

BOOK REVIEW

New Foundations for Asian and Pacific Security. Edited by Joyce E. Larson. New York: National Strategy Information Center Inc., 1980. Pp. 255.

In the Preface to the book, the editor stated that “For the purposes of the Pattaya meetings, it was determined that the countries invited should share certain common foundations and outlooks, as reflected in their non-communist political and economic systems, general friendliness toward one another, and demonstrated commitment to cooperative regional endeavors” (p. ix). The main organizer of the conference was the National Strategy Information Center, a conservative research organization in the United States. Sixteen addresses and conference papers were presented, and all with the exception of two — those by Lim Joo-Jock and Munir Majid — were given by ministers, senior officials, and former officials of governments. Hence, the meeting had the appearance of being a political conference.

The book is a compilation of the sixteen papers and committee reports. Additional background papers have also been included and these were written by the editor, Joyce E. Larson, who was the managing editor of the Center, and Dr Frank N. Trager, the Director of Studies at the Center and Professor of International Relations at New York University. In general, the book is not a scholarly or academic piece of work: it cannot pretend to provide an in-depth, comprehensive and balanced analysis of the security issues of the Asian and Pacific region. What the book can offer are the reflections of officials and former officials of the governments of some Asian and Pacific countries on the security situation in the region.

The conference participants met against the background of two major developments: firstly, a shifting balance of power in the Asian and Pacific region, and secondly, a conflict among the communist powers over the future of the Indochina subregion. The power situation had shifted from one which was dominated by the United States towards one which was evenly balanced between the two superpowers. The United States, after its defeat in the Vietnam war, withdrew from mainland Southeast Asia, but it remained committed to the defence of its remaining allies in the Asian and Pacific region. The U.S. Seventh Fleet continued to sail in the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea and the United States maintained its military bases in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines. The Soviet Union, however, had increased its military presence in the region and had advanced into the northern islands of Japan and mainland Southeast Asia. The Soviet Far East Fleet had made its presence felt throughout the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea, including the Gulf of Thailand, and the Soviet Union had acquired the use of military facilities in Vietnam. The Soviet military presence had the effect of undermining U.S. dominance and achieving a balance of forces in the Asian and Pacific region.

In Indochina, a regional conflict had become intertwined with the hostility between the two major communist powers, and the subregion had been polarized with the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Laos and the Heng Samrin regime on one side, and China with the Democratic Kampuchean government on the other. Vietnam's ambition to dominate its neighbours, Laos and Kampuchea, had led the Hanoi leadership to embark on a course of action which they had fought against during their historic struggle for independence — the course of intervention, aggression, and occupation. Would Vietnam suffer the same fate as other imperialist and occupying powers? China decided to exert its power and invaded Vietnam but withdrew with the threat that it might teach the Vietnamese another lesson. The lesson was meant for Vietnam, but other Southeast Asian states took note of its implications.

The shifting strategic balance and the Indochina conflict were developments which would affect the stability and security of the states in the Asian and Pacific region for many years to come. What were the perceptions of Asian leaders regarding the threats to their security? How did they respond to these developments and why did they act the way they did? What initiatives or new measures did they suggest to strengthen their defences against the perceived threats? The book has provided some answers from officials and former officials to these questions. But for the purpose of this review, I shall deal with the central question: what new foundations for Asian and Pacific security were proposed and discussed by the conference participants?

The Indochina conflict directly affected the stability and security of the ASEAN states. Yet the interesting point which emerged was the sanguine manner and absence of panic which prevailed among the Southeast Asian participants. All seemed to agree that there could not be a return to the U.S. dominated security system, and there was opposition to any new form of collective security arrangement, whether it be formed by Southeast Asian states or among Southeast Asian states and outside powers. "Pactomania" was a thing of the past, best left alone and allowed to fade away eventually.

Both Indonesia and Thailand singled out the Sino-Soviet rivalry as the main source of threat to the stability and security of Southeast Asia, and they felt that the United States could play a useful security role in the region. Lieutenant-General Ali Moertopo, the then Indonesian Minister of Information, stated that, "It is necessary that the U.S. watch very carefully the moves of the Soviet Union in the Asian/Pacific region. At the same time, the U.S. should use its influence with Peking as a rein on the PRC's actions in the area" (p. 23). Dr Upadit Pachariyangkun, the then Thai Foreign Minister expressed the view that "a stronger and more decisive U.S. in the 1980s will be welcomed by the international community" (p. 31). Lieutenant-General Ali Moertopo said that although there were pressures on ASEAN to take sides in the Sino-Soviet rivalry, ASEAN should remain neutral. Dr Upadit's view on ASEAN's role was that it should pursue co-operation among the member states, avoid confrontation with the Indochina states, and eventually seek the establishment of Southeast Asia as a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality. Dr Thanat Khoman, former Thai Foreign Minister, asserted that it was the policy shift of the United States which contributed to the uncertainties in the entire region and he advocated the creation of what he called a "de facto balance of power" to ensure security, one which would be based, "not on a single world policeman, but rather on the stabilizing forces which emerge from the mutually neutralizing balance of opposing forces" (p. 37).

An interesting suggestion came from Dr Upadit when he called for a United Nations

role in maintaining peace along the Thai-Kampuchean border and providing protection and relief to the Indochinese refugees encamped near that area. In his view, "The U.N. not only should maintain but in fact should intensify its active role, both with respect to monitoring the peace along the Thai-Kampuchean border and channelling effective relief to the masses of suffering Kampuchians in the border area. For these purposes, it may be necessary to establish a permanent U.N. observation unit in the area of the border" (p. 30). This was a positive and feasible proposal, but unfortunately it was not taken up. If it had it would certainly have prevented the Vietnamese incursion into Thai territory in June 1980.

The then Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs, Tan Sri Muhammad Ghazali bin Shafie, dealt with the prospect of an Asian and Pacific community as a means to preserve stability and security in the region. He disagreed with the concept of the Pacific community as envisaged by the United States, Japan, and Australia because the states were motivated by self-interest: the United States trying to continue with its domination, and Japan and Australia to protect their strategic, political and economic interests. He was in favour of an all-embracing organization which would bring together communist and non-communist states in the Asian and Pacific region. He stated, "It is in terms of a creative force — bringing together ideologically, politically, and economically disparate societies — that I prefer to approach the Pacific Basin concept" (p. 198).

Ambassador Melchor, one-time key aide of President Marcos of the Philippines, and Mr Bernard Chen, the then Minister of State for Defence of Singapore, were present at the conference, but their views on the security issues of the Asian and Pacific region were not recorded in the book. If these had been available, they would have provided further contrasts in the views of the ASEAN officials concerning regional security. It was clear that the ASEAN states did not have serious differences of views on the subject, and where such existed they were reflected in the different emphasis regarding the threats from China and the Soviet Union. For example, Indonesia and Malaysia perceived China as the threat to the stability and security of the states in Asia, while Singapore saw the Soviet Union as the expansionist power and as the supporter of the Vietnamese ambitions in Indochina.

As far as the East Asian region was concerned, the officials present seemed more responsive to the security threats posed by the Soviet military presence and the build-up of the North Korean military forces. General Masao Horie (Ret.), Councillor of the Japanese Diet, while recognizing the increased tension in East Asia, felt that there should be no change in the defence policy of the government: that is, a continuing dependence on the United States for its overall defence, and an expansion and modernization of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. A specific development would be in the expanded role of the Japanese navy. General Masao Horie (Ret.) stated, "Efforts will be made to enhance Japan's ability to protect the three straits choking the Sea of Japan and the sea lanes of communication around the Japanese islands" (p. 99).

Admiral Kenichi Kitamura (Ret.), former Chief of Naval Operations, and Professor Jun Tsunoda of Asyama-Gakuin University went further than General Masao Horie (Ret.) when they asserted that Japan should consider the protection of not only the sea lanes around the Japanese islands but also the sea lanes vital to the trade of the country. They accepted that the United States was no longer the dominant power in the Pacific but, nevertheless, regarded as a 'shockku' the American decision on the 'swing strategy', whereby elements of the U.S. Seventh Fleet could be diverted from the Pacific in the event of crisis in the Indian Ocean and Middle East region. In view of the altered strategic situation and the

threat to the sea lanes from the Soviet navy, Admiral Kitamura (Ret.) and Professor Tsunoda expressed the opinion that, "the inherent rights of self-defence give Japan the right to protect its sea-borne trade on the high seas, and to co-operate with the U.S. in this endeavor" (p. 118). Implicit in this was the attitude that Japan should assume responsibility for the protection of sea lanes vital to Japan's trade, including the Straits of Malacca.

From South Korea, Ambassador Hogan Yoon, then Consul General of the Republic of Korea in New York, stressed Soviet expansionism and North Korean military build-up as the destabilizing factors in Northeast Asia. Towards meeting these threats, he stated, "It will be desirable for the ROK, the U.S., and possibly Japan to work toward the formation of a regional security arrangement for Northeast Asia, while maintaining mutually beneficial economic and trade relations" (p. 127). South Korea, therefore, appeared to be the only country that would be prepared to consider a security framework based on multilateral alliances.

In any discussion of Asian and Pacific security problems, the role of the U.S. occupies a central place. Clearly, all the Asian leaders at the conference did not want a return to the Cold-War, U.S. dominated security system. What they seemed to accept was the presence of the United States at current or even increased levels for the purpose of maintaining stability and security by balancing the Soviet military presence. Except for the representative from South Korea, no other Asian participant called for any new security arrangement with the United States. It was noteworthy, therefore, to read the suggestion of Dr Frank Trager that, "The U.S. should aim to reinvigorate the existing defense treaties with its remaining Asian and Pacific Basin allies (that is, with the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand)" (p. xxviii). He stated that the United States should not revive SEATO. However, the American official at the conference, Dr Douglas Pike of the Defense Department played down the security role of the United States and instead indicated that it would prefer a political and diplomatic solution to the issues of peace and security. He stated, "It seems quite probable that as the United States moves deeper into the 1980s it will increasingly be guided — partly by design and partly in reaction to the rush of chaotic events — by a single overarching principle: the desire to see established in Asia a condition of socio-political, economic, and military equilibrium within the framework (that is, within the organizational structure) of some new type of international system" (pp. 234-235). His suggestion which he called, "Asian equilibrium through Asian regionalism" would imply the absence of intervention by the external major powers, namely, the United States and the Soviet Union, which had been the bane of the stability and security in the Asian and Pacific region.

The book has provided certain views of Asian leaders concerning the problem of Asian and Pacific security. However, there was little, if any, elaboration, explanation, or comments on those views expressed at the conference. I felt a sense of an opportunity lost, considering the fact that the organizers were able to have such a distinguished gathering of Asian ministers, officials and former officials and yet did not record the exchanges which must have taken place in Pattaya and which would have made the book worthy of consideration as a reference book. As it is, I was disappointed that the participants had little to offer in the way of 'new foundations' concerning the problem of stability and security in the Asian and Pacific region.

Lau Teik Soon
National University of Singapore