

**SOVIET PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH-EAST ASIA
(1964 — 1970)**

1971



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P R E F A C E

The study — Soviet Perspectives on South-East Asia (1964-70) — is a study of U.S.S.R.'s political, social, economic and strategic role in South-East Asian region. Though it is having a restricted sphere of time from 1964 to 1970, but the author has tried his utmost to analyse the moves of the Soviet Union as one of the super powers as well as the responses or the counter-moves of another super-power or the other forces trying to influence the region.

The whole study has been divided in a planned way which covers four chapters, including the conclusion. The first chapter — introduction — discusses the Soviet Involvement in South-East Asia before 1964. The Soviet Union did not consider South-East Asia of any strategic significance during the period immediately after the Second World War. But after Stalin's death in March, 1953, the Soviet policy underwent a change and the Soviet Union launched an all-out offensive, economic, diplomatic, political and cultural, in South-East Asia to increase the Soviet influence and to weaken the position of United States in this area. Khrushchev went to the extent of taking recourse to personal diplomacy but his interest in the region declined after the middle of 1962 mainly because the Chinese influence seemed unassailable.

The second chapter deals with the Soviet Thrust in South-East Asia, 1964-70. The Brezhnev-Kosygin team abandoned the policy of doubts of the Khrushchev era in favour of the policy of maintaining a Soviet presence in South-East Asia. Soviet aid to Vietnam was increased manifold. Diplomatic relations were established with Malaysia, Singapore and Philippines. Burma, Cambodia and Laos received massive Soviet aid. There was a perceptible change in the Soviet policy towards Thailand with whom a trade agreement was signed almost at the fag end of 1970. The South-East Asian countries were afraid of China and so ^{they} also welcomed friendly relations with U.S.S.R.

The third chapter deals with the New Dimensions of Soviet Perspectives on South-East Asia. The defreezing of Sino-American relations posed a serious threat to Soviet policy aims in the region. The Chinese Communist, determined to build up China as a super-power, entertained the ambition of dominating over Asia in general and South-East Asia in particular. To counter these moves, the Soviet Union formulated the plan of economic co-operation and collective security in South-East Asia. While it was admitted by the Soviet commentators that collective security involved more than economic co-operation they also stressed that it was not similar to a military bloc. This bold Soviet venture aimed not only at outmanouvring China in the South-East Asia but also at discrediting the West-supported existing regional groups. There was a mixed reaction in the

South-East Asian countries to the proposal of collective security. It was also being realised by the countries of the region that diplomatic relations with China were essential for any real hope of peace or stability for them.

The last chapter deals with the conclusion in which inferences derived from the three chapters have been put forward. By 1970, the Soviet influence in South-East Asia had increased considerably because of the Soviet aid to the countries of the region. The active presence of Soviet navy had also begun to be felt in the Indian Ocean. The whole situation was in a flux. China's emergence as a new major power gave rise to a new equation in the region against the existing two super powers. It was also being considered as a threat to the developing nations and its nuclear capability was posing a danger of its expansionist attitude to the detriment of its neighbouring nations. The Sino-U.S. rapproch^ement and the future role of U.S.A. in the region would influence the future Soviet policy. The Soviet proposal of regional economic co-operation and collective security held bleak prospects. There seemed to be less chances of giving a practical shape to the idea of self-reliance and the South-East Asian countries would continue to welcome aid from all the possible sources. China's policy was expected to be limited to propaganda than concrete actions which would perpetuate the fear complex among the countries of the area. All these factors were expected to favour the Soviet Union in increasing its influence.

This study is a micro study and requires a full and exhaustive inquiry on the subject. The material consulted in this study is mainly derived from secondary sources and is listed in the bibliography at the end.

This study was supervised by Dr. R. Vaidyanath, Head of the Centre of Russian and East European Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. I am greatly indebted to him. He inspired me to examine further the complexities of Soviet Perspectives on South-East Asia. It is a privilege to work under this affectionate teacher who supervised and guided this research with unfailing patience.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA BEFORE 1964

The Soviet Union did not have any vital strategic interest in the South-East Asian region immediately after the end of the Second World War, when the colonial powers were withdrawing rapidly. However, the fast growth of Communism in the region and the revolution in China gave a boost to, and demonstrated the significance of, the Communist cause in South-East Asia.¹ The future of Communism in South-East Asia had been of little interest to Kremlin, except during a short period after the formation of Comintern. However, the Soviet policy towards South-East Asia changed by the time the Korean War came to an end. The Soviet Union had realised that the aspirations of the peoples and governments of South-East Asia could be helpful in extending the Soviet influence in the Area.

After the end of the Korean War in 1953, the Soviet Union pursued a policy aimed at enlarging the possible domain of conflict between the newly emerging South-East Asian nations on the one hand and the United States and the West on the other. Khrushchev's promise of economic aid, which later developed into

1. Tarun C. Bose, "American and Soviet Interests in Asia", International Studies, (New Delhi), vol. 10, Nos. 1-2, July-October 1968, p. 48.

military aid, was intended for this purpose.² Simultaneously, the Soviet Union adopted a militant anticolonialist posture in South-East Asia. By constantly assailing colonialism and by extending support to the nationalist movements the Soviet Union not only succeeded in winning the sympathy of the new nations of South-East Asia but also increased substantially its influence in that area. It seemed to have comprehended how predominant was the emotional and political urge behind the nationalist movements in the South-East Asian countries. As the Soviet Union had no political commitments to the colonial powers so it easily pushed itself forward as a friend of nationalism everywhere. The Soviet Union also made efforts to channelise the main currents in South-East Asia to its own advantage. The Soviet leaders talked frequently of their desire for peace.

The Soviet Union did not assist the countries of South-East Asia till 1953. This policy was abandoned by the new leaders who took over the reigns of power in Soviet Union after the death of Joseph V. Stalin in March 1953. This marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. An era of gradual detente[†] in Soviet foreign policy began under this new leadership.³ Within a period of less than a year, the war in Indo-China was brought to a halt by a negotiated peace.

2. On the purpose of Soviet military aid, see Stephen P. Gilbert, "Wars of Liberation and Soviet Military Aid Policy", ORBIS, Vol. X, No. 3 (Fall, 1966), pp. 839-58.

3. Bose, op. cit., p. 58.

Although the new line of Soviet foreign policy was initiated almost immediately after Stalin's demise, the theory underlying it came to light only in the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956. It was unfolded here that regarding foreign policy, the Stalin's successors were also committed to thwart the ambitions and designs of Western nations but they did not accept Stalin's contention that the economies of the western nations were doomed to decline. They also disagreed with the theory that war with the capitalist bloc was inevitable. In Khrushchev's view, the cry of "capitalist encirclement" did no longer held ground. He also declared his firm faith in the ultimate victory of communism and said that only "peaceful co-existence" could be the mainstay of Soviet foreign policy.⁴ During Stalin's regime, the Soviet imperialism was of a limited military character. Under Khrushchev, it was not only demilitarized but it also became unlimited. Military power or the doctrines of Marx and Lenin were not to be utilised by Khrushchev to extend the Soviet influence. Instead, the technological and productive capacity of U.S.S.R. were to be used as instruments to achieve the desired aims.⁵

The views set-forth in the Twentieth Congress were reasserted by Khrushchev in the Twenty-First Party Congress in 1959. He

4. For Khrushchev's statement in the Twentieth Party Congress, see Leo Grulow, ed., Current Soviet Policies (New York, N.Y., 1957), vol. 2, pp. 29-63.

5. Hans J. Morganthau, "Soviet Policy and World Conquest," Current History, Vol. 37, November 1959, p. 291.

maintained that war in the nuclear era could only lead to mutual destruction and therefore "peaceful co-existence" was the only sane and agreeable direction. He also declared that the period of "capitalist encirclement" had definitely come to an end and that the weight of world forces had moved in favour of "communist camp".

The Soviet Union successfully projected in SouthEast Asia its image as a sympathetic "big brother" and the champion of nationalist struggles against imperialist powers. Many factors worked in Soviet Union's favour. Firstly, western imperialism, and not Soviet, held sway over the underdeveloped countries of this region. So the people of this area had no ground to be afraid of the Soviet intentions. Secondly, the anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist stance of communism proved to be very advantageous in influencing the South-East Asian nations.⁶ Lenin's theory of imperialism influenced many leaders and intellectuals of these countries. Thirdly, the leaders of the South-East Asian countries welcomed Soviet aid and trade because it provided them with an alternative to Western aid. Fourthly, the planned economic progress of Russia impressed the statesmen and the intelligentsia of the new nations who looked forward to rapid economic development of their own countries.

6. Michael T. Florinsky, "Russian-American Rivalry in Foreign Aid," Current History, Vol. 35, September 1957, p. 154.

7. Richard F. Rosser, An Introduction to Soviet Foreign Policy, (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1969) p. 95.

To the countries of South-East Asia, the Soviet model seemed to be the solution of their need for rapid economic growth. Therefore the Soviet offers of economic and technical assistance were more acceptable. From the very beginning the Soviet Union directed its efforts toward the important countries. And all over the South-East Asia, the Soviet foreign-aid policy conformed to its political aims.⁸

The main purpose of Soviet foreign-aid policy was to neutralize the gains of American aid.⁹ The Soviet Union undercut the rates of interest at which foreign-aid credits for industrialisation were given by the United States and other Western Governments. The terms of Soviet loans were more attractive as compared to U.S. loans. The Soviet loans were for periods varying from ten to thirty years and the rate of interest ranged from 2 to 2.5 per cent. In contrast to this the rate of interest charged by the United States ranged from 3.5 to 6 per cent.¹⁰ Besides, the Soviet Union accepted repayment in the form of local export goods some of which had low value in international commerce.¹¹ The aid-receiving nations could use this offer to dispose of domestic surpluses, usually agricultural,

8. Bose, op. cit., p. 59.

9. Michael P. Gehlen, The Politics of Co-existence — Soviet Methods and Motives, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967) p. 185.

10. U.S.A., Congressional Record, Vol. 105 (1959), p. 10971.

11. Gehlen, op. cit., p. 189.

which were often difficult to market. It also extended help to the projects that were allocated top priority by the governments of Southeast Asian nations. It always laid emphasis on the point that the Soviet aid could obviate their exclusive dependence on the West and could help them achieve economic freedom. (Khrushchev proclaimed the Soviet view in unequivocal terms in the Twenty-First Party Congress: "Our country builds its relations with all states on principles of complete equality and collaboration without any conditions of a military or political nature.... The Soviet Union gives aid on fair commercial principles. The socialist countries help the underdeveloped nations to create their own industry, while the United States seeks to sell consumer goods which have no sale on the home market."¹²)

The Soviet aid to the South-East Asian countries seems to have been motivated by two important aims. Firstly, it wanted to convince countries of the peaceful character of Soviet intentions and in this way it wanted to encourage the South-East Asian nations to take a "neutral" stand. Secondly, it wanted to convince the underdeveloped countries that the Soviet Union had more to offer than the West for their transition to a modern, industrialized society.

Due to the pressure of their domestic politics and the prevalent prejudices against the former colonial rulers, the

12. Quoted in U.S.A., Congressional Record, Vol. 96 (1960), p. 15325.

majority of the new nations of this region disapproved military alliances or any intimate entanglement with the United States. These nations preferred to follow a policy of non-alignment in the face of Great-Power struggle. This amply suited the requirements of Soviet Union's foreign policy objectives after the death of Stalin in 1953 and particularly after 1955.

The Soviet Union launched an economic offensive after 1953 which aimed at utilising to its own advantage the problems, aspirations, and needs of the peoples and Governments of South-East Asia. It also aimed at weakening the position of United States and Western Europe. Simultaneously, the Soviet influence in South-East Asia was to be increased by peaceful methods. The offensive was waged equally on the diplomatic, economic, political and cultural levels. Khrushchev took recourse to personal diplomacy in 1960 and toured Burma and Indonesia. This initiated the new thrust of Soviet foreign policy. This foreign diplomacy consisted of two-way traffic. Therefore foreign officials, like U Nu and Sukarno, in return visited the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union also made use of its aid, trade and technical assistance,¹³ and support in the United Nations of issues considered vital by the underdeveloped countries,¹⁴ to expand its political influence and make these countries to part the company of United States and the West.

13. New York Times, January 4, 1958.

14. With Indonesia, for example, in respect of its claim to Dutch New Guinea.

A. Soviet Union and the Bandung Conference

The Soviet Union's efforts at encouraging neutrality among the new nations showed results publicly for the first time at the Bandung Conference where many new nations strongly pleaded in favour of neutrality. Three Hundred and Forty delegates representing twenty-nine African and Asian countries were present at Bandung. The twenty-nine countries represented a population of over 1.3 billion, more than half the population of the world.

Marshal Voroshilov, the Soviet President, and the presidiums of the five Soviet republics of Central Asia, sent greetings to the conference. Vasily V. Kuznetsov, Soviet deputy foreign Minister, in a special statement made on April 16 on the eve of the Conference, said: "The struggle of the Asian and African countries against all forms of colonial rules and for political and economic independence enjoys the full understanding of the Soviet peoples."¹⁵

The main attention was focussed on two issues at the Bandung Conference and both the issues were considered to be important for ties with the Soviet Union. "Colonialism" was the main topic of discussions and the main target of attacks by all.¹⁶ The second issue was controversial. It was a motion pressed by the anti-communist nations for the endorsement of

15. International Affairs, Moscow, No.5, May, 1955, p.22.

16. A. Appadorai, The Bandung Conference, (New Delhi, Indian Council of World Affairs, 1956), p. 8.

the "right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively." This proposition was against the policy of neutrality. The foundation of NATO and the Baghdad and SEATO pacts was laid on the principle of "collective self-defense" and strong bonds with the West against the danger posed by the Russians and Chinese. But neutralism was based on the principle that the pacts and alliances, which might lead to wars, must be avoided.

Discussions led to amendments which resulted in increasing the "Five Principles" to ten.¹⁷ It seems that these changes displeased the U.S.S.R. because it mentioned only "Five Principles" when it dealt with the countries of Asia thereby implying that no modification was made. "The Five Principles," said International Affairs after the Bandung Conference, "have been recognized by more than 30 countries with a combined population of 1,5000 million people."¹⁸

While some Western observers considered that the Bandung Conference was a success for democracy,¹⁹ some others felt that it indicated Communist-neutralist co-operation and, therefore, denoted a great achievement for Moscow.²⁰

17. Ibid., p. 9.

18. V. Durdenevsky, "The Five Principles," International Affairs, Moscow, No. 3, March 1956, p. 45.

19. For instance, Carlos P. Romulo in The Meaning of Bandung (Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press, 1956).

20. Dallin, op. cit., p. 303.

B. Soviet Union And Burma

Burma was considered to be a neutral nation by the U.S.S.R. The trade crisis between Burma and the U.S.A. facilitated Soviet Union's endeavours to establish friendly relations with Burma. The main export commodity of Burma was rice and the United States was already having a large surplus of rice. The Communist bloc came to the rescue of Burma at this critical moment. China signed a trade agreement with Burma (November 22, 1954) for the purchase of 150,000 tons of rice. Other East European countries also entered into such accords. A three-year Soviet-Burmese trade agreement was signed on July 1, 1955. It provided for the Soviet purchase of from 150,000 to 200,000 tonnes of rice during 1955 and Soviet deliveries to Burma of machinery, industrial equipment, and other goods. It also envisaged Soviet technical assistance to Burma's industry.²¹ In this way the Soviet bloc became the chief trade partner of Burma replacing the West.

U Nu visited Soviet Union in 1955. A joint-declaration was issued by U Nu and Bulganin on November 3, 1955, emphasizing that the "relations between the Soviet Union and Burma have always been sincere and friendly." Both prime ministers criticised "the policy of organizing blocs" and commended "non-joining of blocs". It also demanded the cessation of atomic and hydrogen bomb tests, admission of Communist China to the United Nations

21. News From Behind the Iron Curtain, (New York), Vol. 4, No. 10, October 1955, p. 16.

and also urged for adherence to the "Five Principles of Co-existence."²² At a press conference in Moscow, U Nu admitted that the Soviet Union was the first country which offered technical assistance on terms suggested by Burma. "Clearly, this agreement is only a stage on the road to broader economic co-operation."²³

Khrushchev and Bulganin visited Burma in December, 1955. They stayed there from December 1 to 7. They were accorded a cordial reception in Burma. The statement issued in Rangoon at the end of their visit stressed on the principles of neutralism. This visit also resulted in an economic agreement which provided for Soviet technical assistance, specially aid in agricultural program, irrigation projects, and industrial construction on credit terms.²⁴ The Soviet leaders offered to construct a technical institute in Rangoon "as a gift to the people of Burma." Accepting the gift, U Nu promptly offered a gift of a quantity of rice which ^{was} "gratefully accepted" by the Russian leaders.²⁵

"Advisers" from the Soviet Union and the East European countries were also sent to Burma.²⁶

22. Pravda, November 4, 1955, Translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. VII, No. 44, (December 14, 1955) pp. 9-10.

23. New Times, Moscow, No. 46, November 10, 1955, The Soviet Union and Burma, pp. 3-5.

24. Pravda, December 8, 1955, Translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. VII, No. 49, January 18, 1956, p. 10.

25. Ibid.

26. Dallin, op. cit., p. 310.

Khrushchev's second visit to Burma took place in 1960 which according to him, was "highly beneficial for the further development of Soviet-Burmese relations."²⁷

C. Soviet Union and Indonesia

Indonesia, the most important "newly liberated" country of South-East Asia, was given little attention by the Soviet Union in the beginning. Its diplomatic recognition by the U.S.S.R. took place only in January, 1950.

The visit of John Foster Dulles to Indonesia in March, 1956 compelled the Soviet Union and China to realize its importance. Consequently Soviet and Chinese artists were sent to Indonesia. A Soviet economic mission went there to discuss Soviet-Indonesian trade agreements. Soviet trade representatives offered to construct industrial plants in Indonesia. Even Soviet arms were offered.²⁸ The first Soviet-Indonesian trade agreement was signed in Djakarta on August 8, 1956. A fortnight later, President Sukarno proceeded on a tour of the Soviet Union, China, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Austria. Sukarno attended many meetings and receptions in the Soviet Union where he always stressed on friendship, peace and liberty.²⁹

27. Pravda, March 6, 1960; Translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XII, No. 10, (April 6, 1960) p. 5.

28. The New York Times, August 21, 1956.

29. New Times, (Moscow), No. 38, September 13, 1956, pp. 1-2.

Sukarno was hailed by the Soviet press as a "great fighter for Indonesia's independence" and reports of his life in prison and exile were published. His antagonism to West was also widely publicised. In response, Sukarno lauded the Soviet collective farms, eulogised the Bolshhevik revolution and criticised "imperialism" and "colonialism." He declared that the fraternal bonds between Russia and Indonesia were "indestructible." Sukarno was honoured and decorated with the Order of Lenin.

The joint-declaration signed by the Indonesians and the Russians in Moscow on September 11, 1956, stressed on antagonism toward colonialism and atomic arms, admission of Communist China to the United Nations, peaceful settlement of the Suez issue, cooperation of the two governments in the commercial, technical and economic fields, rejection of military pacts and coalitions.³⁰

The Soviet Union agreed to give a loan of 100 million dollars to Indonesia according to an agreement signed in Djakarta on September 15, 1956. It was a loan for a period of twelve years and the rate of interest was 2.5 per cent. The loan was to be utilised for industrial development.

In 1960 Khrushchev paid a visit to Indonesia. This visit resulted in an agreement for Soviet loan of 250 million dollars

30. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

to Indonesia on long term credits at an annual interest rate of 2.5 per-cent.³¹ This loan was for industrial projects like metallurgical plants, chemical plants and textile mills. Khrushchev's visit aimed at utilising China's mistakes in favour of Russia. Indonesian Communist Party also received a shot in the arm by Khrushchev's declaration of Russian support to Indonesia in its dispute over West New Guinea and by the three agreements signed during Khrushchev's visit.³² It is argued that the increased Soviet aid to Indonesia was directed at discouraging the strong Indonesian Communist Party from aligning completely with the Chinese.³³

D. Soviet Union and Indo-China

South-East Asia has never been of strategic importance to the Soviet Union. The people or the local communists in Indo-China were significant for the Russians only to the extent the developments in Indo-China affected the issues in Europe or in Soviet Union's relations with the United States or China.³⁴ Although Vietminh was the only Communist Party in the world which led a national liberation movement immediately after the

31. Pravda, February 29, 1960, Translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XII, No. 9, (March 30, 1960) p.8.

32. Sydney Morning Herald, March 4, 1960.

33. Gehlen, Op. cit., p. 187.

34. Donald S. Zagoria, Vietnam Triangle, (New York, Pegasus, 1968) p. 35.

second world war, from 1945 to 1948, yet the Russians did not respond warmly, did not advocate their cause in the international circles and left them entirely under the guidance of the Communist Party of France. The French Communists failed to give much support to Vietminh but on the other hand, for some duration, extended support to the French government's war efforts against them.

The ousting of the Communists from the coalition government of France proved beneficial to the Vietminh to the extent that they started receiving help from the Soviet government and the French Communists. Stalin's interest in Indo-China grew only after the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950. It was realised in Moscow that the Vietminh struggle in Indo-China was serving as a second front against the Western powers.³⁵ But even then the Soviet Union did not declare any assistance to Vietminh. On May 9, 1953, Pravda explicitly refuted a report of a Sino-Soviet-North Vietnamese aid agreement.³⁶

After the death of Stalin in March, 1953, the Soviet Union displayed its inclination for a negotiated settlement of Indo-Chinese war. The Communists had fair chances of further success in Indo-China but Europe was more important for the Soviet Union and the rejection of European Defence Community

35. Ibid., p. 39.

36. Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press (1953), Vol. V, No. 19, (June 20, 1953) p. 19.

by France was uppermost in Moscow's priorities.³⁷ This necessitated the retention of Mendes-France in power, at least till the Soviet objective regarding EDC was achieved. Ho Chi Minh was persuaded by Moscow to agree to Geneva settlement and in return Mendes-France allowed the French Assembly to veto the EDC.

Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh agreed to a political settlement of the Indo-Chinese war because they were confident that the Nationwide elections in 1956, as envisaged in the Geneva Agreement, would lead to the extension of their authority over the whole country.³⁸ It is observed that at the Geneva Conference Ho Chi Minh, under Russian influence, gave his assent for the division of Vietnam on terms which disappointed the communists of the North and particularly the communists of the South.³⁹

The Geneva Agreements were greeted by Pravda, in an editorial, as "an important triumph in the national liberation struggle of the peoples of Indo-China" and hoped that through the free general elections in Vietnam in July, 1956, in accordance with the provisions of the agreements, "national unification will be brought about in peaceful conditions and in conformity with the national interests of all the people of Vietnam."⁴⁰

37. Dallin, op. cit., p. 153.

38. Richard Butwell, Southeast Asia - Today and Tomorrow (London: Pall Mall Press Limited, 1969) p. 57.

39. Douglas Pike, Viet Cong. (New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing House, 1967) p. 52.

40. Pravda, July 22, 1954, Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 1954, Vol. VI, No. 29, September 1, 1954, p. 15.

But the Geneva Agreements were never honoured so far as the elections were concerned. The South Vietnamese government declined to implement the provisions of elections under the unsigned Geneva Accords. Dulles took initiative to form South-East Asia Treaty Organisation closely following the Geneva Conference. The South Vietnamese government, a prominent member of SEATO, openly became a party to the cold war.

Russia lodged a protest in the United Nations when the 1956 elections in Vietnam were not held. But in early 1957 the Soviet Union proposed that both North and South Vietnam should be admitted to the U.N. which implied the Russian acceptance of the division of Vietnam.

By early 1957 Ho Chi Minh also reconciled to the indefinite division of Vietnam and started thinking in terms of reunification as a long term objective possible only after the economic development of the North. This line of argument was followed by North Vietnam's increasing dependence on Russia for the solution of its economic problems. North Vietnam reciprocated the Soviet assistance by also accepting its concept of peaceful coexistence.

The Soviet Union took active interest in Vietnam War from 1957 to the middle of 1962. Two factors, working at cross-purposes, shaped the Soviet policy in Indochina since 1960. The Russians desired to reach a detente with the United States, which aided the South Vietnamese government against the Vietcong

and North Vietnam.⁴¹ Russians also considered it essential to preserve their leadership in the international communist movement specially in Asia, and to prevent North Vietnam from becoming an ally of China against U.S.S.R. or serving as evidence of the success of a rival revolutionary strategy.⁴² These factors made conflicting demands. The first demanded reducing the North Vietnam's escalating conflict with South Vietnam and the latter demanded giving considerable support to Hanoi to prevent it from going over to China.

Retention of Hanoi's allegiance to Moscow assumed so much importance that in 1960 Khrushchev had to intervene on behalf of the Vietminh-dominated Pathet Lao though it involved a risk of an encounter with the United States.

On December 23, 1960, the government of the U.S.S.R. and the government of the D.R.V. signed an agreement on the rendering by the Soviet Union of technical and economic assistance to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in fulfilling first Five-Year Plan for developing the D.R.V. national economy in 1961-65. Under the agreement, the Soviet Union promised to render technical assistance to the DRV in the construction of 43 new industrial enterprises and other projects, including eight thermal and power plants.⁴³ Under this agreement the Soviet Union delivered

41. Zagoria, op. cit., p. 42.

42. Butwell, op. cit., p. 78.

43. Pravda, December 25, 1960, Translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 1969, Vol. XII, No. 52, January 25, 1961, p. 2

to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam increasing amounts of equipment, automotive and construction machines, tractors, trucks, rolled ferrous and non-ferrous metals, petroleum products, chemical fertilizers and other goods needed for the development of DRV's military and civil economy.

At the invitation of the Soviet government, a government delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, headed by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong was in the Soviet Union from June 26 to July 5, 1961 on a visit of friendship. On July 4, 1961, a Joint Soviet-Vietnamese Communiqué, was issued by N.S. Khrushchev and Pham Van Dong. In the joint Communiqué the Soviet Government highly appreciated the contribution made by the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to the solution of major international problems and to the strengthening of peace in Southeast Asia and declared its full support for the proposals of the D.R.V. government on the peaceful unification of Vietnam.⁴⁴

Khrushchev's interest in Indochina declined considerably during the last years of his rule. This disinterest was reflected in the Soviet press also. It continued to be sympathetic to Viet Cong and critical of American intervention but paid less attention to the development of war itself.⁴⁵ It is

44. Pravda, July 5, 1961, Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 1961, Vol. XIII, No. 27, pp. 24-25.

45. Charles B. McLane, "U.S.S.R. Policy in Asia," Current History, Vol. 49, No. 290, October, 1965, pp. 218-219.

observed that Khrushchev's interest in Indochina declined because he had realised in the wake of Sino-Soviet rivalry that the distance between U.S.S.R. and North Vietnam and the geographical factors made it very difficult for Moscow to exercise influence over Hanoi and to curb the Chinese influence there.⁴⁶ It was apparent that any major support to Viet Cong and Hanoi would go in Peking's favour in the long run. And if Moscow initiated any move to end the fighting through a negotiated settlement it would lend support to Peking's allegations of U.S.S.R.'s failure in leading the world communist movement and would have further tarnished the Soviet image in the Communist world. Under these circumstances, the only wise course for Khrushchev was to keep the Soviet involvement in Vietnam to a minimum.⁴⁷

Beginning from 1957-58, the Soviet foreign policy was influenced by the relationship between the United States, China and the U.S.S.R. Differences with Peking limited Khrushchev's foreign policy alternatives. It compelled Soviet Union to reorient its policy towards the United States. The relationship between the two was shaped by their mutual desire to avoid a thermonuclear war. This conditioned Soviet Policy.⁴⁸ From 1963 till October 1964, Soviet-American relations were marked

46. Foy D. Kohler, Understanding the Russians - A Citizen Primer, (New York, Harper & Row, 1970) p. 387.

47. McLane, op. cit., p. 219.

48. Clement J. Zablocki, Sino-Soviet Rivalry, (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1966) p. 47.



with efforts to reach accommodation and East-West detente.⁴⁹
A relation of tensions between the Soviet and Western camps was also sought. In spite of the existence of competition and conflict in many areas, Soviet Union and the United States reached a common understanding allowing parallel courses of action to tackle specific problems.⁵⁰ Khrushchev desired to reach a settlement with the West and confront China with greater vigour. The Sino-Soviet conflict created possibilities of a partial American-Soviet detente.

In the summer of 1963, the "hot line" established instantaneous communication between Moscow and Washington. Treaty Banning Tests of Nuclear Weapons in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water was signed in Moscow on August 5, 1963 which had unlimited duration. The General Assembly of United Nations duly passed a resolution, giving a formal shape to Soviet-U.S. understanding "to refrain from placing in orbit around the earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction." The resolution further urged all states neither to orbit objects carrying nuclear weapons nor to encourage such acts.⁵¹ In the middle of December, 1963, Khrushchev announced a reduction in the defence

49. Albert L. Weeks, The Other Side of Coexistence: An Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy, (New York, Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1970) p. 181.

50. Walter C. Clemens, Jr., The Arms Race and Sino-Soviet Relations, (Stanford, Hoover Institution, 1968) p. 62.

51. V. Israelyan and Others, Soviet Foreign Policy - Brief Review 1955-1965 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1967), p. 270.



budget, which implied a tacit understanding with Washington that it would be reciprocated by the United States. Moscow, Washington and London simultaneously announced on April 20, 1964 their unilateral pledges to cut back production of fissionable materials. After a few months Khrushchev's son-in-law and the editor of IZvestiya, Alexei Adzhubei paid a friendly visit to West Germany with the purpose of preparing the ground for Khrushchev's visit. Although a tentative date was fixed for Khrushchev's visit to West Germany but Khrushchev was overthrown before it could be materialized. The amelioration in Soviet-American relations led to the intensification of quarrel with China.

CHAPTER II

SOVIET UNION'S THRUST INTO SOUTH-EAST ASIA, 1964-1970

The plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee held on October 14, 1964 relieved N.S. Khrushchev of the duties as the First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Member of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. The responsibilities discharged by Khrushchev were handed over to two persons. Leonid Brezhnev was elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of the party and Alexei Kosygin was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers.⁵²

A. Change in Policy by New Leaders

The new leaders adopted a cautious approach which was also reflected in their foreign policy statements. The Brezhnev-Kosygin team stressed that the Soviet foreign policy would continue to be guided by the principle of peaceful co-existence. The new leaders hoped that they would be able to reduce the tension with China.⁵³ Mao Tse-tung sent "warm greetings" to the new team. A Chinese delegation headed by Chou En-lai visited Moscow in

52. Pravda, October 17, 1964, Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol.XVI, No.40, (October 28, 1964) pp. 3, 6.

53. Adam Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy from 1917-1967 (London, Secker & Warburg, 1968), p. 696.

November on the occasion of the anniversary of the Revolution. The initiative for this visit, claimed Chou, came from the Chinese.⁵⁴ The meeting between Chou En-lai and the new Soviet leaders did not yield any fruitful result. The Soviet-Chinese relations continued to be tense. However, the new team in order to placate the Chinese postponed till March a meeting of the twenty-six Communist Parties which was scheduled to be held in December to chalk out the plans of the world conference of the communist parties.

This change in Soviet leader's attitude towards China was prompted by their desire to avoid a formal rupture of relations with China although they also made a determination, to complete with China in South-East Asia.⁵⁵ Beginning from 1950 Soviet policy towards South-East Asia was shaped in accordance with its relations with China.⁵⁶ In pursuance of the new policy, the new Soviet Prime Minister Kossygin, visited Hanoi in February, 1965, in order to initiate the plan of increasing Soviet influence in Vietnam as against the Chinese influence. The new leaders also decided to use the slogan of "Aid to Vietnam Against the Aggression of American Imperialism in an effort to rally the world communist movement.

54. "We took the initiative in proposing to send a party and Government delegation to attend the celebrations in Moscow." Chou, quoted in Peking Review, January 1, 1965, p. 19

55. Kohler, op. cit., p. 388.

56. Ulan, op. cit., p. 693.

The new leaders aimed at securing some control over Hanoi. There is much truth in the Chinese assessment: "The new leaders of the CPSU came to realize that it was no longer advisable to copy Khrushchev's policy of 'disengagement' in its totality. So they switched to the policy of involvement, that is, of getting their hand in."⁵⁷

Khrushchev's policy of doubts about the desirability of maintaining a Russian presence in South-East Asia was completely reversed by his successors.⁵⁸ They realized that the obligations of a super-power imposed on Moscow the responsibility of maintaining a long-term co-ordinated policy of correct relations, with the South-East Asian nations. Hitherto, the Soviet interest in South-East Asia had fluctuated. The new Soviet leaders displayed a much greater comprehension of Soviet interests there.⁵⁹

B. Implementation of the New Policy

Sino-Soviet relationship had always been the dominant factor in determining Soviet policy toward South-East Asia. The new leaders did not follow Khrushchev's policy of disengagement. They decided to make their presence felt in Hanoi. Soviet aid to North Vietnam was increased from about \$ 100 million to nearly

57. Peking Review, November 12, 1965, p. 15.

58. The Age (Melbourne), 'Russia Takes a New Look at Her Policies' in South-East Asia, June 17, 1968.

59. Dev Murarka, 'Russia Seeks Friends in S.E. Asia', Observer, (London), May 26, 1968.

\$ 1 billion per year and high-level efforts were made to woo Ho Chi Minh. While Soviet arms worth 75 million dollars were sent to North Vietnam between 1954 and 1964, a sharp increase took place in 1965 when, as claimed by Russia, Soviet arms worth \$ 555 million were supplied in that year alone.⁶⁰ According to western sources, the Soviet Union later on supplied North Vietnam with 75 per cent of its arms which included surface to anti-aircraft missiles (SAM's), the latest models of anti-aircraft guns, MIG fighters, Russia's largest helicopters and heavy, mobile rocket launchers. A large number of North Vietnamese pilots and technicians were trained in Russia and thousands of Russian advisers were sent to North Vietnam.⁶¹

In an attempt at probing new areas of operation, diplomatic relations were established with Malaysia and Singapore. At the same time great care was taken to see that such developments do not adversely effect U.S.S.R.'s relations with traditional friends in South-East Asia. Enormous aid in economic, scientific and technological spheres was given to many countries of this region.

Soviet support was also extended to Prince Souvanna Phouma of Laos. In spite of the bloody suppression of Indonesian communists after their unsuccessful coup in September 1965, the new

60. Albert Parry, "Soviet Aid to Vietnam," The Reporter (New York), January 12, 1967, p. 28.

61. Rosser, op. cit., pp. 345-6.

anti-communist Suharto government was obliged by the Soviet Union with a moratorium on the 1.2 billion debt which it owed to the U.S.S.R.

One of the objectives of Soviet Russia in forging friendly relations with the countries of South-East Asia was to acquire a permanent foot-hold in the Indian Ocean. Soviet moves in this direction were ostensibly aimed at strengthening its own position vis-a-vis China. The Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean were not only to bring China's land mass within the range of their missiles but also to deflect the threat to Russia's land-based missile sites.

Establishment of Soviet naval power 'consistent with its interests' along the rim of Asia -- from the Black Sea, the Mediterranean through the Indian Ocean to the Far East -- was another important objective of the Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean.⁶² The necessity to keep the sea lanes open from the Baltic ports of Western Russia to the Far Eastern ports of Eastern Russia was also one of the Soviet interests in the region.⁶³ The withdrawal of the British from the Indian Ocean presented ample opportunity to the Soviet Union which was exploited to the maximum by them.

62. Patwant Singh, The Struggle for Power in Asia, (London, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1971), pp. 43-44.

63. The Hindu (Madras), 'Russia's Interest in South-East Asia', November 23, 1970.

C. Soviet Union's Relations with the Countries of South-East Asia

The Soviet Union succeeded in establishing friendly and diplomatic relations with most of the countries of South-East Asia. It skillfully expanded her political and economic influence in this region. The Soviet Union adroitly projected itself as the friendly big brother of new nations regardless of their internal policies toward local communists or leanings in foreign policy.

BURMA:— Burma, which avoided friendship with the big powers for fear of incurring the wrath of China, was systematically wooed by the new Soviet leaders also. Trade between the two increased considerably and the trade balances favoured Burma.⁶⁴

	1961	1965	
Exports to Burma	21.45	34.02	(in millions of Kyaks)
Imports from Burma	0.04	64.33	

Till 1966, Burma had received loans to the tune of 15 million US dollars from the Soviet Union. Eight projects in Burma, which included irrigation projects, a dam, a water reservoir, a hotel and a stadium, were constructed with these loans. Burma also received as gifts a technical institute and a 200-bed hospital valued at 10 million US dollars.

"Burma's road to socialism" under the present Revolutionary Military Council was praised by the Soviet press and writers.

64. Patwant Singh, op. cit., p. 51.

Later, the incidents of Chinese infiltration in Burma's borders with China were given wide coverage in the Soviet press.

The desired objective of the Soviet Union was to help Burma remain in neutralist isolation. At the same time, Soviet Union had taken great care not to demonstrate its presence in a big way in Burma. Cordial relations existed between Burma and the Soviet Union. The Burmese Prime Minister officially visited Moscow thrice between 1966 and 1969. When Chou En-lai visited Burma in 1968, the Soviet Union did not hesitate to impute motives to Chinese economic assistance to Burma and expressed anxiety over a possible success of China's diplomatic efforts in Burma.

CAMBODIA:— The economic assistance being rendered to Cambodia by the Soviet Union was increased two-fold by the new leaders. Till 1966, Cambodia was given 12 million US dollars worth of Soviet aid. In Cambodia, China competed with the Soviet Union in giving economic assistance. Till 1966, Cambodia had received, from China, aid worth 60 million US dollars. Cambodia also received military assistance from China. The Soviet aided projects comprised hydro-power schemes, a dam, a radio station, a 500-bed hospital and a technical college.

Cambodia received military equipment from the Soviet Union which included two Mig-17's and four other Jet fighters. Prince Sihanouk was persistently encouraged by the Russians to take

anti-American position. Sihanouk's efforts to defend Cambodia's borders against Thailand's claims always received support from the Soviet Union. The USSR also extended support to different schemes and plans, which Prince Sihanouk advocated at one time or another, for guaranteeing Cambodia's territorial integrity and neutrality.

The Soviet Union's withdrawal of their official invitation to Prince Sihanouk in 1966 created tension in Soviet-Cambodian relations. It was nothing short of a diplomatic folly. Prince Sihanouk was so much annoyed that he declared his desire to rely more heavily on China. However, the situation was saved in 1967 when the Soviet Union offered a new loan of 3 million US dollars and which was followed by Prince Sihanouk's visit to Moscow.⁶⁵

The military coup against Prince Sihanouk in 1970 and the large scale military intervention by the US in the ensuing civil war posed new problems before the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union found itself between US armed intervention and China's support to Sihanouk's followers in Cambodia. This almost paralysed the Soviet policy towards Cambodia. As a result the Soviet Union's reaction was confined to verbal denunciation of US intervention in Cambodia. While China recognised Prince Sihanouk's Government-in-Exile, the Soviet Union did not follow China's example. The coup led to a rupture of diplomatic relations between China and

65. International Affairs, (Moscow), February 1968, pp.90-92, 97; New Times, (Moscow), March 15, 1967, pp.27-29.

Cambodia but the diplomatic relations between the U.S.S.R. and Cambodia remained unaffected. The Soviet Union continued to maintain its embassy in Cambodia. The Chinese-North Vietnamese scheme of trying to restore Sihanouk to authority in Cambodia did not receive Soviet Union's support. Moscow could not support a political move which, if successful, would be in China's favour. For all practical purposes, Sihanouk had become a creature of China and his restoration would have led to an expansion of Chinese influence in South-East Asia.⁶⁶

INDONESIA⁶⁷.— Indonesia had received economic assistance worth 378 million US dollars from the Soviet Union till it was stopped in 1966. The Soviet aid was utilised in 27 projects which included iron and steel works, fertilizer and cement factories, a mechanised farm, highways, a sports centre and a hospital.⁶⁸ The East European communist countries had given to Indonesia aid worth 257 million US dollars and aid from China was worth nearly 108 million dollars till 1966.

These figures do not include credits for building up arms stocks which was estimated to be to the tune of 600 million US dollars. This substantial amount was used by the Indonesians to

66. Christian Science Monitor, (Boston), 'Red Rivalry in Asia,' June 15, 1970.

67. Sources: New Times, Moscow, June 26, 1968; January 25, 1967 and February 8, 1967.

68. The USSR and Developing Countries, (Moscow, Novosti Press Agency, 1968), pp. 53-54.

build up a strong navy comprising at least twenty submarines, two cruisers, four destroyers and several motor torpedo boats. The Indonesian air force was further equipped with MIG 15s, MIG 17s, and MIG 19s along with some bombers and helicopters.⁶⁹

In this way the Soviet Union invested more than one billion US dollar in Indonesia and the repayment from the Indonesians was almost nil.

The unsuccessful coup on September 30, 1965 led to bloody reprisals against the Indonesian Communists. Indonesia was coming under increasing influence of China and the success of this coup would have established complete Chinese sway.⁷⁰ So its failure gave relief to Moscow. The Soviet Union demanded "an end to the criminal murder of Communists -- the heroic fighters for the national independence of Indonesia and for the interests of the workers."⁷¹ At the same time, the Soviet Union did not miss the opportunity to comment upon the foolishness of Sukarno and the Indonesian Communist Party for being trapped in Chinese designs.

After the failure of the communist coup in September 1965 and Sukarno's removal from power, Indonesia looked for assistance to the West though it continued to maintain that it was non-aligned.

69. Marshall I. Goldman, Soviet Foreign Aid, (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1967) pp. 130-131.

70. Ulan, op. cit., p. 718.

71. Brezhnev's speech quoted in Twenty-third Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Moscow, 1966), I, p. 51.

The Soviet Union also lost interest in providing further assistance to Indonesia. Indonesian criticism of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia led to further deterioration of Soviet relations with Indonesia. Things started moving in a friendly direction in 1969 when a high-level Soviet delegation visited Djakarta. It discussed re-establishment of normal economic and political relations under the guise of giving more time to Indonesia to start repaying in instalments the Russian loans taken by the Sukarno regime. It also offered aid worth 25 million US dollars though Indonesia had till then not declared when it would start repaying earlier Soviet loans.⁷² By August 1970, Moscow and Djakarta agreed on an economic protocol which called for a rescheduling of Indonesia's indebtedness on terms as generous as those offered by the Western countries.⁷³ Moscow even showed signs of reinstating a programme of limited economic assistance in the hope of encouraging Indonesia to maintain its non-aligned status and securing for the Soviet Union some political access and leverage.⁷⁴ Moscow thus played a cool game and maintained reasonable relations with Indonesia.

LAOS:— Diplomatic relations between Laos and Soviet Union were established in October 1960. The Soviet influence in Laos

72. Statesman, (Delhi) 'Russia is Eyeing South-East Asia,' September 23, 1969.

73. Izvestia, August 29, 1970; Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XXII, No. 35, September 29, 1970, p. 20.

74. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "Soviet Policy Toward the Third World in the 1970's," ORBIS, Vol. XV, No. 1, Spring 1971, p. 113.

depended on the existence of three factions and the key role played by Mopcoy at the 1962 Geneva Conference which set up coalition government and guaranteed neutrality and security of Laos. The civil war in Laos, with US and Chinese support to the rival factions, has been a recurring phenomenon. In the beginning Pathet Lao received Soviet support in the Civil war but later on China became their main beneficiary. The North Vietnamese and NLF soldiers used Laotian territory as a supply base for fighting the Americans in Vietnam. This led to retaliation from the US army in Vietnam. In this way the agreement on the neutrality of Laos became non-existent for all practical purposes and a civil war similar to Vietnam, with active US and Chinese involvement, loomed large over the horizon.

As the Soviet Union considered that the only viable solution of the Laotian problem was a peaceful settlement. So it supported the peace initiative taken by the Neo Lao Haksat on March 6, 1970 in which a comprehensive and realistic five-point programme was envisaged for a peaceful settlement in Laos. The Soviet Union's role in Laos would be shaped to a great extent by US-Soviet understanding over Laos, which might eventually work to the detriment of Chinese interest.⁷⁵

Till 1966, Laos had received only 4 million US dollars in aid from the Soviet Union. The Soviets also helped to build a

75. Zafar Imam, World Powers in South and South-East Asia, (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1972), p. 157.

dam and had given as gift a radio station and a hospital.⁷⁶ Its main rival in Laos is China. Although the amount of aid from China has never been disclosed, it is reported that Laos has received substantial long-term loan from China.

MALAYSIA:— Soviet Union's relations with Malaysia have not been always cordial. The U.S.S.R. supported Sukarno in his confrontation with Malaysia. It was only in the later half of the sixties that the Soviet Union changed its position. Steps were taken to forge diplomatic relations with Malaysia and a trade agreement favourable to Malaysia was signed between the two in Kuala Lumpur in April 1967. The then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, declared that Malaysia would "blossom out" by developing friendship with East European countries which did not pursue "belligerent policies." And the first Soviet Ambassador to Malaysia, Vladimir Nikolayevitch Kuznetsov, stated that there were "favourable possibilities" for the growth of friendly relations between Malaysia and the Soviet Union.⁷⁷

The then Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, paid an official visit, the first by a Malaysian Minister, to Moscow in 1968. It marked a milestone in Soviet Union's policy in South-East Asia. The avenues were opened for new Soviet

⁷⁶; New Times, (Moscow), January 25, 1967, pp. 13-14.

⁷⁷. John Hughes, 'Soviet Shadow Spreads into Southeast Asia,' Christian Science Monitor, (Boston), May 21, 1968.

strategy of cultivating cordial relations with the South-East Asian countries afraid of China. The Soviets contended that the economic difficulties of Malaysia arose from its exclusive dependence on the United States and Britain and from instability of world prices for Malaysian raw materials. This could be minimised by the long-term agreements and extensive technical co-operation offered by Russia. Malaysia also displayed its willingness to gain some measure of economic independence from the West. Malaysian foreign policy was the foremost matter of concern for the Soviet Union. Here also the Soviets could find a degree of independence and were confident that with closer contacts Malaysia would become aware of the benefits of cordial relations with the U.S.S.R. This would also, in near future, offset some of the Chinese pressures.⁷⁸

A big exhibition of Soviet industrial goods was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1969 which did much to promote trade between the two countries. At the same time a large economic delegation from Russia led by Mr. M.R. Kuzmin also visited Malaysia. In 1970 the Soviet Union purchased 20 per cent of Malaysian rubber exports.⁷⁹

It was felt in Malaysia that the British withdrawal would leave it more vulnerable to internal sabotage engineered by external forces. It was also realised that these external forces

78. Observer (London), op. cit., May 26, 1968.

79. International Affairs, (Moscow), January 1973, p. 107.

could be checked to some extent if Malaysia maintained good relations with the Soviet Union. The then Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, declared that the presence of Soviet navy in the Indian Ocean posed no threat to the countries of that region and that his country would seek a guarantee from all major powers for its security.⁸⁰

Thus, Soviet Union made a good beginning in Malaysia in the face of Britain's predominant influence there and the anti-communist convictions of the Malaysian leaders. Soon Russia became the largest single buyer of Malaysian rubber. Malaysia's exports to the Soviet Union rose as high as fifty times its exports.⁸¹

NORTH VIETNAM: Brezhnev and Kosygin decided to re-establish Soviet presence in Hanoi with a view to compete with China on equal terms. Soviet Prime Minister, Kosygin, visited Hanoi in February, 1965, and offered aid of anti-aircraft weapons, surface-to-air missiles and MIG fighters.

Kosygin's visit assumed a new dimension when forty-nine American fighter aircrafts attacked North Vietnam during his presence in Hanoi. This compelled Kosygin to adopt a more rigid anti-American posture and to give more assistance.

80. Statesman (Delhi), op. cit., September 23, 1969.

81. Singh, op. cit., p. 50.

Soviet economic aid to North Vietnam till 1966, it is estimated, amounted to more than one million US dollars. Negotiations in October 1966 between the Soviet and DRV government delegations resulted in an agreement of Soviet assistance for the development of DRV's economy and defence capability. Similar agreements were signed in 1967, 1968, 1969 and 1970. The talks held between the delegations of the two countries in Moscow in October 1969 led to an agreement of Soviet aid of essential requirements to DRV. Agreements on additional Soviet economic and military aid to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1970 was signed in Moscow on June 11, 1970.⁸²

From 1965 to 1968, the massive Soviet military aid to North Vietnam consisted mainly of anti-aircraft guns, missiles, radar and fighter planes. It was emphasized by the Soviet leaders that these items were purely "defensive" and were meant to be used only for the protection of North Vietnam against American bombing and shelling. But in late 1968 and 1969, the Soviet Union supplied to the North-Vietnamese substantial quantity of arms, specially mortars of a range and accuracy superior to those supplied by the Chinese or manufactured by the North Vietnamese themselves.⁸³ It is estimated by the western sources that ninety per cent of arms used by the National Liberation Front and North Vietnam

82. *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 63-64.

83. Kohler, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

against the Americans and their allies in South Vietnam were provided in military aid by the Soviet Union. In a speech at Minsk on 15 February, 1968, Kosygin publicly admitted for the first time that the Soviet Union was providing the aid of modern armaments to the Vietcong in South Vietnam.⁸⁴ These arms comprised sophisticated air defence equipments including MIG-29's and rocket missiles. In fact during 1970 the entire burden of North Vietnam's war economy was borne by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet tactics and objectives were made clear in a speech given by Alexander Sholepin, Politburo member and head of the Soviet trade unions, at a meeting of World Federation of Trade Unions in East Berlin on December 17, 1968. He said that the conflict in Vietnam had entered into a new phase, when along with active military action, a struggle was being carried on to secure a political solution to the Vietnam problem. Sholepin described the commencement of talks in Paris and the results achieved in these talks as great victories for the heroic Vietnamese people, the socialist countries, and all peace-loving forces. He further affirmed the Soviet Union's resolve of continuing support to the North Vietnamese struggle. He added that the comprehensive mobilization of efforts to exert pressure on the US ruling circles was essential in order to compel the Americans to cease their aggressive war in Vietnam. According to him, this would in turn

⁸⁴. The Statesman (Calcutta), February 19, 1968.

enable the South Vietnamese people to settle their own affairs, in accordance with the political program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam without any foreign interference.⁸⁵

In this way, the Soviet Union extended substantial support in the shape of military equipment to the National Liberation Front. It was even more vigorous in its public and propaganda support to the NLF and the North Vietnam's stand on the terms on which the war in Vietnam should be ended. The basic approach of the Soviet Union, however, was not to be placed in a position where it might be involved in direct military confrontation, against the United States. This approach, which was to a considerable extent strengthened by the Soviet Union's difficulties with China put a definite upper limit on the extent of the Soviet Union's military support to the North Vietnamese and the NLF.

The Soviet Union was prepared to bear the considerable economic burden of assistance to its friends in Vietnam. It was not averse to the damage to America's international prestige and American domestic political complications caused by the continuance of the war.⁸⁶ Its own aid to the NLF and the North Vietnamese which was greater than that of the Chinese enabled the Soviet Union to advertise its contribution. At the same time, however, it was the policy of the Soviet Union not to allow the course in Vietnam to spark

85. Quoted by Kohler, *op. cit.*, pp. 393-4.

86. Vladimir Petrov, *Soviet Foreign Policy and the Collapse of Communist Unity, Modern Age*, (Chicago), vol. 15, No. 4, Fall 1971, p. 340.

the danger of direct confrontation with US. The American documents on Vietnam War, popularly known as Pentagon Papers, clearly bring out the fact that American policy makers were aware of this dimension of the Soviet approach.

It is contended that the Soviet leadership was not totally averse to the American presence in South-East Asia since it provided the check to Chinese expansionism that Moscow was unable to provide.⁸⁷

PHILIPPINES:— With the intensification of dispute with China, the Soviet Union began moving in the direction of improving its relations with ^{the} Philippines. While in early years the Soviet press had deified the rulers of the Philippines as the lackeys of American imperialism the tone gradually began to change during the latter half of the sixties. Soviet commentators professed to see interesting, constructive stirrings in the Philippines. "The winds of change in Philippines are felt with ever greater force," a Soviet commentator recorded. Moscow was happy to lend a helping hand in the process.

Moscow was aware of the fact that while the Filipino leadership was staunchly anti-communist, yet as between Russia and China they regarded the latter with substantially greater

87. Current History, (New York), Vol. 53, October 1967, p. 196.

88. The Age (Melbourne), op. cit., June 17, 1968.

suspicion. The progress of the Soviet détente with the U.S., while Sino-American relations continued to remain strained, was another factor favourable to an improvement of Soviet - Filipino relations. President Ferdinand E. Marcos was eager to create the image of a decisive and independent leader; so he also came round to the view that the improvement of the relations of his country with the Soviet Union might produce political dividends at home and also mitigate the criticism of others in the region. In 1966 the Philippine government for the first time decided to allow ^{the} Philippine citizens to visit East European countries. In the same year K. Vishnevetskiy, an Izvestiya correspondent, became the first Soviet journalist to be allowed to visit the country. In a series of articles on the Philippines, he described about the tremendous interest aroused by his visit and the great desire to learn about the U.S.S.R. which he found in the people there.⁸⁹

In the spring of 1968 the Philippine Parliament approved a project for establishing trade relations with the Soviet bloc countries. At the conference of the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC), which met in June, 1968, Philippines held the view that there were possibilities of continuous cooperation because the Soviet Union also desired to check the Chinese influence. This approach was prompted by the feeling that such a course would

89. "The Soviet Union and the Philippines: Prospects for improved relations," Mizan (London), Vol. 10, No. 3, May/June 1968, p. 100.

be prudent because Russian power was expected to increase in the region in the wake of Britain's departure. The declining enthusiasm of United States for the role of universal protector was also a factor that the Philippines had to reckon with.⁹⁰ In this way, between 1966 and 1968, ^{the} Philippine attitude towards the Soviet Union changed and the government leaders became less intransigent on the question of relations with the U.S.S.R. This change was prompted by a feeling that the Soviet presence in South East Asia was already an established fact. But there was also a belief that Russian power might fill part of the vacuum created by Britain's departure from the region and the declining United States' enthusiasm for the role of universal protector.

In November 1968, a Russian trade and goodwill mission visited Manila for the first time and, in return, a large group of Filipino officials went to Moscow.⁹¹ A cultural and a press delegation from the Soviet Union visited the Philippines in 1968.⁹² U.S.S.R. established diplomatic relations with Philippines in 1969.

90. Room for USSR in South-East Asia, Observer (London), June 15, 1968.

91. Daily Telegraph (London), April 8, 1969.

92. New Times, (Moscow), No. 37, September 18, 1968, pp. 27-29.

SINGAPORE:— Like Indonesia, Malaysia and ^{the} Philippines, Singapore was also impelled to put its relation with the Soviet Union on a better footing because of its apprehension of Chinese domination on South East Asia. Three months after Singapore's withdrawal from the Malaysian Federation (August 1965) a delegation from Singapore visited Moscow. It was headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Toh Chin Chye. The delegation explored the possibilities of establishing trade and other contacts with the Soviet Union. The Soviet news agency, Tass, established an office in Singapore in January 1966. Later on a Soviet trade mission visited Singapore which culminated in signing of a trade agreement between the two countries on 2nd April, 1966. In the summer of 1967 a Singapore trade delegation visited the Soviet Union in connection with the implementation of this agreement. A Soviet economic delegation visited Singapore in October 1967 to discuss plans about the building of a number of industrial enterprises. A Singapore-Soviet shipping agency was set up in 1968.

Singapore established diplomatic relations with U.S.S.R. in 1969 which was followed by a trade agreement. Singapore opened a Trade Commissioner's office in Moscow in 1969. The Russian embassy was established in Singapore in January, 1969.

In 1970, the Soviet Union agreed to help with the construction of a cutting tool plant and a watch factory. Contact between the two countries was also established in the cultural

sphere. In the spring of 1970, the first Soviet film festival was held in Singapore. Inche Rahim Ishak, a member of the government, speaking at the opening of the festival, likened it to a "fresh, invigorating breeze."⁹³ Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore, visited Soviet Union in latter half of September in 1970. He held talks with President Podgorny, Premier Kosygin, First Deputy Premier Dmitry Polyansky. Both the sides, while expressing satisfaction at the development of closer relationship between the Soviet Union and Singapore, agreed to study the practical possibilities of expanding trade ties and economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation to the mutual benefit of both countries.⁹⁴

Thus in the case of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore, a continuing concern over China coupled with the diminution of the British influence and the growing evidence of a reduced American presence after the end of the Vietnam War were factors leading to desire proceeding cautiously in the direction of normalising relations with the Soviet Union. For its part the Soviet Union greatly toned down the old rattling concerning the reactionary nature of the regime of these countries and the importance of the revolutionary action against them. It preached vigorously the gospel of co-existence and spoke of the

93. New Times, (Moscow), August 12, 1970, No. 32, p. 15.

94. New Times, (Moscow), October 7, 1970, No. 40, p. 18.

interest of the Soviet Union in contributing to the economic development of these countries by aid as well as trade. The Soviet Union also apparently made no secret of the fact that it fully shared the concern of these countries concerning China. As a result of these circumstances the situation became gradually efficacious for moves on both sides in the direction of improved relations. In view of its own course of detente with the Soviet Union, the United States did not seek to put any obstacles to the development of relations at the level and at the pace at which they proceeded.

THAILAND:— Thailand was a member of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation and the headquarters of South-East Asia Defence Organisation was established at Bangkok. Although USSR's open hostility to the members of SEATO in South-East Asia was well known yet Thailand and the USSR maintained diplomatic relations. Traditional Soviet view of Thailand and the Philippines has been that of American puppet regimes sustained by artificial high rate of economic growth through US neo-colonialism and finance capital.⁹⁵

Thailand, in fact, was the only country that stood thoroughly condemned in Soviet eyes as a "chariot wheel" of US plans in South-East Asia. Sometimes it was recorded that there were

95. News and Views from the Soviet Union, (USSR Embassy, New Delhi) Jan. 7, 1969; March 18, 1969 and New Times (Moscow), No. 42, October 18, 1967, pp. 30-32.

"sober elements" in Thailand and that the policies pursued by Bangkok were detrimental to its national interest, the advantages flowing from Thailand's alliance with the US being "illusory." But Moscow believed that there was little prospect of any immediate change in the Thai attitude and continued to paint it a dark shade of grey.⁹⁶ But it, however, continued to maintain an embassy in Bangkok.

However, during 1968-69 some slight change was noticeable in Soviet attitude towards Thailand which was visited by a cultural and a press delegation from the Soviet Union. But the Chinese held the edge over communist insurgency which achieved a new vigour and purpose in Thailand.⁹⁷

It was reported by Tass at the close of 1970 that "The USSR and Thailand have signed a trade agreement in Bangkok. This is the first trade agreement in the history of relations between the two countries."⁹⁸

96. The Age, (Melbourne), op. cit., June 17, 1968.

97. Daily Telegraph, (London), op. cit., April 8, 1969.

98. Pravda, December 26, 1970, Translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XXII, No. 52, January 26, 1971, p. 31.

CHAPTER III

NEW DIMENSIONS OF SOVIET PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The change of situation in South-East Asia and specially the defreezing of Sino-American relations led to the emergence of new dimensions of Soviet perspectives on South-East Asia. The main objective of Soviet Union was to counter the threat of increasing Chinese influence in the region. It also sought to take advantage of the uncertainty that had grown concerning the future American presence and its role in the region at the end of the Vietnam War. In view of its own detente with the U.S., the Soviet Union did not give the impression to the countries of the region that it did not propose to supplant the United States as the major power in the region. On the other hand, it played up its own role as one of constructive advantage to the countries concerned as an influence that would contribute to safeguard them from the Chinese danger and at the same time serve as a countervailing factor to American power. The Soviet Union skilfully sought to identify itself with the nationalist urges of the people of South-East Asian countries and their desire for the economic development. The Soviet objectives were to be achieved by supporting and strengthening governments of South-East Asian countries and convincing them of the viability of regional economic co-operation and collective security plan.

A. Change of Situation in South-East Asia

Around 1968, the balance of military power started shifting in favour of the USSR. The uncertainty about the approximate nuclear equality made it difficult to check the extension of Soviet interests. This led to the inevitable growth of Soviet power and influence in areas from which, historically, it had been excluded so far.

No alternative had been found to replace the decreasing British influence in the Indian Ocean region. The Soviet Union had asserted its position by moving in the area with impressive naval forces and base arrangements. The development of a strong Soviet navy was beginning to free landlocked Russia from its former geographical containment.⁹⁹ Previously Russia was regarded essentially as a nation whose expansion was limited to the areas contiguous to its own frontiers. The changes in naval armament, the long range nuclear-power submarines, the possibilities of refuelling and servicing at sea with a corresponding decline in the importance of fixed bases such as served the once dominant British naval power — all these helped the Soviet Union to escape from its geographical containment. The Soviet Union had become a naval power not only in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea but also in the Indian Ocean.

99. Barry Goldwater, "The Perilous Conjecture: Soviet Ascendancy and American Isolationism," ORBIS, Vol. XV, No. 1, (Spring, 1971), p. 59.

The Soviet navy had assumed an important political role in Soviet diplomacy and it could be advantageous in establishing a greater influence in the Indian Ocean. One of the important reasons for an increasing Soviet Naval presence in the Indian Ocean was the urgency to counter growing Chinese influence in Asia in general¹⁰⁰ and Southeast Asia in particular. Moreover, Britain had already declared its intention to withdraw from South-East Asia and this was bound to lead to new permutations and combinations. It was realised that it would be too late to establish a claim of Russian interest in the region a few years later.¹⁰¹

After Ho Chi Minh's death and Peking's action of giving shelter to exiled Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, it became quite evident that China's influence in Hanoi and South-East Asia generally had increased as compared to the Soviet Union's influence. By 1967, it became clear that any further expansion of communism in South-East Asia would be of more benefit to China than Russia.¹⁰²

The Soviet leaders had perceived that the Chinese entertained the ambition of establishing a sphere of influence in a region which it regarded to be under its historical sway. The overseas Chinese communities were to be instrumental in this plan. But,

100. The Times, (London), September 15, 1970.

101. The Age, op. cit., June 17, 1968.

102. Ulam, op. cit., p. 718.

luckily for the Russians, the abortive coup of pro-Peking Indonesian Communist Party and the militant accent of China's foreign policy had rendered a damaging blow to the Chinese image. Moreover, China's domestic issues, arising from the Cultural Revolution, left less time for Peking to devote to the external relations and related problems. This scenario, as a whole, convinced the Soviet leaders that it was the most opportune moment for the Soviet Union to befriend the nations contiguous to China.¹⁰³

Moscow, at the same time, also seemed to be getting worried about what would happen in South-East Asia after the Americans' departure.¹⁰⁴

The fiasco of Indonesian Communist Party warned the Soviet leaders not to expect too much too soon. They also saw an opening for Soviet influence. They were confident of sustaining Soviet Union's thrust in the region because of the decrease of Chinese influence after the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰⁵

B. Do-freezing of Sino-American Relations

The compulsions of the Cultural Revolution had driven China to adopt a policy of isolation but by 1969-70 it succeeded in breaking that self imposed isolation. It had become evident

¹⁰³. The Age, (Melbourne), op. cit., June 17, 1968.

¹⁰⁴. Christian Science Monitor, (Boston), op. cit., June 15, 1970.

¹⁰⁵. Observer, (London), op. cit., May 26, 1968.

that the triangular relationship of the United States, China and the Soviet Union would greatly influence the developments in South-East Asia. China's re-emergence on the scene and the efforts being made toward a Sino-American rapprochement provided ample cause for conflict, between China and the Soviet Union, in pursuing foreign policy objectives. On the other hand, the Sino-Soviet conflict, which had become more intense, led to a partial convergence of Sino-American interests. The Soviet leaders could foresee that inspite of all their caution they were bound to come into conflict with the rapprochement towards which the United States and China were moving.

The intention of the Chinese communists to build up China as a world power had become clear. Chinese leaders desired to establish China's domination over all of its neighbours. The Chinese needed South-East Asia, which they might rule indirectly.¹⁰⁶ A policy of statement published in Pravda on May 18, 1970 accused the Chinese of seeking domination over all of Asia.¹⁰⁷

The Soviet leaders realised that, if the Sino-Soviet hostility continued for long, China would look for strong protection which may come from a well armed US-Japanese alliance. If, however, the U.S.S.R. succeeded in winning over Japan to her side, China would have no other alternative but to depend on the United States.

106. Stefan T. Possony, 'The USSR: Beyond its Zenith,' ORBIS, Vol. XV, No. 1, (Spring), 1971, p. 102.

107. Pravda, May 18, 1970 (Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XII, No. 20, June 16, 1970, pp. 1-7).

On the other hand, the United States felt that its inability to repair the breach in her South-East Asian strategy provided Russia with an advantage which could be more easily countered by developing relations with China. So one of the options before the United States, towards which it also seemed to be inclined, was to take a gamble and square her relations with China.

It was this background of the defreezing of Sino-U.S. relations that began to influence the course of Soviet policy in South-East Asia.

C. Low-keyed Presentation of the Plan of Economic Co-operation and Collective Security in South-East Asia.

One extremely important development in Soviet foreign policy was the low-keyed presentation of Soviet Union's international ambitions and strategies. It showed interest in encouraging the creation of strong governments in South-East Asia to resist any Chinese-inspired interference within the framework of a possible regional collective security system.

On June 7, 1969, Leonid I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, enunciated what would be in the decade ahead the underlying Soviet approach toward Asia and particularly toward South-East Asia. The occasion was the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties held in Moscow. After warning about the continued danger from the forces of "imperialism" (i.e., the West), Brezhnev dwelt on the

increased importance of the non-aligned developing countries, noting that "the fighters for national liberation and social emancipation in the countries of Asia and Africa comprise one of the most important and active contingents of the world wide anti-imperialists front."¹⁰⁸ Commenting on the dangers to the unity of the international communist movement, Brezhnev attacked Communist China. Denouncing Peking's "splitting activities", its "feverish military preparations" and its "fanning of chauvinistic feelings" hostile to the Soviet Union, he condemned the Chinese communist leadership for pursuing an adventurist policy that threatened not only the unity of the international communist movement but all "peace-loving" nations as well. Brezhnev then made a proposal whose general substance indicated a new Soviet priority. "The burning problems of the current international situation do not conceal from our view longer-term tasks, namely, the creation of a system of collective security in areas of the globe where the danger of another world war, of armed conflicts, is concentrated. Such a system is the best replacement for the existing military-political groupings."¹⁰⁹ He added that "we are of the opinion that the course of events is also putting on the agenda the task of creating a system of collective security in Asia."¹¹⁰

108. International Affairs (Moscow), July 1969, pp. 20-21.

109. Ibid., p. 20.

110. Ibid., p. 21.

Further official Soviet endorsement of this idea was provided in Gromyko's report on foreign policy to the sixth session of USSR Supreme Soviet on 10th July, 1969 in which he maintained that it was "a question of the collective efforts of all the states of Asia and of strengthening the security in this region of the globe in their common interests. This whole question clearly requires due discussion and consultation among the interested states to find mutually acceptable decisions."¹¹¹

As a prelude to these discussions Soviet ambassadors from at least 15 Asian countries were recalled to Moscow for briefing and to discuss the likely reaction in Asia to such a scheme.¹¹²

On September 19, 1969 Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko announced to the United Nations General Assembly that the Soviet Union was "ready to take part in consultations and exchanges of views on all questions concerning a collective security system for Asia."¹¹³

Brezhnev's brief remark had created worldwide speculation about the Soviet intentions. Despite the subsequent publicity, the world had no clear understanding of what the Soviet Union had in mind.¹¹⁴

111. Pravda, July 11, 1969; Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XXI, No. 28, August 6, 1969, p. 9.

112. The Observer (London), June 22, 1969.

113. The Korea Herald (Seoul), September 25, 1969.

114. Peter Howard, "A System of Collective Security," Mizan, July-August, 1969, p. 199.

On the basis of scanty evidence available it seemed that the Soviet proposal originally envisaged some type of multi-lateral military alliance directed primarily against China. However, it was difficult to guess what form such an alliance would take, and the extent of the Soviet role in it.¹¹⁵ Soviet commentators themselves clearly stated that collective security involved more than purely economic cooperation. At the same time they strenuously denied that it was analogous to a military bloc: "This is either the result of insufficient knowledge of the fundamental principles of collective security - which completely contradict the policy of dividing the world into military blocs - or an attempt to mislead certain quarters in the countries of Asia, and to induce groundless doubts. A system of collective security can mean more than a combination of political measures and obligations by its members. Collective security systems can be reinforced by economic, scientific and technical co-operation and by cultural relations."¹¹⁶

The proposal of collective security represented the boldest venture made by the Russians into their new sphere of influence. Their aim, according to Western sources, was a two-fold attempt to outmanoeuvre Peking on China's southern flank and to discredit western-backed regional groupings already formed.¹¹⁷

115. Ibid., p. 199.

116. A. Gavrilov, Moscow Radio, August 6, 1969 (Summary of World Broadcasts, Second Series SU/3146/A3/1, 8 August, 1969).

117. The Korea Herald, (Seoul), op. cit., September 25, 1969.

Whatever the Soviet Union might have in mind, the aim of Brezhnev's proposal was to win Asian sentiment to the Soviet side, both as a weapon in the Sino-Soviet dispute and in Soviet efforts to erode American influence in Asia.¹¹⁸ China was regarded in Moscow as a threat to Soviet interests. Therefore, the main purpose of any form of collective security was to isolate this threat. (Since the beginning of 1969, the Soviet Union's role in Asia increased significantly.) It made great efforts to improve its position in South-East Asia also. Soviet economic and diplomatic activity in South-East Asia increased considerably.

Soviet officials paid many important visits to South-East Asia, including tours of countries with which the Soviet Union had not enjoyed too cordial relations in the past. The Soviet Trade Minister, Patolichev, visited Malaysia, Cambodia and Singapore. N. Kapitsa, Head of the South-East Asia Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, visited Laos and Thailand. A Soviet cultural delegation also visited Thailand in June, 1969. An economic and technical mission visited Indonesia at the end of August, 1969 to discuss economic co-operation, especially the completion of Soviet aid projects and the vexed question of Indonesian debt repayments. Delegations from the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and the Komsomol visited Laos.

¹¹⁸. Howard, op. cit., p. 200.

M. Kuzmin, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, visited Malaysia in September 1969 and opened a large Soviet trade exhibition in Kuala Lumpur. A cultural delegation and Pravda's Tokyo correspondent, Biryukov, visited ^{the} Philippines.¹¹⁹

(The proposal of collective security evoked varied reaction in South-East Asia and each country interpreted the proposal in the light of its own national objectives. Indonesia described the scheme as designed to safeguard Soviet interests in South-East Asia.¹²⁰ Thailand and ^{the} Philippines have shown little interest. There was a feeling in Malaysia and Singapore that the British withdrawal would leave them open for internal sabotage engineered by external forces. Those external forces, they thought, could be checked to some extent by Russian presence.¹²¹ The ^{then} Malaysian Deputy Premier, Tun Abdul Razak, announced that the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean caused no threat to South-East Asian countries and his country would seek a guarantee from all major powers, for the neutralisation of South-East Asia which, in Russian view, has much in common with the Soviet proposal for the establishment of a collective security system in Asia.¹²² Singapore also realised

119. Howard, op. cit., p. 200.

120. Djakarta Radio, July 15, 1969. (Summary of World Broadcasts, Second Series FE/3127, July 17, 1969 p. 2).

121. Statesman (Delhi), op. cit., September 23, 1969.

122. International Affairs, op. cit., January 1973, p. 107.

that friendly relations with Russia would guarantee its security. While Malaysia actively advocated regional economic co-operation and bilateral trade, Indonesia and Singapore showed their preference for regional military alliances independent of any outside power.

Reacting to the proposal China charged that the Soviet Union was aiming to "enter into a counter-revolutionary alliance with a handful of reactionaries in South-East Asia." In Peking's view, it was a "sinister scheme" for "controlling Asian countries and opposing China and the people's revolutionary movements in various Asian countries."

To combat Chinese propoganda, Soviet media redoubled its efforts to present on the one hand, a vital revolutionary face to the Asian Communist movement and, on the other hand, a peace-loving and resonable image to the non-Communist governments in South-East Asia. At the same time, Soviet charges that China constituted the main threat to peace and stability in South-East Asia were accompanied by specific examples of Chinese interference in the internal affairs of individual countries. In Burma, the provision of military training to Kachin and Shan insurgents in Yunnan was regarded as a real Chinese threat to Burma, constituting rank meddling in the affairs of a neutral and peace-loving country. China was "pursuing an expansionist, chauvinistic policy."¹²³ It was also alleged that there were

123. Moscow Radio, 30.3.69 (Summary of World Broadcasts, Second Series SU/3039/A3/7, April 1, 1969).

detachments of Chinese troops in northern Burma. In Malaysia, Peking was accused of "exploiting the heterogeneous ethnic composition of the country" and of being partly responsible for the communal clashes in that country.¹²⁴ In Singapore, China was accused of conducting an active propaganda campaign.¹²⁵

Mr. I.I. Safronov, at that time Russian Ambassador to Singapore, said on November 7, 1970 that he saw no prospect of peace in South-East Asia. He considered China as a stumbling bloc to peace.

But at this time the South-East Asian leaders were becoming increasingly convinced that China could no longer be treated as a political leper, and that friendly relations must eventually be established with China if there was to be any real hope of peace and stability for their countries.

While the South-East Asian countries were willing to use the Soviet Union for their own purpose and while they harboured their own misgivings concerning China, they were, at the same time, reluctant to be put in a position where they could be made to appear as part of a Soviet scheme for encirclement of China. The South-East Asian leaders could not be sure about the duration of Sino-Soviet hostility and the possible course of relations between them and between the two communist giants in post-Mao

124. "Radio Peace & Progress", 8-8-69 (Summary of World Broadcasts, Second Series SU/3148/A3/1, August 11, 1969).

125. Pravda, August 18, 1969; Translated in The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XXI, No. 33, September 10, 1969, pp. 20-21.

period. They did not want to court the implacable hostility of the Chinese. On the other hand, they sought to keep the situation sufficiently fluid so that they themselves might receive some courtship from China. In this way, the South-East Asian countries, hoped to gain from both the Communist countries by playing upon their fear against one another.

Imp (In the beginning the Soviet leaders were optimistic due to the fact that many countries had shown an "understanding of peace initiative." But it was being gradually replaced by anxiety at the tepid response from Asian leaders. However, the Soviet press emphasized that the final shape of the collective security system would be decided by Asians themselves. "The Soviet proposals proceed from the urgent need to oppose the aggressive forces in Asia by a collective system. It would be different from the existing imperialist military and political groupings. It would guarantee the security of the Asian peoples. The Soviet proposal includes steps to consolidate peace and produce conditions for creative endeavour to boost the economic development of Asian countries."¹²⁶)

Soviet observers have been forced to acknowledge the difficulties which would have to be overcome before the system could get off the ground, but these are not considered insurmountable: "We can not close our eyes to the difficulties and

126. Moscow Radio, July 8, 1969 (Summary of World Broadcasts, Second Series, SU/3121/A3/3, July 10, 1969).

barriers that exist in relation between various countries on the continent. But there are many more things that unite them than disunite them: for instance, a unity of interest in wanting to preserve and consolidate the peace to develop their national economies and to improve the standard of living of the peoples."¹²⁷

(While professing sympathy for measures aimed at strengthening economic co-operation in Asia, Soviet commentators were sceptical about the efficacy of the steps which had been taken till 1969, although their criteria for judging them were more political than economic. The Soviet attitude was epitomized in an article by V. Pavlovsky: "Of course, the problem of economic integration presents many difficulties in such a vast area as Asia, with its large number of states at different levels of development and with similar economic systems. Experience has shown that the success of regional alliances depends largely on the extent to which the countries involved are unified on an anti-imperialist basis and resist the pressure of foreign monopolies, and on the degree to which their struggle for economic independence is supported by Socialist countries."¹²⁸

(An article published in Izvestia on November 19, 1970, claimed that the idea of creating collective security system in Asia was "obtaining ever broader support" and at the same time

¹²⁷. M. Nepesov, Moscow Radio, September 21, 1969 (Summary of World Broadcasts, Second Series, SU/3184/A5/1, 25 September, 1969).

¹²⁸. "Problems of Regionalism in Asia", International Affairs (Moscow), April 1969, p. 46.

reiterated that "considerable effort will be required for its practical implementation."¹²⁹

Thus, at the close of 1970 the Soviet Union was presenting in a low key the plan of regional economic co-operation and collective security in South-East Asia which aimed at checking growing Chinese influence, combating American interests in the region and forestalling what it saw as U.S. and Japanese attempts to form another Asian military bloc.

129. V. Matveyev, "Southeast Asia: Crisis of the Policy of Force," *Izvestia*, November 19, 1970; Translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. XXII, No. 46, December 15, 1970, pp. 13.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

At the close of 1970, a general review of Soviet thrust in South-East Asia revealed a progressive increase in the Soviet influence in the region. But even then the quantum of Soviet Union's financial assistance to the countries of this area remained at a lower level than that of the U.S.A. However, the Soviet aid to the South-East Asian nations had succeeded in making the Soviet presence felt in the region.

The Soviet offers of economic and technical assistance were welcomed by the key-countries because of easy credit facilities and the advantage of repayment in local currency or through local export goods. The Soviet Union also stressed that its assistance to the developing nations of South-East Asia aimed at encouraging them to be self reliant and to obviate their exclusive dependence on the West.

By 1970, the military assistance by the Soviet Union to the countries of this region also increased considerably. Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam received massive aid of arms and equipments from the Soviet Union. The presence of the Soviet navy had begun to be felt in the Indian Ocean but the Soviet Union avoided taking up military commitments in the region.

On the whole, it became clear that the Soviet Union had been making efforts to buildup friendly relations with new nations while maintaining cordial relations with those nations which had old and traditional friendly links with it. This was not an easy task, specially when its success depended on the needs, requirements and appreciation of the recipient nations.

The success or failure of Soviet goals, its strategies and tactics, to a great extent, depend on the complex problems faced by the South-East Asian nations, specially those which received economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union.

The international politics completely ignored the interests of all the South-East Asian nations which ^{were} vitally concerned about the protection and advancement of their national interests. The fear complex of China, which is having predominant influence in the countries of this region, facilitated the involvement of the two super-powers.

The entire scenario of South-East Asia was undergoing change. Sukarno's Indonesia was ruled by a military oligarchy which annihilated the communists. Malaysia had become responsive to the Soviet Union's overtures and had established diplomatic relationship with it. The escalation of war in Vietnam posed a threat to the peace and stability in South-East Asia. Cambodia had become another troublespot and the U.S. military intervention had started a prolonged civil war in Cambodia. Another

civil war seemed to be in the offing in Laos. Thailand apprehended that the Cambodian civil war might spill over it. Besides, the common fear of China in the region had led to the emergence of three-power equation in South-East Asia.

The Soviet proposal of collective security and regional economic co-operation had led to public debates in the countries of this region. While Malaysia supported the idea of regional economic co-operation and bilateral trade, Indonesia and Singapore displayed their preference for regional military alliances independent of any outside power. But the prospects for regional economic co-operation or the regional military alliances looked very bleak. The ideas of uniting the numbers of teeming masses of hungry people and joining poorly armed soldiers through alliance could hardly be acceptable as the solutions of the complex problems faced by the South-East Asian nations.

Although the idea of self-reliance seemed to be catching up because even Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia had started expressing concern over the pre-dominant U.S. influence in the politics and economies of their respective countries yet the idea of self-reliance continued to remain practically unimplemented. The countries of this region remained dependent on external aid and assistance which was welcomed by them. Most of the countries exploited the rivalries and mutual suspicion of the two super-powers to extract the maximum possible aid from

them. The U.S.S.R., the U.S.A., and even China, gave massive aid to Burma, Cambodia and Laos.

The Soviet Union claimed that its aid helped the South-East Asian countries to be self-reliant and to become less and less dependent on the U.S.A. and its allies. But the Soviet Union and other communist countries were not in a capacity to give aid sufficient to satisfy fully the needs and requirements of these countries. Like any other foreign aid, the Soviet aid was also likely to degenerate into an instrument of pressure and coercion and of shifting dependence from one super power to another.

However, it could not be denied that the Soviet assistance had succeeded in winning the friendship of many nations. It had also increased Soviet influence, in conformity with its super-power status, in a region which was never considered to be an area of its influence in the past.

Although the Soviet Union had suffered many failures and setbacks and its involvement was growing in the region but till 1970 there was no massive involvement of the Soviet Union in the region in contrast to U.S.A.'s involvement. Actually, Soviet press and mass media had been very critical of massive U.S. involvement in South-East Asia in general, and in Vietnam and Cambodia in particular.¹³⁰ However, the Soviet Union's

130. V. Pavlovsky, "Washington and Asian Regionalism," New Times (Moscow), No. 44, November 3, 1968, pp. 22-24.

involvement in the region at a massive scale in future cannot be ruled out completely.

The result of the reappraisal of U.S. policies in the region and U.S.A.'s future role will definitely influence the shape of Soviet Union's future policies.

The Soviet Union has to face the challenge of American and Chinese influence in this area. But various factors are expected to favour Soviet policy in the region. By 1970 there were indications that the United States would initiate moves for ending the confrontation with China¹³¹ and the subsequent withdrawal of massive U.S. military presence from the region to be replaced by bilateral defence pacts and the growing military role of its allies.

As China had staked its claim for a major world power status so it was pre-occupied in projecting a global image of its own. Bigger issues like relations with the United States and the Soviet Union, economic relations with the Western European Economic community, problems of International Communist Movement etc. received top priority in China's foreign policy goals and the relations with the lesser powers and problems related with them were not considered of much importance. China's policy was expected to be limited to propoganda than concrete actions and its involvement in the region was expected to remain more

131. A. Doak Barnett, A New U.S. Policy Toward China (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1971), p. 16.

of a psychological character which would serve its purpose by promoting the fear complex among the countries of this region.

These expected developments in the U.S. and Chinese policies in South-East Asia would be conducive for the increase of Soviet influence in the area. But it is a fact that no move made by the Soviet Union to increase its influence in the region has passed without attracting equally strong move from the United States and its Western allies. So any increase in Soviet commitment in the area is bound to draw response from the U.S.A. Therefore, any increase in U.S.S.R.'s political and economic involvement in the region would require the tacit approval of the U.S.A. As the South-East Asia does not hold any strategic importance for the Soviet Union from defence point of view so the U.S.S.R. is not expected to involve itself in regional pacts like the U.S.A. and would not create any obstacle to the partial military withdrawal by the United States.

The Soviet Union is opposed to China's pretensions of a major global power. Therefore, any move made by China to increase its power and influence in the region would be countered by the Soviet Union. In the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation and Cambodia-Thailand border problem, Soviet Union had succeeded in checkmating the Chinese moves. But the Soviet Union failed to compete with China in purely ideological involvements like the engineering of a military coup d'etat in Indonesia and the civil war in Cambodia and Laos. The Soviet Union's stand

vis-a-vis China, therefore, posed a big problem for its role in South-East Asia.

However, ideological rivalry precludes any possibility of the two super-powers joining hands against China. China has also displayed extra care not to provoke the U.S.A. in taking any open action against it and it is expected that China would act likewise in its dealings with the Soviet Union. In South-East Asia also China has behaved in an exemplary fashion with Burma, Cambodia and North Vietnam. However, all the countries of South-East Asia, including North Vietnam, are apprehensive of Chinese designs. So these countries would like to cultivate friendly relations with the Soviet Union not only to protect themselves from Chinese expansionism but also to receive more aid and arms supply. But the development of friendly relations with the Soviet Union might not hinder them in cultivating friendly relations with China although the Sino-Soviet split would continue to inhibit their manoevrability in world affairs.

Thus, at the close 1970, all these factors favoured the possibility of increasing Soviet influence in South-East Asia.

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