

Shades of 1960

Carter's new military alliance in Southeast Asia

by Dean Andromidas

The Carter administration is quietly assigning military advisors and personnel to its former bases in Thailand. According to reports in the London *Guardian*, specialists have arrived to prepare the command and control system for B-52 strategic bombers at five airbases used to bomb Indochina during the Vietnam War.

If the above report sounds distressingly similar to South Vietnam in 1960 it is no coincidence. It is the most dramatic development of the Carter administration's policy of reviving an active regional military alliance in Southeast Asia. Unlike John Foster Dulles's Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the aim of which was to "contain" Communist China, this project seeks the active cooperation of China in a grand alliance aimed at the Soviet Union and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The cornerstone of this plan is the effort of Washington and Peking to include the nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), consisting of Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, in this anti-Soviet alliance. Since the close of the Vietnam war in 1975, and especially since the Chinese invasion of Vietnam this year, ASEAN has been under ever-increasing pressure to fill the "vacuum" left by the American "withdrawal," by transforming its economic and political association into a military alliance with Peking. In recent weeks, the drive for an ASEAN military pact has been spurred on by seemingly endless American and Chinese statements on the need to "defend" Thailand from the "hostile" military forces of Vietnam, and its ally Kampuchea (Cambodia).

Vietnam has responded to the escalating tension in the area by insisting that all reports of "Vietnamese

hostility" toward Thailand are designed to provide a cover for a new Chinese invasion of Vietnam. On Dec. 1, the Foreign Ministry in Hanoi addressed a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Waldheim, urging the United Nations take action to stop the impending Chinese invasion. Observers have noted that this week's closing in Peking of so-called Democracy Wall, where numerous complaints and denunciations of the Chinese leadership have been lodged on wall posters, is a sign that China is planning for an early attack. During the first Chinese invasion, some of the "Democracy Wall" dissidents passed information on the Chinese plans to foreign correspondents and diplomats.

The Thai trigger

According to the British daily *Guardian*, several hundred U.S. Army, Air Force and Navy personnel in civilian clothes, together with a group of agents from the Central Intelligence Agency, have deployed to Thailand since last January, with the mission of reactivating a network of five airbases.

A steadily increasing number of Americans have taken up positions at the former U.S. naval base and logistics center at Stathip, southeast of Bangkok. Others have deployed to U Tapao, the largest of the airbases. Logistics and support personnel are said to be preparing ground systems capable of handling the rapid deployment of a squadron of B-52s.

The reintroduction of U.S. military personnel follows recent public statements by Thais and U.S. government officials referring to the 1954 Manila Pact, under which the Thai government can ask for aid from the United States, Great Britain, and other signatories, in the event



Thailand is attacked. It was the Manila Pact on which the now-defunct SEATO was based.

China, meanwhile, has stated it would militarily support Thailand should a conflict with Vietnam take place. Chinese strongman Teng Xiaoping told visiting Thai Air Marshal Harin Hongskula last October: "China will side with the ASEAN countries if Vietnam attacks them, and it will side with Thailand if Vietnam attacks it."

Through these statements, the Carter administration and Peking have deliberately established Thailand as a trigger for wider conflict in Indochina. Both countries hope to use the volatile situation on the border between Thailand and Kampuchea to provoke a confrontation between Thailand and Vietnamese forces based in Kampuchea. Thailand is backing what remains of the military forces of the deposed Pol Pot regime. Such a confrontation would seriously drain Vietnamese military forces, enabling China to invade Vietnam from the north. Moreover, a Thai-Vietnamese conflict would provide Peking with a pretext for its second invasion.

Chinese provocations

The Chinese are backing up their words with actions, sending "advisors" into Thailand to plan the conflict with Vietnam. Citing Western sources, the Vietnamese army newspaper *Nhan Dan* reported Nov. 16 that China has sent teams of specialists to refugee camps in Thailand on the pretext of preparing to resettle them in China. It is widely believed these "advisors" and "specialists" are actually recruiting fresh troops for the Khmer Rouge/Pol Pot forces and sending them to China for training. They have then been sent back to carry out operations in Cambodia.

The Chinese are also cooperating with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency to train 10,000 Laotian refugees from camps in Thailand. Most are Meo tribesmen who had fought for the CIA during the Vietnam war. A 4,000-man division has already been formed and is conducting operations inside Laos.

These operations are being given de facto if not active support from the international aid organizations conducting relief operations along the Thai-Cambodian border. While the State Department is quick to accuse the Phnom Penh authorities of refusing to allow the distribution of relief supplies to be monitored, it is well known that such monitoring is nonexistent along the border areas. Tons of supplies are being handed directly to the Pol Pot troops, many of whom run the refugee camps. This is even admitted by National Security advisor Brzezinski's top assistant Les Denend who told the press "we had to bend the normal sorts of controls that we might want to maintain."

Despite the assertion that such moves are merely in defense of Thailand if Vietnam should conduct military "incursions" into Thai territory it is clear they represent preparations for opening a "second front" in support of a Chinese invasion of Vietnam and Laos from the north. This is supported by direct Chinese military deployments along the border.

The Chinese deployment has not gone unnoticed, least of all by Moscow. Last month, a Soviet naval task force consisting of a cruiser and two destroyers called at Haiphong port to mark the anniversary of the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese friendship treaty. The task force's arrival was well publicized by the Vietnamese. The fleet's commander, Vice-Admiral N. Yasakov, first deputy commander of the Soviet Pacific Fleet was grandly received by Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong and Army Chief of Staff General Van Tien Dung.

ASEAN military bloc

Though ASEAN has been very vocal in its criticism of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea to depose Pol Pot, every country in the organization has "second thoughts" when the implications of an alliance with China against Vietnam are considered.

The prevailing mood in the region was aptly summed up recently by a prominent columnist in the Philippines, Teodoro Valencia. While welcoming the news of increased U.S. arms shipments to the region, Valencia dryly wrote: "We will never know up to what point the Americans will go before quitting on us. ... The United States wants to serve notice on Vietnam that if she does not behave, America will fight to the last ASEAN country. We welcome the arms, but we are not sure we want to shoot any Vietnamese."

It is precisely because of this hesitant attitude that

Washington and Peking have launched a no-holds-barred pressure campaign on ASEAN. Thus far, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has enthusiastically endorsed the Chinese-American attacks on Vietnam, and his Foreign Minister Sinnathamby Rajaratnam has promoted this policy in international forums. The armtwisting has primarily been directed at Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Indonesia, the most important country in the region with 130 million people is the key target of attack. Pressures have included economic, "human rights" manipulation of the Chinese community in the country, and the threat of Iran-style "Islamic" destabilization. (Indonesia has the largest Muslim population of any country in the world.) More and more, the country is conforming to Chinese-American policy.

Indonesia is close to normalizing long-broken relations with China. This came one step closer with the recent announcement of a plan for the repatriation of one million Chinese ethnics holding Peking passports. This has been a major obstacle to normalization, especially since Indonesia was the target of a Chinese-backed coup attempt in 1965, which included elements from the Chinese community living in Indonesia.

The high degree of pressure on Indonesia was recently reflected in a series of articles in Kampuchea's nationalist paper, *Merdeka*. On Dec. 3, the paper attacked Thailand for sponsoring United Nations resolutions against Vietnam, and thus "dragging" all of ASEAN into a "confrontation policy" with Vietnam. The U.N. resolution sponsored by ASEAN on Thailand's initiative "was clearly master-minded by the United States and China," the paper said.

Earlier, on Dec. 1, the paper carried an interview with Indonesia's former national security chief, Gen. Sumitro, who criticized ASEAN for sponsoring resolutions on Kampuchea against Vietnam. "ASEAN is playing with fire," he said, and is "disregarding the consequences" of these actions.

In Malaysia and Thailand, the story is the same. According to diplomatic sources the Malaysians are informing friendly visitors that it is the level of Chinese control over the Malay economy via the ethnic Chinese community that has been largely responsible for the country's increasingly hostile attitude toward Vietnam.

Finally, in the Philippines, where the United States is maintaining huge military installations, the government of President Ferdinand Marcos is coming under increasing attack for "corruption" and "human rights" violations. A major radical destabilization operation is also being carried out through "guerrillas" and "social activists" around the country. This Jesuit-controlled Christian left is in many cases working closely with the Chinese-backed "New People's Army."

Japan goes anti-Soviet?

Ohira plays the 'China Card'

Japanese Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira's just concluded trip to China has dramatically restructured Asian politics. In the 1950s all of Asia was polarized around the creation of the U.S.-Japan alliance and SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization) which were poised to "contain" China. Now, Japan and China have formed an anti-Soviet axis to which they hope to recruit the nations of Southeast Asia as well as both North and South Korea. A key component of the new axis involves bringing all participating nations within a revived yen bloc—the Asian counterpart to proposed currency blocs in Europe, the Americas, and so forth.

Ohira has long favored cooperating with the Carter administration and particularly National Security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in engineering the new lineup in Asia. But most Japanese observers had insisted that Ohira would be contained by widespread opposition within Japan. That view was strengthened by the narrowness of Ohira's victory over the coalition supporting former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda. Ohira's actions subsequent to that early November vote show that in fact he has not been "contained."

Two points of discussion with his Chinese hosts remove all doubt that Ohira reached an anti-Soviet "understanding" despite all his public disclaimers. First, Vietnam. Just as in January of this year, Ohira warned China not to invade Vietnam but then indicated that Japan would enforce no penalties on China if it went ahead.

Japan agreed to an immediate \$200 million in yen-denominated loans at concessionary terms (10 years grace and 3 percent interest) normally reserved for foreign aid recipients, Japan promised \$200-250 million in each of the succeeding 5-8 years. At the same time, Japan continues its freeze on aid to Vietnam, including food aid, imposed following the overthrow of the Pol Pot government in Cambodia.

Just as in February of this year, China is taking Ohira's position as tacit acceptance of its planned invasion.

The second point of discussion was Korea. The U.S. State Department long considered Park Chung Hee the