopolitical strategic principle: the magical "China Card." A general scaling-down of U.S. forces in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, in particular the intended withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea, must be viewed in the same context. Brzezinski's and Cyrus Vance's illusions, in combination with Harold Brown's incompetence in

the military strategic area, had in fact by 1978 set into motion a second major U.S. strategic withdrawal from Asia and the Pacific Ocean after the 1973-75 Vietnam disengagement.

As Ray S. Cline argues convincingly in a recent essay contributed to the 1982 Hoover International Study "A U.S. Foreign Policy for Asia," the Carter/Brzezinski "China Card" ploy was based on three debilitating myths. First, that the U.S. tilt toward China would strengthen the U.S. strategic posture in Asia and inhibit Soviet advances; second, that China is a loyal friend, virtually an ally of the United States; and third, that Deng Xiaoping has firm control over a stable regime in Peking, capable of lifting China promptly out of poverty and backwardness. On page 7, Cline quotes some candid statements by Hua Guofeng that rather precisely explain the Chinese interest in playing along with the "China Card" game: "The Soviet Union and the United States are the source of a new world war, and Soviet social imperialism presents the greatest danger. . . . [However], the more powerful enemy can be vanquished by taking advantage of every, even the smallest opportunity of gaining a mass ally, even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable, and conditional." Such, Cline remarks correctly, is the friendship that Carter was so proud to have won.

Now look at the effect of the Carter China policy for Indochina and Southeast Asia. From the standpoint of Chinese interests and ambitions, the matter was quite straightforward: Once the seriousness of the promise to give China a free hand in Asia had been verified through such real life consequences as the initiation of U.S. withdrawal from Korea, the breaking off of all attempts to normalize U.S.-Vietnam relations, and a potentially disastrous dilution of Seventh Fleet strength by mid-1978, the P.R.C. leadership shifted the implementation of the economic and military policy measures in Cambodia described above into high gear. Attainment of a dominant policy position in Indochina and Southeast Asia is an age-old Chinese objective, and after the failure of the early 1960s policy to achieve it through subversion and insurrection (Indonesia, Malaysia), a new opportunity now presented itself and was exploited in every way possible. The hope of curbing Soviet policy influence in the area was an included policy feature, and some analysts have gone so far as to suggest that the deliberate massacres in Cambodia were simply a prelude to a planned resettlement of parts of Cambodia with a Chinese population.

None of this came to pass, and, in fact, in almost every respect the exact opposite of the Chinese and Carter administration policy objectives was realized. Soviet influence in the region, rather than being reduced, was enhanced dramatically, culminating in the 1979 Vietnam-U.S.S.R. security treaty. Whatever Soviet intentions may have been, there is no question that the "China Card" delusions created the essential opening which the Soviets had only to capitalize on in an almost routine matter. Simultaneously, U.S. influence not only was not enhanced, but a serious crisis of confidence sprang up among ASEAN nations concerning U.S. determination to maintain a strong strategic presence in the Pacific

theatre. Thailand, of course, was the principally affected ASEAN member, and then-Prime Minister Kriangsak made an urgent trip to Washington to seek at least minimal reassurances.

But the situation was far more serious than consideration of the Thai predicament alone would indicate. Thailand, virtually within days of the fall of Saigon, initiated secret negotiations with Peking—more out of desperation than out of conviction—to seek security assistance in case Vietnamese divisions, now poised all along its eastern border, would simply not stop there, but continue their drive west into Bangkok. Malaysia and Indonesia, however, perceived a different kind of threat. To them the entire “China Card” game, putting their traditional enemy the Chinese in charge of Asia policy, was a gross and incomprehensible strategic blunder.

In sum, four years after the traumatic and highly public Vietnam debacle, the Carter administration had incurred or rather helped produce a less publicized but equally serious strategic defeat, whose consequences are the parameters defining the present situation and clearly beg for radically different policy approaches of the kind specified by Lyndon LaRouche in his above-mentioned policy document on Indian and Pacific Oceans Basin economic development. But before turning to the explication of some detailed proposals for implementation following the LaRouche approach, two other matters must be discussed to clear the deck. First, was there a continuity in U.S., or rather Eastern Establishment Asia policy, that led to the Carter disaster. Second, was there any point of inflection in the past decade’s developments at which an entirely different policy was possible and deliberately ignored?

What might have been

While up to this point I have stressed Carter-Brzezinski policy responsibility for the decline of the U.S. strategic position in the Pacific, this point of view is clearly too limited in historical scope. In 1977 the Carter administration inherited a strategic doctrine, which had been formulated eight years earlier by Henry Kissinger and enunciated in Richard Nixon’s 1969 Guam Declaration (“Nixon Doctrine”). The declaration ruled out any future U.S. ground troop involvement in East Asia, stressed “self-reliance” of U.S. allies, and limited U.S. military action to the use of air and naval power against any potential aggressor. The message, reinforced by actual deployment decision, which over the next 10 years reduced U.S. military personnel deployed forward of Guam to less than 140,000, the lowest level since before World War II, came across loud and clear to U.S. allies in Northeast, East, and Southeast Asia: Don’t count on us, we are pulling out. The Japanese Defense Agency, noting U.S. Seventh Fleet strength decline between 1973 and 1977 from three carriers and 29 surface combatants to two carriers and 18 surface ships, carefully formulated that by 1979 the United States had only a limited capability to defend Asian sea lanes against the rapidly growing Soviet Pacific fleet. ASEAN

spokesmen were more blunt: The best ASEAN countries can hope for in the case of Soviet or Soviet-inspired aggression would be moral exhortations, the mobilization of world opinion, and, if the Congress permits, an increase in military aid and credit sales!

It is the continuity of the combined Kissinger-Brzezinski policy—Kissinger’s Metternich-imitating attempt at an Asian “balance of power” scheme centered on China—which by 1979 had created a dead end for U.S. Asia strategy. This perception could be reinforced in many ways, if in this policy review there were room enough to recount even just the most glaringly disastrous consequences of Kissinger policy misdirection in South and Southwest Asia.

That positive policy alternatives, especially after 1975, were available at just about every step of the way, goes almost without saying. Some of the relevant facts are as follows.

Just a few months after the fall of Saigon, a joint Malaysian-Thai initiative was developed to approach Hanoi to suggest a sequence of concrete steps, which would reduce ASEAN-Indochina tensions and lead in due time to Vietnam’s membership in ASEAN. The Thai government made clear that this would presuppose U.S. willingness to normalize relations with Vietnam and at least possible joint ASEAN/Japanese steps to aid in Vietnamese reconstruction. Thai sources have stated that Kissinger personally, hinting at Chinese objections, torpedoed the project.

The next opportunity to draw Vietnam closer to ASEAN arose in late 1977 with Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Duy Trinh’s visit to four ASEAN capitals and his endorsement of a neutral zone of economic cooperation in Southeast Asia, an idea put forward by ASEAN on several earlier occasions and still strongly demanded by Vietnam at the 1976 Colombo Non-Aligned Conference. Now it was Brzezinski who opposed, on behalf of his putative new-found Chinese allies, even tentative steps in that direction. A final Vietnamese initiative came only a few months before the move into Cambodia, during a September 1978 visit of Premier Pham Van Dong to Thailand and the Philippines. There can be little doubt that in the entire 1975-78 period Vietnam was anything but anxious to be fully drawn into the Soviet orbit. The need for reconstruction assistance, the perception that this could be effectively granted only with U.S. concurrence and that it required a stable security environment in Southeast Asia, were views which, according to all reliable accounts this writer could gather in several ASEAN capitals, were shared by a majority of the Vietnamese leadership.

The Kissinger-Brzezinski policy approach of subordinating ASEAN policy to the China Card continued under Alexander Haig. In February 1981 two Carter holdovers in the Reagan administration, Acting Assistant Secretary of State Michael Armacost and Deputy Assistant Secretary John Negroponte—both of whom were former Kissinger aides—wrote a memo proposing to use the Cambodia crisis to further the China Card. They proposed to provide American support for the Khmer Rouge by pressuring the forces of Sihanouk and Son Sann to join in a united front with the Chinese proxies.

The two men wrote that keeping the Cambodian fighting going would keep ASEAN polarized from Vietnam; moreover, they wrote, ASEAN nations normally suspicious of China would be forced to align with China on an issue of common interest, thus aiding the creation of a China-centered political lineup.

Through three administrations, pursuit of the illusory "China Card" let all opportunities for a constructive strategic alternative in Southeast Asia come to naught. Instead, we are now facing a Vietnam whose economic and military policies have become even more firmly embedded in the Soviet strategic framework. Comecon membership and the 1979 Vietnam-U.S.S.R. security pact are only the outwardly visible signs of this development.

Present U.S. policy alternatives

Since early 1983 Vietnamese foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach and several ASEAN leaders have resumed rounds of diplomatic activity reminiscent of the 1975-78 initiatives, culminating in Thach's recent trip to several ASEAN capitals. But this, of course, is not 1977, and walls of suspicion have been built up on all sides. Still, the United States must not simply dismiss or ignore what has been set in motion. The crucial point of method is to develop a new strategic framework within which such tentative steps can be given a chance to succeed.

Precisely this is the thrust of the LaRouche long-term economic development perspective for the Pacific and Indian Oceans Basin. A commonality of purpose is to be defined which shifts the policy debate away from narrowly defined security issues and changes the agenda at least initially to establish broad points of agreement and common interest, which then allow a fresh approach to otherwise intractable and divisive items. Suppose that instead of the Thai demand for a 30-kilometer withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from the Thai border, an entirely different border issue—the development of the Mekong River as an issue of vital economic interest to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam—was put at the head of the agenda. An agreement in principle to proceed with such a project could then readily become the basis for establishing minimal ground rules, including security safeguards for all sides, without which execution of such a project would, of course, be unthinkable. The LaRouche policy proposal contains a whole sequence of similar economic development proposals, which are addressed not only to the development needs of Indochina and Thailand, but would define a common bond for the majority of the nations of the Asian Pacific and Indian Ocean rim. A high-level policy conference could be usefully convened to establish a well-defined list of priority projects with the necessary financial and credit arrangements suited to their speedy execution.

In the meantime, for the immediate purpose of this policy review, it must suffice to list the number of policy steps the United States must take preliminarily and, if need be unilaterally, to reassure its Asian allies, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for future action of the kind just indicated:

Military bases: In the face of the aggressive Soviet military build-up in the entire Pacific and Indian Oceans theater (see chart, p.31), existing U.S. bases must be maintained and reinforced; the most urgent need exists to modernize and bring back to full strength all Seventh Fleet capabilities. This writer, however, sees no need for new Pacific or Indian Ocean rim bases, whether in Pakistan or in Thailand. A reopening of bases in Thailand would simply provide a further pretext for reinforcement of Soviet bases in Vietnam, possibly provoking Vietnam into officially converting, for example, Cam Ranh Bay, now legally still only a "port of call" for the Soviet Pacific Fleet, into a full-fledged base under Soviet control. The security benefit for Thailand and the United States would be negative.

The refugee issue: U.S. inaction with regard to the refugee problem is scandalous. The United States must take immediate steps to at least relieve the economic pressure on Thailand. More broadly, a first constructive step for negotiations with Vietnam could aim at a mutually agreed upon policy for systematic resettlement of Cambodian refugees in Cambodia. This requires recognition by the Thai and U.S. governments that the atrocities committed by the Pol Pot regime have created a situation in Cambodia, which has made it physically impossible for that country to survive on its own under present conditions. Cambodia now has a 60 to 65 percent female population and virtually no trained administrators at almost any level. A cataloguing of actual needs, even if only involving rudimentary rebuilding of industry and administration, could provide the basis for a rational refugee resettlement policy. Direct or indirect U.S. aid in the process could create the context for future normalization of U.S.-Vietnamese relations and simultaneously lay the groundwork for Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodian territory.

Strategic policy vectors: The most important long-term strategic policy question involves the internal stability of China. This can be promoted only through resumption of those modernization policies associated with Sun Yat-Sen's "New China" efforts of 1911, efforts later drowned in political chaos. The United States unilaterally, and without interference in internal Chinese affairs, can nonetheless make major contributions in this direction. Two types of approach are most promising. First, the LaRouche policy document takes note of Chinese plans for a major upgrading of the south-north Hangzhou-Peking Canal, originally built during the Sui (581-618) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties. U.S. assistance for such a large-scale infrastructure undertaking is feasible and would advance the in-depth modernization process. Second, assistance in the crucial areas of scientific research, most notably in such advanced fields as plasma physics and fusion research, to give just one example, also coincides with expressed Chinese wishes and proposals. Other areas of collaboration should be readily identifiable.

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