15

SECURITY ISSUES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: A SOUTHEAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

by

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If the record of the past four decades of relative peace in the Western world is anything to go by, the next arena of major international conflict may well be fought somewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, and not, as has been and is currently thought or anticipated by many, in Western Europe.[1] Although the forces of the Western Alliance are poised and positioned on the flanks, on borders that divide the East and West after the defeat of Nazi Germany, and face the threat of an invasion or attack by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies, and which scenario pervades the tensions between the United States and the USSR, the mutual destruction of both because of escalation beyond conventional weapons makes it less likely for conflagration in that continent. Instead, the more probabilistic battlefield is in Pacific Asia, and this is largely because the scene is less so simple in terms of competing influence and access and the relations between allies, friends and enemies. Who would, for example, have predicted or even contemplated the hostility between China and Vietnam so soon after the end of the Second Indochina War given the close relations between the two in the Vietnamese struggle against Western "imperialist" forces?

If the Soviet Union <u>is</u> the remaining expansionist imperialist power of a past age, her quest for influence, nay domination, may have to be made somewhere in the Pacific Ocean - and not Europe where the limits of her territorial imperative cannot extend, short of course of gains made by military adventurism, beyond the borders she gained at the end of the Second World War. In 1975, when it was apparent the US

was "withdrawing" from Southeast Asia, it was the Kremlin that was quick to rush in to fill the power vacuum that was created. Nevertheless, thanks to the bungling nature of Soviet diplomacy, the Russian bear may find that her immense power is not really a capability that so readily translates into influence, albeit the recent "Vladivostok Initiative" and the emergence of Gorbachev may present a challenge that requires novel responses.[2]

But, at the same time, it is not the Soviet Union, and not the Soviet Union and the United States in competition that will shape the security scenario in Asia and the Pacific; rather it is more the confluence and confrontation of four major powers, namely the aforementioned pair and the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Japan. This interplay of 4 principal antagonists sets Pacific Asia as the more complex security setting of the world, if only because of rapidly transforming events that makes it less stable as an environment than that now exists in Western Europe. Some observers have noted the intricacy of a triangular relationship that presents especial power configurations in the Asia-Pacific, but the lack of attention to the fourth side of what is a quadrangular power situation can only be made at one's peril. Japan, the vanquished power in the last Great War, may actually be the victor of the post-war prosperity that was fostered by the United States. But the US-Japanese "alliance" has been under severe strain in recent years and its corrosion may hark an alternative to peace if the export and market orientation of Tokyo is beset by the protectionist policies of Washington.

Furthermore, to illustrate the potentiality of serious conflagration, Sino-Soviet competition and its likelihood of erupting into armed hostilities should not be dismissed too easily, especially if Beijing's modernization in the Dengist mode allows it a fair capacity to project its power into its traditional or assumed spheres of influence. This alarmist scenario is tempered by the possible chance that China may become capitalist, but for the moment a system that advocates a "country, two systems" approach is not likely to have completely shed its memory of its heritage of having been the "Middle Kingdom".

It should therefore be apparent that the security situation in Pacific Asia presents a complex web of power relationships, a less stable environment then that exists in Europe where the line of demarcation between friend and foe is so clear-cut even as disagreements surface amongst allies. It is folly, of course, to assume that serious questions affecting the strategic equation between the United States and the Soviet Union and the calculus of war that has always loomed in the European heartland are distinct from security issues in the Pacific, signifying the global dimensions of superpower interests. But, irrespective of the lack of forward movement in negotiations on arms control and a new round of tensions after detente, a stalemate in Europe exists. In Pacific-Asia, however, deterrence based on nuclear weapons is less important or irrelevant, and hence conflict more than likely. It is not only more than likely - it has already occurred and at least two conflict situations still

prevail, namely the Korean problem and its relation to Northeast Asia, and the Cambodian (Kampuchean) conflict and the security situation in Southeast Asia.

The purpose of this limited paper is to review the security situation existing in Pacific Asia by highlighting past trends and future or likely possibilities. "Pacific Asia" here only means the countries normally defined as those in East Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, the states of the Pacific, Australasia, the Soviet Union and the United States. Although the Asian continent is very large and there are many security problems, it is felt that this geographic delineation is necessary because of time and other limitations. More importantly, however, it is felt that Pacific Asia (or Asia-Pacific) security problems are crucial in understanding an apparent transformation of the "power balance" in the region which presently is tilted in favour of the United States. None the less, it should be noted that security problems of the Asia-Pacific are not unrelated to other areas of the world, as for example, the Indian Ocean.

"Security" as understood here is not confined to the conventional notion of resisting or overcoming the threat of external aggression but emphasizes internal defence as well. Indeed, in contrast to the European milieu, Pacific Asia is a conglomeration of states at various stages of modernization or development, between those that are economically developed and others which are developing, between countries with strong social cohesion and those that are

fragmented, between countries that are democratic and those that are less so or undemocratic. Not surprisingly, domestic security concerns are more important in some of these countries, especially if these relate to challenges to authority emanating from communist-inspired insurgencies and separatist or irrendentist revolts. At the same time, the involvement or intervention of major powers in the various sub-regions constitute a dynamic factor in intra- and inter-state relations and the larger issues of security. By stating thus, it should be noted that Pacific-Asia is a diverse region, that it is both ocean and continent, and unity of entity in terms of geography and culture (as in the case of NATO) is simply non-existent.

As alluded earlier, "security" should not be understood mainly in "defence" or military terms, but encompass political and economic questions. Economic survival in terms of a free trade regime may be the most important requisite of national survival, and therefore its security, for many of these states in the region that has already been heralded as being dominant in the twenty-first century. However, the recession of the 1980s may cause severe economic problems that may serve to undermine the security of several of the Pacific-Asia states and play a role in the competition for influence among the major powers.

THE MAJOR POWERS

Any assessment of the security situation in Pacific Asia must begin with a discussion of the major powers, namely the United States,

the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China and Japan. Although Japan is not a military power and its self-defense orientation an important feature of its security predisposition, none the less its important economic standing has shown its dilemma of having to find a political role that it previously shunned in the international context.[3] But precisely because of its economic interdependence, its potential for a military role should not be easily brushed aside. In some sense, the United States and the Soviet Union are "external" to the region, but inasmuch as they are global powers are also "Pacific" powers. The interactions between these powers define the changing security configuration of the region, but such relations must also be seen in connection with those of other actors. The roles of the major powers, then, determine to no mean extent the security issues of the region. However, as the United States role is pivotal in the region, its impact and relations with the other powers is central to our discussion.

Since the end of the Pacific War, the United States has enjoyed a supremacy in the region that will probably continue into the end of this century. Although its "sudden" departure from Southeast Asia in 1975 was seen as part of a larger withdrawal syndrome,[4] the United States is simultaneously viewed as a vital factor in the security of Pacific Asia inasmuch as it can be regarded as a benign power. To some extent, the United States provides a security umbrella that allows for the continued economic development of its allies, leading to the charge by some critics that countries like Japan and South Korea enjoy

a "free ride" in defence. On the other hand, US security interests may also mean the "protection" of authoritarian regimes such as the Philippines under Marcos, though in this respect its presence there also provides for the security of the larger Southeast Asian environment.

In terms of the order of battle, US military superiority cannot be matched by any other power, but the problem is more that of political will to match the military capacity. Since 1969, with the advent of the Nixonian Guam Doctrine, it can be discerned that the United States is not ever likely to commit ground troops to Asia, even if memories of its Vietnam experience continue to fade. The United States continues to provide aid and other assistance to its allies and friends, but the extent of her commitment and involvement in a real conflict situation is a worrisome factor. Because of this, for example, it may well be that a country like Thailand has in recent years been cultivating a security relationship with the PRC, since its security ties with the US - in spite of outwardly strong linkages - cannot be relied upon in the final analysis.[5]

The United States nevertheless constitutes the major obstacle to any "advance" by the Soviet Union in the region. However, US military superiority does not in any way limit political and economic overtures that the Kremlin is able to achieve, the recent fishing agreement with Kiribati being one example. Seen in a different light, the question may be asked if the US interest in the Asia-Pacific is merely to counter the Soviets, that it is only part of its global interests. US spokesmen have repeatedly claimed that their interests

are in the region, but at the same time it seems undeniable that Europe remains the geographical core of its security concerns.

Up to 1979, when the US began to initiate "normalization" with Beijing (the discussions began much earlier), most of Pacific Asia had nestled in the assumption that the PRC was the "villain" of the region, but since then US/PRC relations have reached a situation closer to that of allies. Although it is no longer valid to assume that the US and the PRC share a common and undivided concern about containing the USSR, the former seems less perturbed by the regional power inclination of the PRC. In this regard, US interests in Asia can be seen as more to prevent Soviet competition for influence in the region, in part abetted by its own notion that it still maintains military dominance in the Asia-Pacific. In fact, some Southeast Asian fears of the modernization of China, especially in the military sphere, are dismissed by US observers as "premature" because of the assumed US military dominance in the region for at least the next two decades, and because such modernization is seen as a very long process and not so easily accomplished by Beijing.

Part of the US relationship with Beijing must ultimately lie on the question of Taiwan. In effect, although the issue of Taiwan and its eventual inclusion in the PRC is seen as a natural one, the present situation differs little in substance from that there are "two Chinas", in spite of whatever outward form of the two entities. This is not a serious security issue as much as it is political, but its resolution may in fact depend on the "one country, two systems" experiment in Hong Kong after 1997.

Given the strong emphasis on a strategy of the availability and strength of "carrier task forces" in the US Seventh Fleet, it may well be inferred that Japan remains the core of Washington's interests in the Pacific, in fact giving credence to the notion that it is an 'unsinkable aircraft carrier'. Japan's strategic location and its "choke points" that presents challenges to Soviet navy movements out of Vladivostok into the Pacific makes it a crucial strategic location for the United States. But if Japan is essential to the US strategic posture in the Pacific, the latter has of late been pressing for a greater contribution to their common defence from the former. Such pressures are related to broader bilateral issues of economics and trade and also political questions as to the appropriate Japanese role in the region. The problems of existing trade frictions between Tokyo and Washington, of the huge trade deficits in the latter's disfavour and of protectionist tendencies in both capitals may lead to conflict that may engulf the whole region and destroy the peace gained since the end of the last war, a danger that has been voiced by some quarters. Japanese contribution to the US security role remains at present limited, but this prospect may loom larger in the years to come if the US wanes in its role because of domestic and economic problems. A 'surrogate' role expected of the Japanese in this sense may well be realized since both Tokyo and Washington share common concerns of the "threat" of the Soviet Union.

If the United States can be viewed as the "top dog" nation in the Asia-Pacific,[6] a situation which should continue into the end of this century, there can be no question that the Soviet Union also

wants to be a Pacific power at least in incremental fashion, and recognized as much as it is an European power. But the Soviet Union is a military power that enjoys litle political influence in all of Pacific Asia, except perhaps in Indochina and North Korea, and to a lesser extent in some countries of the South Pacific. Its quest for influence is viewed in Western and Japanese quarters as worrisome, and viewed more than suspiciously by Beijing. However, some countries are more "relaxed" in their attitude towards the USSR and presumably do not view it as a long-term threat.

As noted by Simon, the position of the USSR is decidedly inferior if compared to the United States because of its intractable conflict with China, its poor relations with Japan, the lack of appeal of the Soviet model for development strategies, and the relative stability in East Asia (except Indochina) which provides few opportunities for Soviet influence.[7] Although the Soviet military build-up in the Pacific has been impressive, there are several deficiencies in the Kremlin's strategy to be assertive in the region,[8] even with the advent of Gorbachev. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union's efforts are inexorable and sometimes singularly odd. The Kremlin, for example, was the only country in the world to congratulate the Marcos regime for its misplaced victory in the February 1986 elections. Its continuing position of relative influence in Vietnam should not be dismissed too quickly, in view of the strong nationalist posture of Hanoi, as the facilities it has obtained at Cam Ranh and Da Nang are precious to its naval linkages of its largest fleet, the Pacific

fleet. Similarly, it can be noted that it plays an important role in North Korea and understands Pyongyang's ability to "play" to the competition between the Kremlin and Beijing.

But the real or more immediate challenge of the Soviets to the security of Pacific Asia lies more in its relations with the PRC, an issue that is subsumed as Sino-Soviet relations. Although Sino-Soviet relations will never reach a situation of "normalcy" before Beijing's break with Moscow, improvements are possible as to reduce tensions between the two. Fears of both the Chinese and Soviets may lead to appreciations of "one above the other", if not keeping them at "equidistance", and this creates domestic security problems in various individual countries. For example, a fear of Chinese expansionism (such as the view of the PRC as the long-term threat to Southeast Asia) may lead to a more cordial or less hostile response to Soviet attempts to be an important actor in the region. [This need to steer between Scylla and Charabydis is difficult and could be disastrous, as was shown by Cambodia under Sihanouk.] In spite of the low possibility of the Soviets being able to satisfy the PRC's three conditions for normalization, none the less Beijing recognizes the legitimate right of Moscow to retain base rights in Vietnam.

The role of the People's Republic of China in the security of the Pacific may be "positive" in that it is viewed as potentially less threatening than the Soviet Union. In some sense, this notion rests on the military backwardness of the PRC even if it is a regional power. The PRC's involvement as an interested party or antagonist in the

conflict situations of the region, however, belies some of the suspicions that exist as to its future ambitions. The PRC's involvement in the 1965 communist coup in Indonesia, for example, is a haunting memory that still acts as a major pscyhological obstacle to the resumption of diplomatic relations or even increased direct trade between the two countries.[9]

Inasmuch as the Soviet Union is the eminence grise in the future constellations of security events in the Pacific, the PRC might even be duly considered a member of the Western alliance, leading to the possibility of a US-Japanese-PRC condominium against the "increased Soviet threat". This notion is also linked to the imputation of a peaceful posture in Beijing, making it less likely now to support North Korean adventurism as it did in the Korean War.

On the other hand, however, it is not lost in some Asian minds that the PRC will wage war if necessary to achieve its aims, the most poignant example being the "teach Vietnam a lesson" campaign in 1979. Although the lesson was more a failure, there is no doubt that Beijing's intentions are less than benign. It is also not lost that the PRC has nuclear weapons and delivery capacity which together in itself is an important consideration of its military/adversarial potential.

Part of the uncertainty of the Chinese "threat" rests on domestic political developments in the post-Deng era, that is whether the "Four Modernizations" will continue or whether the country will lapse into a "more red" mode. Either way, however, the perceptions of

a Chinese threat are not likely to recede. The former mode may mean a loss of opportunities for Asia-Pacific's developing countries to compete with China (with its low labour costs) in the manufacture trade and the drive for foreign investment. The latter may mean a more hostile China with a prospect of open invasion or export of communist subversion or both. But it is more likely that China's role will be that of an independent "third" actor in the evolving power relationship between the four major powers of the region,[10] acting according to its own interests. For the moment, also, it can be anticipated that her security role will be less belligerent and that her national preoccupation will be on socio-economic modernization.

The fourth side of the power quadrangle in the security setting of Pacific Asia is Japan which has renounced war since its defeat in 1945. Japan, significantly also, is non-nuclear in its defence make-up, a telling testimony of having been the first and thus far only nation to have experienced atomic bombing. An "ally" of the United States, Japanese re-armament is no longer an issue that it had been in the early postwar years. In spite of its anti-war constitution, there is still apprehension that Japan may one day re-emerge as a strong militaristic power bent on subjugating the Asia-Pacific region. Given her peaceful inclinations and the vast economic power it has, however, the crucial challenge for the Japanese is to forge a role that is supportive of the existing power balance in Pacific Asia but at the same time not appearing too strong militarily.[11]

The United States is ever-anxious that the Japanese will shoulder a larger share of the defence burden although Tokyo has so far resisted allocating more than 1 per cent of its annual budget to military expenditures. At the same time, there appears greater support to a Japanese input in the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), a proposal that can see Japanese contribution in the technological and scientific dimensions of the common defence between the US and Japan and Washington's European allies. The Japanese certainly have the capacity and wherewithal to develop further its defence industries to support her defence effort but for the moment do not allow sales or even transfer of technology of its various equipment.

It has been observed that Tokyo's contribution to regional security could develop along the political and economic dimensions, a notion which would certainly be compatible with the Japanese thesis of "comprehensive security"[12] as a prophylactic against war. With the provision of economic assistance, Japan may be able to help the modernization efforts of countries of the Asia-Pacific and therefore allow these countries to emphasize less on military expenditures. In turn as well, the economic modernization of these countries will assist them to be more self-reliant and resilient and as such bolster their strength for national survival. The other area is a Japanese role in mediating conflict, the specific example being the Cambodian conflict. However, Japan's political role has thus far not been effective or even well attempted, presumably because the terrain is terra incognita. Moreover, Japan's pro-Western stance presents difficulties in conflict mediation since non-West (in this case, the Vietnamese) countries naturally become suspicious.

It should therefore be more than apparent that in the next decade the interaction between the United States, the USSR, the PRC and Japan will be important in the security dimensions of the region. One often neglected consideration of this relationship is the targetting against Asian targets of Soviet SS-20 IRBM missiles in the Soviet Far East. If US-Soviet competition in Europe contains the ingredient of nuclear warfare, this is much less discussed in Pacific Asia largely because of the "conventional" nature of the strength of the parties in confrontation. Presumably, as the Soviets continue with the assertiveness in their foreign policy overtures in the region, the calculation of nuclear weapons parity will become salient in the security setting of the region.

MINOR POWERS

Some consideration of "minor powers" is germane in assessing the Asia-Pacific security situation as their roles are instrumental in the competition for influence in the region. These minor powers might in some sense be seen as "non-Asian", but they do see themselves as part of the region. These powers are France, Australia and New Zealand.

As in Europe where France has developed an independent defence posture, in the Pacific it remains as a colonial power that appears reluctant to forego its possessions in the interest of its status and security outlook. It is facile to regard French interest in the Pacific as merely having possessions for its testing of nuclear

weapons, but the French presence probably constitutes a global outlook in Paris that the region should not be separated from European developments. Interestingly, it was the French which took the lead among European countries to organize in 1984 an international meeting on the emergence of the Pacific as a challenge to the West.[13]

It could of course be said that French policy and administration in its far-flung Pacific possessions are somewhat anachronistic in this post-colonial epoch, but the French presence may be an important deterrent factor, if not alternative, to Soviet penetration of the region. Unfortunately, however, the French capability seems limited and thus far its policies rather nebulous. Rather than pursue a strategic policy for the region that is related to non-communist interests, its view seems to be that the Pacific also "belongs" to the French - a view that seems manifested by its having to increasingly deal with the articulation for self-determination in its possessions. On the other hand, it is not inconveivable that the Soviets view the French presence as another stumbling block to its outreach for influence in the area.

As part of the ANZUS pact, the roles of Australia and New Zealand are critical for the southern flank of the Asia-Pacific region. However, the views of these antipodean minor powers, long part of the Western security tradition (both fought as US and British allies in the last two wars), have become increasingly critical of their roles. Because of the view of not alloving nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed US warships into its ports,[14] New Zealand is now no

longer part of ANZUS. Similarly, trade and economic problems in Australia's ties with the US have caused a mood possibly leading to the former's reconsideration of its security linkages with Washington.

For the last four decades, Australia and New Zealand have played an important role in the security of Southeast Asia, especially in providing for the defence of Malaysia and Singapore. They still continue to play this role by their membership in the Five-Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) through which they contribute naval and air elements as well as troop attachments in those two countries. The FPDA is important in the integrated air defence of Malaysia and Singapore, and the Australians have committed to a continuing rotation of sorties of their fighter aircraft right up to 1988 even as they withdraw their presence from the Butterworth air-base.

The Australian and New Zealand contribution is small but none the less significant to the security of Southeast Asia. Their presence is not intimidating but reassuring. The Australian air presence not only provides for aerial defence in conjunction with the Malaysian and Singaporean air forces, but assist in ASW surveillance of the South China Sea as well as perform a training function. In exchange, it can be noted that Australian and New Zealand troops enjoy and learn both the experience and facilities of jungle warfare.

Beyond Southeast Asia, the Australians perform a valuable role in providing for US facilities as part of the latter's global security network and of course for the linkage in operations between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The strategic importance of Australasia

should not be exaggerated, but recent political developments only serve to indicate a troublesome factor between Western allies. A reassessment of their roles in the Western alliance in the Pacific has surely taken place, but it is too premature to assume that their interests are now self-centered and self-serving. Perhaps it may be opportune to consider if Western security interests in the region may be served even in the absence of formal alliance arrangements. In this regard, too, the aspirations and wishes for a nuclear-free South Pacific should not be viewed as necessarily detrimental to Western security interests.

In assessing the roles of "minor" powers, it may be necessary to include in our discussion Indonesia and Vietnam who either have the desire or the strength or both to be regarded as such. However, in spite of the massive military strength it now has at its disposal,[15] it does not seem likely for Vietnam to wage war beyond its occupied territory of Cambodia. Certainly, its position as the socialist outpost of Southeast Asia with Soviet backing is a threat to the security of the region, but for the moment its designs are thwarted by the skilful diplomacy of the ASEAN grouping that has made it possible for it to be more regarded as an international pariah. But Hanoi's intrasigence over Cambodia and ASEAN's refusal to accede to the security imperative for the need of an Indochinese federation continues to be the major challenge to the peace and stability of Southeast Asia and as such Vietnam must be seen as a "negative" factor. Such a situation is only a step away from a major

conflagration in this subregion.

As for Indonesia, it has made known its pretensions of being a middle power and because of its size and spread of territory is inclined to believe in its primacy in the region. But Jakarta's major problem is not so much the gap between desire and capability as the need for political and territorial consolidation of its far-flung archipelago. It also lacks the economic wherewithal to seriously mount any military adventure too far beyond its borders. Jakarta's role is therefore limited but on the other hand may be instrumental for subregional unity and cohesion in Southeast Asia, a theme of national and regional resilience that it continuously refers to, and is the source of.

SUB-REGIONAL PROBLEMS

As has been listed, the two zones in the Asia-Pacific that constitute challenges to regional peace are Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia (the Korean peninsula), precisely those areas where the region's two most important wars have been fought, namely, the Vietnam and Korean Wars. It is also in these two areas that the interests of the major powers are in contention or interaction and indeed provide a locus of the spheres of influence, past, present and future, of the United States, the USSR, the PRC and Japan.

Far from achieving an era of peace, the end of the Vietnam War (the second Indochina War) in 1975 signalled instead a new round of hostilities in this subregion of the Asia-Pacific, thus living up to its reputation of being a region of turbulence and revolt. In spite of

peace feelers that were extended by non-communist ASEAN, the communist countries of Indochina continued their hostility towards their neighbours, thus leading to a divided Southeast Asia. ASEAN's suspicions of less than benign designs on the part of Hanoi were substantiated with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, an action that continues to be the bone of contention between the two "blocs" to the present. This compartmentalization was further aggravated by the economic disparities between the two - ASEAN on the one hand being one of the world's fastest developing regions and Indochina on the other being part of the world's poorest countries, accentuated no doubt by their capitalist versus communist modes of production.

Although military confrontation between ASEAN and Indochina seems less likely now, their rivalry takes place in the diplomatic and political arenas, with the former leading in influence over the dispute over Cambodia and the rightful government in Phnom Penh. Equally important is the continued involvement of external major powers, a dilemma for ASEAN that has espoused a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) for the region. ZOPFAN is premised on the non-interference of external powers in the affairs of Southeast Asia, albeit this desire is tempered by a tacit understanding that the United States continues to be dominant in the balance of forces in the region.[16] However, as has been noted, there is a realization that the Unitd States cannot be relied upon - after all, Southeast Asia is only a derivative of larger interests in the Asian region as a whole.[17]

In this respect as well, there is considerable frustration in ASEAN of the need for a more comprehensive US understanding of its problems, especially in its quest for economic modernity. The ASEAN belief is that its national well-being and survival is dependent on its ability to diversify its economies through manufacturing and to have established markets for its primary products. But in recent years rising protectionism (for instance, the Jenkins bill) and the decline of commodity prices have hurt ASEAN's heretofore high growth rates and which have political and social ramifications. Rather than the lip service in support of ASEAN, there is belief that countries like the US and Japan, to which the grouping is partial to, are unmindful of the sub-region's more pressing problems.

Whilst the ASEAN countries attempt to maximize their influence with Japan and the United States and to reduce their dependency on these powers,[18] it has to be remembered that the grouping is essentially one of six equals, thus complicating the regional security scenarios or perspectives among them. Although none has yet turned diametrically away from a pro-Western security orientation, their notions on self-reliance are not devoid of considering alternatives (as example, Malaysia is contemplating purchasing Soviet military equipment and the Thais already have tried out Chinese tanks and light infantry weapons). Furthermore, the growing protectionist policies of both the US and Japan would tend to corrode the prevailing political and security ties that exist.

One other significant element of the Southeast Asian security situation is that of domestic political stability and its relation to regional order. A major manifestation of this dimension is the domestic political situation in the Philippines and the viability of the Cory Aquino government that replaced in February 1986 the Marcos regime that had been in power over the last two decades.[19] This situation contrasts with the relative political stability that exists in the other ASEAN states. Of concern is the political fragmentation in the Aquino government and its ability to counter the growing power of the communist New People's Army.[20] Related to this is the ambivalence or contending views on the future of US bases at Subic and Clark after its lease expires in 1991.

In contrast, the Indochinese states continue to be stable in spite of poor economic performance. But because of the poor prospect of a resolution of the Cambodian problem, the Southeast Asian region will continue to be a problem-area in the security of the Asia-Pacific for the next few years.

As opposed to the conflict in Indochina which has more indigenous roots, the situation in Northeast Asia are traceable to cold war origins, the Korean War being an outbreak of the serious territorial demarcation problems that had been quickly established in 1945. In this respect, the Korean problem is more akin to the issue of the two Germanies and indeed the South Korean side is supported by the United States and its Western allies, and on the other North Korea invariably by the Soviet Union and the PRC. But in recent years, a

more than fair amount of stability can be discerned in this region largely due to the new regime in the PRC which is more concerned with a prevailing peace on the Korean peninsula. The "threat", as it were, emanates largely from North Korea whose aggresiveness seems unchanged even as an "opening up" has taken place between Seoul and Pyongyang.

Northeast Asia of course encompasses Japan, Taiwan and a section of Sino-Soviet border, but the Korean problem is to Northeast Asia as the Indochinese problem is to Southeast Asia. Significantly enough, two of the four "tigers" of the Pacific rim, the NICs that have startled the world with their leap into modernization, are here, and trail Japan in achieving success in their export-led drive. The PRC, in turn, is also keen to follow the footsteps of these tigers. Such emphasis can only mean better security in the region. However as like the countries of ASEAN, their growing prosperity and stability could be hit by a serious wave of global recession or protectionism, "not only on the economic well-being of these countries but also on the lubricant that has kept their political machinery functioning."[21]

Over the last two decades, South Korea, the country of the morning calm, has gained spectacular success in its economic modernization but remains vulnerable to an attack from North Korea, its authoritarian system under continuous siege and its economy too dependent on exports. Its "success story" has no doubt provided a sense of self-confidence to South Korea, but Seoul continues to rely on the presence of the United States for its security even as she manages to provide most of her defence. The presence of 38,000 US

troops at forward locationsis ample reminder of this psychological reliance against the threat of external attack by an erratic and militaristic kin-neighbour.

North Korea, on the other hand, is not able to so freely rely on its communist patrons, the Soviet Union or the PRC, for its military adventures, indicating the intersection of the interests of these aforementioned two powers with that of Washington in a delicate triangular relationship. Despite its overtly aggresive image, it is certainly constrained by the PRC and the Soviets, although this does not dampen its desire to emasculate the South as much as it can, the case of the bombing incident in Rangoon in 1985 being the latest and most poignant example.

As in Southeast Asia, there is an apparent approximation of a stand-off between the antagonists at conflict in Korea. This does not imply, however, that there are no tensions but rather to indicate there is a fair measure of stability in the situation such that violent or open conflagration is less likely to occur as in the past. None the less, the proclivity of Pyongyang to embark on military adventures in quest of its Great Leader's wishes should not be underestimated. If such violence erupts, United States' involvement is automatic, and as such one can also expect the intervention of the other powers. Although Japan is not directly involved, yet at the same time it shares an interest in seeing to the stability of this subregion and of South Korea's integrity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

If Pacific Asia has enjoyed relative peace and impasse seems to be the mode in two of the sub-regional situations, namely Kampuchea and Korea, the forces of contention and the quest for influence are not necessarily diminished nor have withdrawn into the background. At the same time, it is noteworthy that economic problems have come to the fore that can threaten the security within and between states, thus rendering a challenge much more complex than military issues. If the 21st Century is the Pacific Century, the country that is the Pacific Power will be the one that today has laid its groundwork in the quest for influence.

In retrospect, it could be said that relative peace in the region has been due to overriding interests of both the superpowers to security questions in Europe, but yet conflict has occurred in the Pacific. Although the US is dominant today, there appears signs that its power is being eroded because of the economic burden of defence[22] and because the Soviet Union is incrementally but surely penetrating the region. Moreover, changing relations between the Soviet Union, the US and China could be negative to Washington and the present balance of power. As noted by Nishihara on Southeast Asia: "if a Sino-Soviet detente should be accomplished in Moscow's terms, namely, if China should be 'pacified' and loosen relations with Washington, this would be detrimental to the United States and its Asian friends, which are trying to maintain the balance of power in Southeast Asia by working with China."[23]

In part, relative peace in the Asia-Pacific has been due to the relative prosperity and development fostered by free-market strategies and export-led growth, in turn abetted by a US defence umbrella and free trade opportunities in the US. However, increasing protectionism may well lead to stagnation in many of the Asia-Pacific economies with tremendous ramifications for national and regional well-being and security. Thus, in effect, it is not the Soviet Union or China that poses the threat but rather the United States and Japan, the latter two especially in its enveloping trade frictions with global implications.

On this note, it is salient that, despite interest and much discussion on the emergence of a Pacific community of free trading nations, there has been little substantive progress in forging cooperation that will benefit the countries of the region. But, in part, the poor success is a function of the "security" connotations of such notions that has created a reluctance to get together for the common good.

Finally, but not least, it is likely that any new conflagration in the region is likely to be a maritime incident and not a land-based one. In this, territorial expansion and the quest for riches of the sea may well determine the extent to which major and minor powers will compete for influence and domination in Pacific Asia.

NOTES

1. The most dramatic exposition of this thesis, albeit dated, is General Sir John Hackett and others, The Third World War (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1978).

2. See Zara Dian, "The Vladivostok Initiative", Asian Defence Journal (Forthcoming, October 1986).

3. Masahide Shibusawa, Japan and the Asian Pacific Region (London: Croom Helm for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1984).

4. Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "The US Military: The View From Southeast Asia" in Sam C. Sarkesian, ed., The US Military: Views From Abroad (in press).

5. Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Paul Chan, "ASEAN/PRC Relations in the 1980s", being prepared for the Japan Center for International Exchange.

6. B.K. Gordon, "Pacific Futures for the USA", paper read at the National University of Singapore-Singapore Institute for International Affairs Conference "Moving into the Pacific Century: The Changing Regional Order in the Asia-Pacific", Singapore, 5-6 November 1983.

7. Sheldon Simon, "The Great Powers and Southeast Asia", Asian Survey, Vol.XXV:9 (September 1985), p.930.

8. For an elaboration, see Masashi Nishihara, East Asian Security and the Trilateral Countries (New York: New York University Press, 1985), pp.30-33.

9. Zakaria Haji Ahmad & Paul Chan, op.cit.

10. Some observers exclude Japan in the evolving power relationship in the Asia-Pacific. See Richard Solomon, ed., The China Factor (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981).

11. For a discussion of these issues, see Charles Morrison, ed., "Japan/ASEAN Political and Security Relationships", forthcoming.

12. See Robert Barnett, Beyond War, Japan's Concept of Comprehensive National Security (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984).

13. International Conference "The Challenge of the Pacific-Western Hopes and Fears?", organized by the International Institute of Geopolitics, Paris, April 6-8, 1984.

14. See discussion in International Institute for Strategic Studies, Strategic Survey, 1985-1986 (London, IISS, 1986), pp.168-171.

15. Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "ASEAN and Vietnam: A Preliminary Politico-Military Assessment", paper read at the International Security Council Roundtable Seminar "The Soviet-Vietnamese Alliance and the Security of Southeast Asia", Bangkok, July 6-8, 1986.

16. Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "ASEAN's Perspectives on Regional and International Order" in Sukhumbhand Paribatra, ed., ASEAN and The Search For Order In A Changing World (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and Michael Leifer, Conflict and Regional Order in Southeast Asia, Adelphi Paper No.162 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1980).

17. Simon, op.cit., p.919.

18. For an elaboration, see Charles Morrison, Japan, the United States and a Changing Southeast Asia (New York: University Press of America for the Asia Society, 1985).

19. This focus was highlighted in the IISS' survey for 1985-86, op.cit..

20. See M. Rajaretnam, "The Philippines under President Aquino's Leadership", paper read at the Seminar on Trends in the Philippines, organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 7 June 1986.

21. William H. Gleysteen Jr., "Domestic Developments Affecting Stability and Regional Relationships in Northeast Asia", paper read at the SeCap Workshop on "Opportunities and Constraints on Asian Regional Cooperation", Tokyo, August 19-21, 1985, p.3.

22. See Simon, op.cit.

23. Masashi Nishihara, "The Shifting Strategic Balance in Southeast Asia?", paper read at the SeCap Workshop on "Opportunities and Constraints on Asian Regional Cooperation", Tokyo, August 19-21, 1985, p.20