

Thanks to Kissinger, Soviet threat mounts against ASEAN countries

by Sophie Tanapura

“Although great power and superpower competition for influence in Southeast Asia is nothing new, activities in the Indian Ocean have heightened the already strategic importance of the area as a transit point into the Pacific, and, as a result, will raise the stakes for a confrontation of powers in the future.

“Because of shared goals, at least for the time being, Vietnam has become in effect the instrument of Soviet power and influence in the area. Occupation of Kampuchea and continued Vietnamese military presence in Laos have permitted the establishment of increased Soviet presence in those countries and in Vietnam itself, where it had previously been limited,” said secretary general of the Thai National Security Council, squadron leader Prasong Soonsiri, speaking before a banquet in Bangkok for the World Media Conference Asian Fact-Finding Tour April 2.

The Thai secretary general characterized the increase in the number of Soviet aircraft and naval ships in the area as “startling”: 1) at least 117 SS20 nuclear launchers are positioned east of the Urals, targeting China and other Asian countries and capable of reaching all of Japan and about one-half of Alaska; 2) 50 Soviet divisions are emplaced along the Sino-Soviet border; 3) the Soviet Pacific Fleet contains roughly one-third of all Soviet submarines (120), one-fourth of all principal surface combatants (80), and one-third of all naval aircraft; and 4) Backfire bombers now routinely operate over the Sea of Japan and, in the fall of 1982, Soviet Backfires conducted their first simulated strike operation against a U.S. aircraft carrier group.

Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri presented additional documentation of the Soviet buildup. The U.S.S.R. has transferred some \$2.8 billion worth of arms to East Asia between 1976 and 1980, and \$2.8 billion more to nations in South Asia. This includes approximately 500 tanks, 635 artillery pieces, 50 combat ships, and 250 supersonic combat aircraft. During the 1979-82 period, Soviet arms transfers to East Asia and the Pacific rose to 1,050 tanks, 790 artillery pieces, and 265 supersonic combat aircraft—ten times more tanks and supersonic combat aircraft between 1979 and 1982 than between 1975 and 1978.

Perhaps the most important Soviet strategic gain since their “acquisition” of Cuba is Vietnam’s Cam Ranh Bay. The last time the Russians had a warm-water port of call for the

Pacific region was at the end of the 19th century in Cochinchina. The Japanese newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* recently reported that the Soviet Union has stationed 400 marines, fully equipped with 50 armored vehicles, amphibious personnel carriers, mortars, and 82-mm antitank guns, at Cam Ranh Bay. If these forces were to remain more permanently stationed, the bay could rapidly become a Soviet strategic forward base capable of rapid deployments in Southeast Asia as well as into the Persian Gulf, Tokyo military sources said.

The Soviet buildup in the Pacific-Indian Ocean area was made possible by the debacle in U.S. foreign and military policies overseen by Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and associates. In 1970, Kissinger orchestrated the overthrow of the neutral Sihanouk regime of Cambodia and installed the Lon Nol government. Then in 1975, Kissinger, Alexander Haig, and Thomas Enders, in a deal with Peking, allowed the Lon Nol regime to be overrun by the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge led by the genocidalist Pol Pot, who then carried out Maoist back-to-the-land policies, killing 40% of the Khmer population.

U.S. policy took a more disastrous turn when the Kissinger-Nixon China policy became better known as Brzezinski’s magical “China Card” policy in 1978 under the Carter administration. This policy was responsible for the second major reduction of U.S. presence in the area following the U.S. pullout from Vietnam. The belief was that Chinese imperial designs could fill the gap left by the United States and check Soviet expansion. The China Card also provided the rubric under which the United States withdrew its moral and economic support from the ASEAN nations.

The China Card was only a further elaboration of the Guam Declaration (or the Nixon Doctrine), worked out by Kissinger, then national security adviser. The doctrine proposed that there be virtually no U.S. ground-troop involvement in East and Southeast Asia and that U.S. allies, if hit by conventional aggression, should assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for their defense. The United States would furnish economic assistance when requested and deemed appropriate.

This yielded three main results: 1) it created a long-hoped-for opening for the Soviet Union to move into the area; 2) it led the Asian countries to conclude that the United States was not a dependable ally; 3) it showed that the United States has

no ASEAN policy, as everything was subsumed under the China Card policy orientation.

In the face of this Soviet buildup in the Pacific-Indian Ocean basin, especially around Cam Ranh Bay, ASEAN countries today are increasingly aware that they are easy prey, and are being forced to make corresponding defense budget decisions.

Singapore has ordered 4E-2C AWACS and ground-support units, estimated at nearly \$1 billion, to monitor the Malacca Straits. The Singaporean Air Force, which already has over 30 F-5s and 120 Skyhawks, is buying about one dozen F16-J79 fighters. Indonesia is also interested in F16s, but has had to shelve the idea for the moment due to budgetary problems. Defense sources in Malaysia also indicate interest in sophisticated fighters such as the F16, F20 Tigershark, or the European-built Tornado.

Thailand, which feels more immediately threatened by the Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation than any other ASEAN country, has made it a point to request the F16 A100 model, used by the U.S. Air Force and already sold to Egypt, Israel, Pakistan, South Korea, and Venezuela. The Thais consider that the short-term danger is definitely a land threat from the Soviet-backed Vietnamese troops running Kampuchea, a country which the Thais had relied upon as a buffer state between them and Vietnam. The medium-term threat would be a naval one, they believe.

With Soviet-backed Vietnamese troops at their border, the Thais also feel that they are as much a front-line state as Pakistan. The F-16/A-100, which has doubled the action radius of the F-16/J-79, the U.S. export model, gives the Thais the necessary added capability to cover Vietnam as well as prepare for an eventual naval threat.

Should Thai Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda get a green light for the requested F-16/A-100s during his visit to the United States later in April, the Soviets may step up their carrot-and-stick approach toward Thailand. In March, the Soviet Union invited Thai Princesses Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and Chulabon, as well as to Supreme Commander and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces Gen. Arthit Kamlang-ek, to visit Moscow. The number of Soviet scholarships for Thai students has increased sixfold from 10 to 60 for the coming year. However, should F-16/A-100s get U.S. approval—further cementing a long Thai-U.S. relationship—the Soviets could very well wage a smear campaign, accusing the Thais and the Americans of being responsible for the arms race in the region, a campaign which could shake up ASEAN internally.

The trap Thailand faces is felt equally by all ASEAN nations. Without a U.S. policy of economic development for the ASEAN nations and a strong U.S. defense policy, the ASEAN countries are trapped in a purely defensive posture which will not be able to withstand Soviet expansionism in the long or even medium term.

INTERVIEW: Prasong Soonsiri

'Kampuchea is not

Interview with Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General of the National Security Council of Thailand, conducted by Sophie and Pakdee Tanapura on March 16.

EIR: Do you think a political solution to the problem of Kampuchea can be found in the regional context?

Prasong: The problem of Kampuchea is complicated, has many other implications in other areas, and cannot be solved in a simple way, by merely having the interested parties sit down together for a talk. By interested parties, I mean, Vietnam and the Democratic Kampuchea coalition government. Not even Vietnam and Thailand could bring about a solution, because the problem of Kampuchea is not a problem between Vietnam and Thailand. The problem is also not one between Vietnam and ASEAN, as Jusuf Wanandi of the Indonesian Center for Strategic and International Studies had suggested, and cannot be solved by the five [ASEAN] plus two [Vietnam and Laos] discussions, or the five plus anything else.

EIR: How then should people view this regional conflict?

Prasong: The most important question to ask oneself is how did the problem of Kampuchea start in the first place. I am a firm believer in the Buddhist religion. If we know the real cause of the problem, we could begin to tackle it and subdue it. The Vietnamese say that the Khmer Rouge were the first to attack Vietnam and, therefore, they had to pursue them into Kampuchea, taking over the whole country. The Vietnamese say that they had to defend themselves because the Khmer Rouge, supported by the Chinese, violated their borders, burned down their houses, and killed the Vietnamese people.

However, if we review the historical events, we can easily see that these Vietnamese excuses are only part of the global problem of Kampuchea. In fact, the Khmer Rouge first wanted to push back the Vietnamese that were settling down on Kampuchean territory along the Vietnamese-Kampuchean border. This was when the Vietnamese supported the Vietcong against American soldiers fighting in the Vietnam war. While the Vietcong waged guerrilla warfare in the southern part of Vietnam, North Vietnam, at the time, sent logistical and troop support to the Vietcong in the south along Ho Chi Minh trail and stationed three battalions on Kampuchean territory. After the liberation of South Vietnam by the

a Vietnam-Thailand problem'

North in April 1975, the Khmer Rouge were able to overthrow the Lon Nol government and establish themselves as the new legitimate government. The problem began when the three battalions that were sent to support the Vietcong in the South remained in Kampuchea, even though the North had already conquered the South. At that moment, the Khmer Rouge asked the Vietnamese to withdraw from Kampuchean territory. Now why did they have to make such a request? They were allies, weren't they? The answer to this can be found by studying the relations between China and Vietnam, and China and the Soviet Union.

Since 1965, relations between China and the Soviet Union have been continuously deteriorating, until its worst point after 1978. At the same time, relations between China and Vietnam were also at their low. This is why I said the problem of Kampuchea is very complicated. It goes way beyond the simple problem of Vietnamese soldiers coming into Kampuchea and occupying the country.

EIR: Who then will be able to solve the problem of Kampuchea?

Prasong: The problem goes beyond the capacity of the small people in Kampuchea, beyond the capacity of the ASEAN countries. The United Nations proposal to organize an International Conference on Kampuchea has tried to take into account the full scope of the problem. This should help create the framework for a solution. . . .

The essence of the problem has never fully been taken into consideration. The deterioration of Vietnamese-Chinese relations was in effect ignored, though the two countries were at one time in history closely tied to each other. After all, they drink the same water from the Red River which comes from China, from the same mountain source. They are like brothers and sisters. History at different moments may have created deep bitter feelings between them, but they cannot escape the fact that they are neighbors and will have to live next to one another.

Now the present deterioration of the Vietnamese-Chinese relations began, in fact, at the point that relations between the Soviet Union and China were deteriorating, that is, from 1965 to 1978. It is precisely during this period that the Soviet Union saw the opportunity offered to her, especially after the

1975 withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. This resulted in a power vacuum which created an opening for the Soviets to move in.

The Soviet system spreads by imposition of power. You can see that in Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America. The Soviets cannot sell their political and socio-economic systems to any of the small countries of this area. Nobody wants to hear of it. Therefore, for the Soviet Union, there is only one way: to impose military might to serve their political purpose.

And what are the Vietnamese interested in? The Vietnamese took advantage of the situation when Soviet-Chinese relations were at an abysmally low level. At that point, Vietnam was having problems with certain Khmers on its border that the Chinese were supporting. They had to draw in the Soviets because the Chinese stopped all aid—several billion U.S. dollars intended for some hundred projects. What could replace this aid? The Soviets were one such big source. The problem in Indochina is that relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union are such that each side is taking advantage of one another. Their relations are not based on any historical principles or thought-out policies. Therefore, when we analyze closely this particular relationship, we can safely say that it is not based on mutual trust. The Soviets would like to dominate this area of the world, but at the same time, the Vietnamese have no trust in them in the long-term. However, at present both sides need and depend on each other. Without the Soviets, the Vietnamese would not be able to remain and fight in Kampuchea. Without the Soviets, the present Vietnamese government might not even be able to survive in Vietnam itself. Military aid was needed to build up the Vietnamese forces after the first Chinese "lesson." In 1979, Vietnam had only 33 divisions. Only two years later, by 1981, Vietnam was able to increase its forces to 58 divisions equipped with some of the most modern weapons. Economic aid was also given, in the way of sufficient food supplies and several projects intended to help in the reconstruction of the country. But as far as I can see, the Soviets give aid only to the extent that it keeps Vietnam feeding out of their hands, giving the Soviets themselves time to increase their presence in Indochina and especially in Vietnam.

Now why did I say that such a relationship is based on

mutually taking advantage of each other? This is because the Soviet Union looks upon this region not only in terms of Soviet interest, but rather in terms of Soviet world strategic interest. Should the Soviet Union control this area, it would give them better control over the juncture point between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans which then leads to their interests in the Middle East. This is why the Kampuchea problem is a very complicated one and involves the interests of the superpowers. Therefore, the problem cannot be solved easily with some kind of formula.

EIR: Do you think that a strategic shift in the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union in favor of the United States could favorably influence the situation in Kampuchea?

Prasong: From the recent events, Soviet expansionism is checked only when it stumbles on an obstacle. I will always remember Lenin's teachings to his followers. Carrying out a policy, he said, is like plunging a bayonet into the enemy's flesh. If the blade encounters a bone and you cannot push it through, then pull it out. If the bayonet does not encounter any bone, then keep plunging it into the enemy until he is dead.

Here is another example—when the Soviets decided to set up a strategic base in Cuba. At the time, I was still a student in the United States, in Colorado to be exact. That was when John F. Kennedy was President of the United States. Why did the Soviet Union halt in its tracks following the quarantine announced by JFK? We should learn how to deal with the Soviet Union from such relevant historical examples. We should not think like some politicians who entertain the illusion that some compromise could be reached. It is not easy to do so with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is willing to sit down at the table only if the negotiating partner is firm. If the negotiating partner is not firm, the Soviets will exploit that weakness immediately. This is so in every case and, therefore, also in the case of Vietnam. Now when I say firm and strong I don't mean being stubborn. I mean firm in principles. Many events in the world violate these principles. U.N. principles still protect small countries like ours. We have to stick to principles of international law, of majority rule, because we live in a world community. If we don't stick at least to these principles, we small countries will run into trouble. If we keep to these principles, there will be increased security.

I myself, when working on security questions, keep three things in mind. One, I will defend principles and measures taken to safeguard those principles of international law, international relations or U.N. resolutions. Two, I must look for friends and allies, which is a way of reducing conflicts. The third point is non-intervention into another country's business.

EIR: How do you estimate the Vietnamese threat for Thailand?

Prasong: More than 20 Vietnamese divisions are fighting in Kampuchea and this poses a threat for us, because while fighting in Kampuchea, they sometimes violate our borders. Other times, they threaten to violate our territory. There are some countries in ASEAN that think that the Vietnamese are not a threat to regional security. Now if Vietnam were to keep their troops within their borders, I would say Vietnam poses no threat at all. However, I say that with 20 divisions in Kampuchea and with six divisions in Laos on our borders, the Vietnamese are definitely a threat to the security of Thailand. Vietnamese territory never before touched our borders, but now their soldiers are along our borders. . . .

Vietnam did not come into Kampuchea alone, but brought along with her Soviet influence into Indochina. The Vietnamese threat has the support of the Soviets. Were we able to move Vietnam out of Kampuchea, the Soviets would still be quite entrenched in Indochina and this can pull other superpowers into the regional conflict. It will be difficult for countries in this region to maintain peace and security.

The Soviets started to come into the region since 1979 and their military power increased with the years that followed. They first used the harbors, built improved piers at Cam Ranh Bay, then used the airfields as well as building up additional military installations, including an electronic intelligence center capable of gathering all relevant strategic information in the region. This station is located in the southern part of Vietnam, near Danang. The Soviets have also improved the harbor site of Kom Pong Som which allows for Soviet or East European freighters and warships to dock. A third deep sea port has already been completed at Riem, conceived as a temporary port second to Kom Pong Som. So we can see that the Soviets have expanded their presence from Cam Ranh Bay right into the Gulf of Thailand at Kom Pong Som and Riem in Kampuchea. Therefore, Soviet military power, whether it be warships or submarines, is right at our doorstep.

Cam Ranh Bay has become the Soviets' big military command-control center for Southeast Asia. It also has enlarged airfields which can accommodate medium-size bombers of the Tupolev 16 type, otherwise known as "Badgers." We now have ten Tupolev 16s stationed at Cam Ranh Bay, as well as several Tupolev 95s, also known as "Bears." The medium-size Badger bombers have an action radius of 2,000 miles, therefore, with the capability of reaching Indonesia. As for the Bears, there are two categories: Bear D and Bear F to hunt submarines, as well as to gather intelligence or to deploy on reconnaissance.

Why do the Soviets have to increase their military strength in this region in this way? The other powers are staying within their own borders. China has never stationed her forces outside the country. The United States has withdrawn its forces to Subic Bay (Philippines).

Not only have the Soviets built up their air force presence in the region but they have also done as much for their naval power. The Soviet navy stationed at Vladivostok over the

past two to three years is the fastest growing naval power in the Far East. Before 1979, Soviet Naval forces stationed at Cam Ranh Bay at first numbered only four to five surface warships moving in and out of the harbor per year. In 1979, this figure increased to 10-15 ships per year. In the following year, this increased to 15-20 ships. And finally in 1983, it reached 20-25 ships altogether, as dense as the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean. At present, there is a continuous two-way flow of Soviet ships on the order of 24 every day from Vladivostok or those Soviet ships coming back from their deployments in the Middle East through the Indian Ocean making their way back for repairs or reconnaissance. As for surface warships stationed in Cam Ranh Bay, there are no fewer than five, not to speak of the constant presence of two submarines that surface once in a while. These nuclear submarines are capable of attacking anywhere but you must understand the following. There is a constant presence of some 24 warships in the Bay—what with those permanently stationed there and those docking in for repairs. Because of this, the Soviets have built up repair docks and piers, permanently anchored as well as floating dry docks, for that precise servicing purpose. There are at present altogether five piers capable of servicing surface warships as well as nuclear submarines.

In addition to this imposing presence, Soviet advisers have also been sent into Kampuchea and Laos. The Soviets are at this point helping Laos improve the quality of its armed forces. They are also planning to build up their military installations in Kampuchea. Given these facts, we can see that there is both the intermediate as well as long-term threat. The intermediate threat emanates from Vietnam in Kampuchea because it is on our borders. If the long-term Soviet threat is not resolved, this region will be the site of many power conflicts. China herself cannot allow the Soviets to block her in the South. I still believe that, even though China just opened in Moscow her fourth dialogue with the Soviet Union, China will never be as close as she was to the Soviet Union in 1965 because their national interests are now so divergent. The dialogue is merely a channel of discussion and nothing more. I think that this state of affairs does not make Vietnam very happy. We must keep in mind that the Soviets consider everything from the standpoint of their world strategic interest. If the Soviets were to reach some kind of agreement with China, Vietnam would be in real trouble.

EIR: What are the Vietnamese doing in Kampuchea?

Prasong: Vietnam justifies its action as humanitarian but, on the other hand, she has not contributed in any way to the reconstruction of the Kampuchean economy. All to the contrary the country is being colonized and will be transformed into another Vietnam in the long term within the creation of the Indochinese Federation. Each time Vietnam makes a declaration concerning Laos or Kampuchea, she usually refers to the "special relations" between Vietnam and the other Indochina states. By "special relations," they actually mean

relations among the three Indochina states similar to those during the French colonial period when there was a colonial master. You can check the terms of the treaties signed between Vietnam and Kampuchea or Laos and you will see that the 25-year treaties with either Laos or Kampuchea limit the sovereignty of those countries.

EIR: You have often mentioned that Kampuchea is undergoing the process of Vietnamization. How is this taking place?

Prasong: In Kampuchea, Vietnam has intervened deeply into the socio-educational process to transform the Khmer sense of national identity, to reshape Khmer children's outlook toward Vietnam. They have reformed the school curriculum and introduced Vietnamese as an obligatory language in Khmer schools. This is the truth. Vietnamese citizens have been placed in administrative posts at the municipal, district, and provincial levels. Khmers holding these posts who are not willing to buckle under Vietnamese rule, are systematically purged.

EIR: What kind of policy would you like to see from the U.S. government?

Prasong: As far as I can see, U.S. policy in Southeast Asia usually consists of mere declarations that it supports ASEAN policy. This indicates that the United States does not really have a policy for Southeast Asia. Because if she had her own policy, she would not have to say that whatever ASEAN wants, the U.S. will support. I want to call the attention of the United States to the fact that the Soviets are building up their forces in this region tremendously. Some people in the U.S. are saying that the U.S. should better move to some rim area. I don't think small countries in this area would want to become communist. However, we must not forget that the Soviet Union has already swallowed other smaller countries by using its military strength. What would stop them from repeating it, if a superpower like the United States were to overlook this kind of problem and agree to move out of the area, as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea was once discussed. I don't agree with that kind of policy at all. I think that, on the contrary, the United States should increase its role and presence in this region. In such a crisis situation, smaller countries like ours wouldn't mind it at all. But if the United States thinks that it should move away in order to defend itself, it would increase its own isolation. It is perhaps more comfortable now but it is in for deeper trouble in the future. The United States may think that its weapons are of better quality, better efficiency, even though in certain categories of strategic weapons, the U.S. may be inferior. But don't underestimate the other side whose guidelines are simply "whatever I can take by force, I take." Don't forget Lenin's teachings: "Probe with your bayonet; if you encounter steel, withdraw; if you meet flesh, continue." I will never forget this since my studies. And this has proven to be Soviet behavior. Therefore, you must be firm.