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## Southeast Asia

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# ASEAN appalled at Reagan's China Card

by Ramtanu Maitra

Recent visitors to Southeast Asia have reported to *EIR* the absolute astonishment throughout the region at the lengths to which the Reagan administration is going in its pursuit of the chimerical China Card. How, they ask, could the United States openly endorse a new Chinese invasion of Vietnam, as Undersecretary of State James Buckley did at an Aug. 16 news conference in Bangkok, Thailand? Asked directly about the U.S. attitude toward a new invasion, Buckley responded, "I don't think anyone would discount the possibility of countermeasures as being appropriate in a given situation. We do know that the Chinese are, in effect, immobilizing a very significant part of the armed forces of Vietnam with the result that there are fewer troops to make mischief in Cambodia."

Is the United States blind, Southeast Asians ask, to their own view that, as Malaysian Foreign Minister Ghazali Shafie told newsmen in August, "The Chinese remain the greatest threat in this region"?

The air of self-delusion in Washington regarding the China Card and Asian support for it reminds one of Vietnam War era fantasies. The déjà vu effect is heightened by Buckley's and Alexander Haig's obsessive references to "North Vietnam," for example, Buckley's Indonesian statement that "the fact that the North Vietnamese, despite the size of their forces, are bogged down is in itself enormously encouraging."

The principal difference between now and the period between the 1960s and early 1970s is that the same people who ran the Vietnam War, e.g. Haig, now attack Vietnam in order to ally with China. Buckley arrived in Indonesia fresh from a visit to the camps of China's bloody-handed Pol Pot forces in Thailand. He waxed eloquent at the "enormously encouraging" developments and promised supplies to what he called "genuine freedom fighters" in both Kampuchea and Afghanistan, and said he "would neither rule it [military aid] out or rule it in."

For Buckley and Haig, the "freedom fighters" do not only include the Khmer Rouge forces that murdered half of Kampuchea's population in the three short years of their rule. The United States together with China, is also aiding the 3,000-man forces of former Kampuchean Prime Minister Son Sann—while pressuring Son Sann to

join a coalition with Pol Pot. Moreover, Washington and Peking are now arming a rag-tag group of "insurgency forces" stemming from old CIA operations of the 1960s. The *Bangkok Post* reports a flow of Chinese and U.S. money and arms to some of the central highlands tribes of Vietnam organized into a group called FULRO, together with tribesmen in Laos led by Vang Pao, etc. many of whom had been involved in the opium business. A group of these people met recently in Washington with high State Department officials as well as Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Tower. A former Green Beret in Thailand told one source contacted by *EIR* "Don't worry. We'll be back running operations in Vietnam again."

### Zhao tours the region

Any delusion that the majority of ASEAN supports Washington's policy should have been dispelled by the events surrounding Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang's trip to four of the five ASEAN countries (Indonesia does not recognize Peking, and refused to host Zhao). Before Zhao arrived, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir visited Indonesia, and the two countries agreed that, though they continue to oppose Vietnam's troop presence in Kampuchea, Vietnam did not represent a threat to ASEAN, whereas China did.

In Malaysia, Zhao was persistently grilled on China's attempt to restore Pol Pot and on China's opposition to the ASEAN peace plan during the July U.N. conference on Kampuchea. In all the ASEAN countries, Zhao met criticism of continued Peking support for Maoist parties trying to overthrow ASEAN governments. Malaysian Premier Mahathir did not accept Zhao's explanation that Peking's support was only "political and moral." "What we want is for China not to recognize the communist parties at all," Mahathir declared. "We got nothing at all from Zhao." The Malaysian press pointed out that the Chinese closed down one radio station inside China supporting the subversives, only to open another station the next day outside China's borders under a new name.

Mahathir and his Indonesian allies are also known for their strong opposition to overseas Chinese business ownership in their countries. (Mahathir had written a book on this subject in 1970 titled *The Malay Dilemma*.)

Washington's recent China Card actions—particularly Haig's announcement of arms sales to China and support for Peking against ASEAN at the U.N. on the Pol Pot question—have only increased the influence of the anti-Peking views of Malaysia and Indonesia within ASEAN as a whole, according to an Aug. 25 *New York Times* article citing officials in Singapore and Thailand. Nonetheless, Haig continues to wave the China Card, and we may yet see statements that describe the "light at the end of the tunnel."