

The Patterns of Regional Relations in Southeast Asia

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Two developments in particular have seemed to influence the structural pattern of interstate relations as it has developed in the years since World War II. On the one hand, formerly formidable European colonial empires have largely given way to a growing number of "new states," some of these very small and lacking many of the traditional attributes of nationhood as well as the means for solving various of the problems facing them. At the same time there has been an unparalleled attempt in some parts of the world to integrate at least some phases of traditionally national activity within the framework of new and more territorially extensive regional communities. Political fragmentation and international integration, accordingly, are today two of the chief dynamic forces underlying the changing process of world politics. Integrative forces are generally regarded to be most influential in the European and North Atlantic areas, as indicated by the growing strength of both the Common Market and NATO, while nationalist forces seem to be at their strongest in the recently emancipated former colonial territories.

The emphasis on economic, defense, and other integrative activity in the European and North Atlantic areas following World War II has tended to obscure the fact that various new patterns of regional relations have also been attempted in other parts of the world. Suggestions for closer regional relations in Southeast Asia, in fact, predate the postwar period. Manuel

Quezon, president of the Philippine Commonwealth in the pre-war years after the United States had given his country internal self-government, proposed a Pan-Malay Union embracing Indonesia and Malaya as well as the Philippines.¹ The suggestion was premature because neither Indonesia nor Malaya had even been promised independence by their imperial rulers. The Indonesian Communist, Tan Malaka, was another political figure to suggest a type of regional union before the war, proposing the establishment of a federal arrangement linking Australia and Southeast Asia.

During World War II the Japanese considered the Southern Regions, or Southeast Asia, as a distinct unit within their larger Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere, although, for the most part, the old divisions of the European colonial period were perpetuated during the Japanese wartime occupation of the area. The Southeast Asia Command of the Allies also treated Southeast Asia as a single region—at least all of it except the Philippines and Indochina north of the sixteenth parallel.²

In July 1947 nationals of Indonesia, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaya domiciled in Bangkok formed the nongovernmental Southeast Asia League, which was really a Communist device to utilize such regional sympathy as did exist in support of the Viet Minh cause in Indochina.³ The League was subsequently suppressed by the Thai Government. Aung San, leader of Burma's independence-seeking Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, called in 1947 for both Southeast Asia as "an entity" within a larger "Asiatic Commonwealth"⁴ and a Southeast Asia Economic Union,⁵ but did not live to see either. The French and the Thai, in a delicate struggle for power in the restive Indochinese countries, agreed in the same year to sponsor jointly the formation of a Pan Southeast Asia Union, which would include Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos, to begin with, and which later would be expanded to embrace Burma, Indonesia, Borneo, and apparently even India.⁶ Domestic rivals of the then Thai leadership attacked the Union, however, and the association never came into being. Marshal Phibun Songkhram, after his return to the premiership following a conventional Thai coup, invited Burma, the Philippines, and India in 1949 for talks in Bangkok on political and economic

affairs, but these never were held. The Philippine government, for its part, convened the Baguio Conference of 1950 for the purpose of drawing the countries of South as well as Southeast Asia closer together, but nothing eventuated from these meetings.⁷

There were probably almost as many reasons why these early efforts on behalf of regional cooperation failed to arouse enthusiasm as there are countries in this part of the world. Particular explanations for the lack of interest of each of the Southeast Asian nations can be cited in the case of all of these overtures. But there is also at least one important general reason which seems to underlie the failure of all of these attempts at closer area cooperation. This is the fact that none of the proposals filled any need of which most of the Southeast Asian countries were aware. Most of the early suggestions for Southeast Asian regional organizations had their roots in sentimental considerations, a regional variant of pan-Asianism, for example, or the feeling of kinship stemming from the shared experience of past colonial domination. The big problems of national survival and higher standards of living would be tackled by the newly established national governments themselves. The nation-state, glorified in the literature of the West and magnified even more in the slogans of the various nationalist movements, was without question functionally appropriate to the demands of the new era of independence.

It remained accordingly for the first regional organization in Southeast Asia to come about as a result of Western initiative, particularly that of the United States, and to occur in the field of selective military security. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was launched as the major act of the Manila Conference of September 1954 and included as its founding members only the Philippines and Thailand from Southeast Asia, nearby Pakistan, the Southwest Pacific states of Australia and New Zealand, and the United States, Britain and France. SEATO was formed for a single purpose: to halt the military spread of Communism to the south in the wake of France's defeat in the eight-year colonial-Communist war in Indochina.⁸ SEATO has been labelled a "paper tiger" by the Communist Chinese, who also have placed responsibility for various infamous political machinations at its doorstep.

SEATO has probably been more than a qualified success, and this success can be calculated in differing ways. Most obviously, there has been no major Chinese military advance into Southeast Asia, and it is difficult to escape crediting SEATO with at least part of the responsibility for this. In addition, the fact of SEATO's existence has contributed to the development of the image of Southeast Asia as a region. Far more important than this, however, is the fact that SEATO has bought time. Eight years passed between the first Geneva Conference of 1954, at which time the Communists probably had the military capability to overrun Laos, and the second Geneva Conference of 1961-1962, which, for all practical purposes, acquiesced in the gains of the Communists in Laos but did not actually turn the country over to them. Habits of cooperation developed by the Thai and the Filipinos in SEATO seem to have had a carry-over effect on other phases of their foreign policies and played a role in the inauguration of the Association of Southeast Asia, launched in Bangkok in July 1961.

The line dividing the members and nonmembers of SEATO is probably a much thinner one than generally reckoned. Burmese Premier U Nu was willing to meet with other countries in 1954 to consider alternatives to the American-suggested SEATO, but Indian Prime Minister Nehru brought pressure on him not to do so.⁹ Subsequently, Burmese officials admitted privately their pleasure with SEATO's existence and its implicit protection of their country as well as their two neighbors, Thailand and Pakistan.¹⁰ Cambodian leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk has also spoken privately in a like manner. Malaya's anti-Communist leadership has probably not joined SEATO primarily because there would not seem to be any gain made by doing so in view of the Anglo-Malayan defense pact (Britain being a member of SEATO already). The Singapore base is available for use in support of SEATO purposes, whatever the various ambiguous communiques through the years say on the subject. Indeed, leaders of Singapore's ruling People's Action Party privately suggested in the summer of 1962 that it might somehow be possible to alter SEATO in such a manner as to make it more representative of Southeast Asia as a region and, so, more palat-

able to those nations which are not formal allies of the United States. This might be done as a result of a gradual phase-out of some or all of the Western members and the simultaneous introduction, step by step, of such countries as Burma or Indonesia.¹¹

At the present time, SEATO is in flux, and there are serious strains upon the organization as now constituted. The British and the French are accused by the Asian members of lacking significant interests in the area and being resultingly unwilling to make sacrifices for the common good. The Thai are seeking to emphasize the bilateral relationship between members, meaning particularly Bangkok and Washington, and there is also dissatisfaction in the Philippines and Pakistan regarding the alleged inability of SEATO to act in, or effectively influence, the Laos crisis of 1960-1962. Various of the allegations concerning this crisis and the behavior of particular states in it are undoubtedly true, but the fact that there is concern is an element in itself which may prove of major importance in the evolving new pattern of relations among the Southeast Asian states.

SEATO was founded in the first instance because it was believed that there was no other way to halt large-scale Communist military aggression in Southeast Asia. There is still no other way. The United Nations is seemingly no stronger today than it was a decade ago to deal with this particular problem, nor are the national armies of the Southeast Asia countries able to halt any large-scale military move against the area. Growing numbers of decision makers—even in states like Indonesia and Burma—are, moreover, increasingly aware of the functional inadequacy of their national governmental institutions for defense purposes. Thai and Filipino realism in this respect helped occasion their participation in SEATO at the start. Indonesia, Burma, and Cambodia might still be won over to an imaginative approach to regional collective defense either in the form of an altered SEATO or, more likely, a substitute for it.

The two Asian members of SEATO, the Philippines and Thailand, today regard themselves as "strangers" in their "own house." As Thai Foreign Minister Thanet Khoman put it,

Thailand is in Asia, but it has somewhat different sentiments and follows a different world policy from most members of the Afro-Asian bloc. This is a lonely role, and we must find some way of relating more effectively to the other Asian countries.¹²

Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal and his predecessor, President Carlos P. Garcia, have said about the same thing publicly. And there is no doubt that Malaya's leadership is moved by similar sentiments.

This was one of the reasons why Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaya joined together to form the ostensibly economic and cultural Association of Southeast Asia, or ASA.¹³ These three countries share a search for a meaningful sense of identity and purpose in the changing world about them. This search is an external variant of the groping for appropriate governmental institutions and policies which has characterized most of the "new states" internally since independence. Neither their status as national states nor as participants in the United Nations or the Afro-Asian caucusing bloc provide the Thai, Malaysians, or Filipinos with a sufficiently meaningful relationship to the world about them.

There were other reasons, however, for launching ASA and, as might be expected, these varied from country to country. The Philippines was disillusioned by what it regarded as the inadequate SEATO response to the Laotian crisis. According to then Philippine Foreign Secretary Felixberto Serrano, "It was imperative to ready a possible substitute for SEATO or, if this were not possible, to begin the painful task of constructing a belt of neutralized states in Southeast Asia."¹⁴ Serrano, who visited Malaya during the state visit to that country of President Garcia in February 1961 (which led directly to the founding of ASA the following July), a month earlier had convened a meeting of Foreign Ministers of anti-Communist Asian states in Manila. The fact that all who were invited did not come may explain why the Philippines did not seek the formation of an all-Asian substitute for SEATO right then and there.

Sharing responsibility with Garcia and Serrano for the inauguration of ASA was Malayan Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman. The Tengku, however, went to great lengths to under-

score the economic and social character of ASA and to deny any possible political overtones. But such political overtones are undeniable. Indeed, they partly explain Malaya's membership in ASA. According to a high Malayan official, who asked not to be identified for obvious reasons:

ASA is, more than anything else, anti-Communist. The nearest capital to our own is Saigon in fragile South Vietnam. We need allies, partly because of our isolation from the main body of the Afro-Asian bloc, which is largely ineffective in matters of this sort anyway. Laos is now gone, and Thailand may be next. We are fearful because Thailand is vulnerable—particularly in the countryside, where the Communists strike. That is why we have used ASA as a means for bringing teams of Thai officials to Malaya to see the good work we have done in the field of rural development. We hope that they will go back and emulate our example. You might say that this is one of the main reasons why ASA was formed.¹⁵

Malaya feels both able to aid others, such as the Thai, and weak and isolated. A small country, it is economically dependent on the export of two commodities, tin and rubber, for which demand and prices have varied. In the eyes of both its own officials and foreign observers, Malaya today is not able to put down by itself a revived insurrection of the sort that engulfed the country in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Unlike some of the other Afro-Asian states, Malaya realizes its economic and military vulnerability. This realism stems in part from the experience of a twelve-year Communist insurrection. Malaya, however, also had a particularly satisfying relationship with the British in the last years of colonial rule and is less opposed to intimate cooperation with other countries as a result. It is not by accident that the three ASA countries are the Southeast Asian lands with the least painful experiences with the former imperial powers.

Both Thailand and the Philippines seem to have been moved much more by economic considerations in joining ASA than Malaya. Thai officials and businessmen, in their speeches and private observations, display a strong fear of the adverse consequences which the European Economic Community may have upon their future economic development.¹⁶ The Philippine leadership has been particularly concerned that African countries

associated with the EEC will either become copra producers or will develop a competitive substitute for that important Filipino export. Thai and Philippine leaders alike also reveal a latent fear that Europe may be "ganging up" on the rest of the world and that European unity must be met by unity among those with whom the Europeans trade and otherwise deal. Moreover, all three ASA countries show an awareness of the possible benefits of pooling their resources both in terms of regional economic specialization (to which, of course, there are numerous pockets of resistance in each land) and bloc voting in various international bodies. The ASA countries caucused and voted as a bloc at the 1962 Colombo Plan and Food and Agricultural Organization meetings and have expressed an intention to do so at the United Nations.

Trade among the three ASA lands is miniscule in comparison with their economic relations with other countries. Nor do Thailand, Malaya, and the Philippines produce the same commodities as their main exports. Accession of other Southeast Asian countries, however, would place the ASA nations in a very advantageous international bargaining position, allowing the producers of most of the world's tin and natural rubber, for example, to deal with their customers as a single unit. But this has not yet come about, and the ASA leaders seem hopeful and enthusiastic about the association's prospects despite this fact. Their immediate aim is to make the fruits of cooperation so apparent that others will feel compelled to associate themselves with the new regional grouping.

The three ASA countries are also probably the Southeast Asian lands that are most modern, meaning in the image of the Western state systems, in their approach to problem-solution. Their leaders appear to attempt to identify national needs and then to find means that will satisfy these needs most adequately, given the costs of the available alternatives. Professor Lucian W. Pye, in his book *Personality, Politics, and Nation Building*, has stated that Burmese behave quite differently, claiming that political effort in Burma seems to vary inversely with the social significance of a problem. There are reasons for speaking similarly of Indonesia.

The present leadership in the three ASA lands appears to have found national governmental institutions insufficient to deal with problems that are basically international in character. These leaders were able to launch ASA and are using it today, not only because they are less anti-foreign and suspicious of the outsider, but also because they have developed an approach that recognizes ends-means relations and makes a more modest appraisal of the national capability to solve specific problems. These characteristics are by no means restricted to Malaysians, Filipinos, and Thai, but they are stronger in these countries.

ASA and SEATO, which can be considered related parts of a single general integrative process, are international organizations or associations of an increasingly more common, if not yet conventional, sort. There are other ways of effecting new relations among peoples or political units, however, and one of these is the amalgamation of existing territories. This is what is happening today in the case of Malaysia, the new state that is being formed as a result of the combination of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, and the three northern Borneo territories of Sarawak, Brunei, and British North Borneo.¹⁷ The imperatives underlying the behavior of the two most politically articulate partners in this union process, Malaya and Singapore, differ in terms of primary emphasis. Malaya probably could exist economically without Singapore. The Federation has done rather well for itself in the half-decade since independence and separation. So, too, however, has the extreme left in the island state of Singapore, currently self-governing internally but still dependent upon Britain in the important areas of foreign policy and defense.

By May 1961, when Malayan Premier Tengku Abdul Rahman overtly espoused the idea of merger with Singapore through the Malaysian formula, the Communists in Singapore appeared headed for an ultimate takeover of Singapore's government by peaceful means. This would have resulted in what Tengku has called a "Chinese Cuba" in the heart of Southeast Asia immediately adjacent to Malaya. Malaysia was proposed as a means of preventing such an eventuality through dilution of Singapore's Communism in a larger political entity—the latter made abso-

lutely necessary, also, in order to retain the delicate racial balance between Malays and Chinese in the parent state, Malaya. Merger only with Singapore would have given the Chinese a greater plurality than the indigenous Malays in the new state.

Singapore wanted union with Malaya in part for the short-term reason of bolstering the political prospects of its currently governing elite. A much more important long-range consideration was the fact that Singapore (with a total area of only 224 square miles and lacking natural resources) could not survive economically, given its high rate of population growth and the increasing restrictions and development policies of some of its former trading partners. As for the Borneo territories, they have been politically wooed by the Malaysians, having lacked any apparent desire for this type of relationship originally.

Although Malaysia differs from both SEATO and ASA in the important sense that it is a new nation-state and not an international organization, there are enough factors in common among the three approaches to regional integration to speak of a related response to the impact of similar phenomena. Fear of the expansion of Communism was probably the main reason for Malaya's espousal of the notion of Malaysia. This also was the only reason for the creation of SEATO and was an important if unheralded factor underlying the formation of ASA. Malaysia, as well as SEATO and ASA, reveals an awareness on the part of at least some Southeast Asian countries of their vulnerability, partly but not exclusively a reflection of their size, in the new world of larger political entities (from which they cannot retreat). There is also a general awareness in the nations embraced by these three relationships that there is a need in the present-day world for new patterns of association. One may expect accordingly continued experimentation. The Philippines, for example, has proposed that, in addition to, or in the place of, the Malaysian-sponsored species of Malaysia, there be established a political confederation of Greater Malaysia, embracing not only Malaya, Singapore, and northern Borneo, but also Indonesia and the Philippines. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the Philippines and Malaya, following Tengku Abdul Rahman's state visit to Manila in January 1959, originally sought a pan-Malaysian

association and turned to the ASA approach—and Thailand—only after a vigorously negative response from Indonesia. This suggests still another strength of the leaders seeking regional integration in Southeast Asia today, a flexibility and willingness to maneuver that stands in sharp contrast to the rigidity of outlook of many of the "new states."

The effect of these new patterns of regional relations have not been lost upon the extreme left, against whom they are partly directed, or on such countries as Indonesia, a nonparticipant to date in the process of regional integration. The Indonesian government has stated that it cannot be "indifferent" to Malaysia, scheduled for launching some time before August 31, 1963, and played a part in the abortive Brunei revolt in late 1962.¹⁸ Malaysia will be more than twice the size of the present state of Malaya, the core territory of the new state and with which Indonesia does not get along. Malaysia would also presumably end any Indonesian territorial aspirations concerning northern Borneo—which is probably the reason why Indonesia's Foreign Minister stated in mid-January 1963 that his government had adopted a policy of "confrontation" toward Malaya on the question of Malaysia. "Confrontation" was the policy pursued by Indonesia toward the Netherlands in the West New Guinea controversy, and the possible use of force over Malaysia was indicated by the training of Indonesian "volunteers" across the border from Brunei in Borneo (which is part of Indonesia except for the three territories planned for incorporation in Malaysia).¹⁹

Lim Kean Siew, a member of the Socialist Front in Malaya (and an opponent of Malaysia as well as of ASA and SEATO), may have put his finger precisely on the point bothering the Communists, the Indonesians, and other nonparticipants in, or opponents of, regional integration in Southeast Asia. Lim declared in a debate on Malaysia in mid-1962 that the Malayan government had been a participating architect in the shaping of a "crescent-shaped anti-Communist dagger pointed at the heart of Southeast Asia."²⁰ Malaya was, he said, the link between SEATO partners Thailand and the Philippines—a vital link because of the vacuum and chaos occasioned in Indochina by the Laotian settlement and the war in Vietnam. Malaysia, ASA

and SEATO were, in short, part of the same integrative process directed allegedly against the leftists and the neutralists in Southeast Asia.

Senior members of two of the ASA governments subsequently have stated privately²¹ that the three countries were not unaware of the *de facto* links among the component parts of the new pattern of regional relations in which they were participating. "We did not start out with this end in mind," one of them declared, "but we soon realized the full impact of what we were doing. The full integration of Southeast Asia is our ultimate aim, and the task must be approached from different angles." The chief leaders of the ASA countries all publicly also strongly avow the hope that their efforts will ultimately culminate in a Southeast Asian common market; some even envision political integration of sorts.

The process of integration in Southeast Asia is so relatively new that only tentative judgments can be offered about it. Although the process may be reversed in the future or, more likely, take different form, the evidence to date suggests that the character of nationalism in at least some of the Southeast Asian countries is not such as to prevent the early and effective union of the peoples of these lands.

Frequency of contact and habits of cooperative behavior born of the SEATO consultative process help explain Thai and Philippine participation in ASA, but other contacts among the three ASA countries have been very limited. This suggests that countries may be drawn into a closer relationship despite unfamiliarity and even some suspicious and hostile attitudes towards one another, which do exist in the case of these three lands. This is a clear possibility if problem-solution seems to require cooperation, particularly if the problem is national survival (which in general terms it is in the case of SEATO, ASA, and Malaysia). It is also possible that external factors may be as important as, perhaps more important than, internal dynamics in occasioning integration, and that the presence of a model, in the form of Europe (to which such countries are accustomed to look for political examples), may greatly facilitate the process.

Finally, although the Philippines and Malaya are probably

the two most democratic states in Southeast Asia, their populations still are far from full participants in their respective political processes—least of all in the making of foreign policy. Though there are clearly interests opposed to regional integration, the governments of Southeast Asia may have much greater freedom to move closer together in these early years of the new post-colonial world than might be the case a generation or more hence. The fact that these are societies and state systems in transition may also facilitate this process. The world, indeed, may be as surprised a decade hence at the degree of regional integration in Southeast Asia as it was at the end of World War II at the thrust and intensity of the nationalist movements in previously colonial Southeast Asia.

NOTES

1. For a good account, see Benjamin Salvosa, "Macapagal Proposal Revives Vinzons Dream," *Manila Times*, August 21, 1962.
2. See *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander South-East, 1943-1945* (London: H.M.S.O., 1951).
3. For the League's manifesto, see *Eastern World*, I (Sept., 1947), p. 7.
4. See Patrick Maitland, in *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh: Nov. 28, 1947).
5. *Straits Times* (Singapore), April 19, 1947.
6. See the *New York Times*, July 6, 1947; see also *Bangkok Post* and *Liberty* (Bangkok), July 12, 1947.
7. For the Philippines' hopes as to the outcome of this conference, see "Letter of Instructions of His Excellency Elpidio Quirino, President of the Philippines, to Hon. Carlos P. Romulo, chief of the Philippines Mission to the United Nations, on the proposed Pacific Union," in Republic of the Philippines, Department of Foreign Affairs, *Quarterly Review*, I (May 1950), 34-35.
8. The most comprehensive study of SEATO and the events leading to its formation is *Collective Defence in South East Asia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1956).
9. See *The Nation (Rangoon)*, August 5, 6, 7, and 9, 1954.
10. The author spoke with several Burmese officials on this subject in Rangoon during 1959-1960.
11. These conversations with the author took place in Singapore in August 1962.
12. Stated to the author by Foreign Minister Thanat in Bangkok on July 19, 1962.
13. See Association of Southeast Asia, *Report of the First Meeting of the Foreign Ministers* (Bangkok: July 31-August 1, 1961; Bangkok: Govern-

- ment of Thailand, 1961); and *ASA: Report of the Special Meeting of Foreign Ministers* (Kuala Lumpur/Cameron Highlands: April 1962; Kuala Lumpur: Federation of Malaya, 1962).
14. Former Foreign Secretary Felixberto Serrano was interviewed in Manila on September 5, 1962.
 15. This official discussed this subject with the author in Kuala Lumpur in August 1962.
 16. For an informed nongovernmental Thai point of view, see Paul Sithi-Amnuai, "An Association of Southeast Asian States—What are the Chances?" *Monthly Review Bangkok Bank, Ltd.* (March 1961).
 17. For further information on Malaysia, see *Report of the Commission of Enquiry, North Borneo and Sarawak* (Kuala Lumpur: Federation of Malaya, 1962); "Memorandum on Malaysia" (special supplement), *Straits Times*, February 7, 1962; Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister of Singapore), *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore: Government of Singapore, 1961); and Willard A. Hanna's articles on Malaysia, *American Universities Field Staff Reports Service*, Vol. X, Nos. 1-6 (1962).
 18. See Ronald Stead's analysis in the *Christian Science Monitor* of January 23, 1963.
 19. *Ibid.*, January 24, 1963.
 20. The author was present at the meeting at which Lim Kean Siew made these remarks.
 21. These governments are Malaya and the Philippines. The author did not revisit Thailand after Lim's remarks but has every reason to believe that Thai officials would have said essentially the same thing.