

Singapore, Malaysia fight State Department and other subversives

by Mary McCourt Burdman

At stake in the tiny city-state of Singapore's current diplomatic battle with the superpower United States, is the economic as well as political survival of the Southeast Asian nations. Singapore, one of the few loyal U.S. allies left in the region, is fighting the insane U.S. policy of military "disengagement," at the same time that American trade policies are dangerously weakening these developing countries' economies.

Singapore, with only 2.6 million people, won the first round of the current fight by expelling a U.S. diplomat they accused of attempting to recruit—and finance—opposition candidates, but it did not stop there. In response to U.S. State Department challenges, the government is threatening to publish its evidence against the former first secretary of the U.S. embassy, E. Mason Hendrickson.

Malaysia has also been waging a fierce fight for its national security against attempts over the past six months to destroy the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed. A white paper, "Towards Preserving National Security," issued March 14, denounces Malaysian communists, Islamic fundamentalism, liberation theology, and Chinese nationalist groups whose attempts to undermine government policy could lead to a recurrence of the Malay-Chinese riots of 1969, in which 248 people died. The Mahathir government has, like Singapore, clamped down on U.S. Establishment financial press such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, for attacking its national economic policies.

Malaysia is also aware of the disastrous consequences of the U.S. worldwide retreat. Noordin Sophee, director-general of the Malaysian Institute of Strategic and International Studies, wrote in the *International Herald Tribune* May 12 under the headline, "ASEAN: In Favor of U.S. Bases in the Philippines," that "if facilities in the Philippines are denied to the United States, it could lead not only to a lessened U.S. military involvement in the region, but also to a more comprehensive political, psychological, and economic disengagement. In the difficult years ahead, ASEAN states will need to ensure maximum U.S. economic engagement."

'Bashing up trade-surplus countries'

But economic engagement is nowhere to be found. In

January, the United States announced that it was suspending duty-free access to the U.S. market for Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, on the grounds that they were no longer developing countries. Speaking to a group of Japanese journalists Jan. 30, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew called this action "part of election-year politics under an administration that has few options besides bashing up trade-surplus countries."

Lee cited the fact that the United States had promised Singapore only seven months ago that it would get a favorable deal on duty-free access to the U.S. market if Singapore tightened copyright laws to protect U.S. interests. If Singapore reaches new agreements with the United States, Lee said, "there is no telling if the U.S. will respect the agreement in letter and spirit." Singapore's minister for trade and industry, Lee Hsien Loong, called the move a "foul blow."

The Trilateral Commission, which met in Tokyo in April, spelled out what the future of these four Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) was to be. A report submitted to the meeting called on Singapore and South Korea to assume the responsibilities of OECD nations, including what the London *Times* called "reasonably liberal external economic policies and internal political arrangements, and a readiness to become donors to poorer countries."

"Whatever Lee Kuan Yew's justifications, the fact remains that some of his recent actions in regard to political opponents and the press run so counter to the traditions and values of both the Trilateral nations and Singapore itself that one can only view them with bafflement and sorrow, and hope that they will be temporary," said the report, whose authors include Carter administration assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs, Richard Holbrooke, now at Shearson-Lehman investment bank, and Britain's Roderick MacFarquhar, formerly executive member of the British Fabian Society and top-level Foreign Office adviser, now at Harvard University. Lee's leadership, "so brilliant for decades, is now open to question from within and without, and even his own friends and supporters talk openly of the impending end of the founder's era."

On May 14, First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong dismissed U.S. denials of Hendrickson's wrongdoing. "We

believe that he has sanction from his superiors. We believe that there is an overall plan to change the course of our political development. . . . It is part of their foreign policy," he said.

The next day, Lee Hsien Loong, minister of trade, industry, and defense services, warned that Singaporeans would lose control of their destiny if politicians owed allegiance to outside powers, particularly if those links were secret. He said Singapore had never been a vassal of the United States and did not want to be in the future.

The U.S. State Department was forced to concede on May 7 that it had to withdraw Hendrickson, with "deep regret." The Singapore Home Affairs Ministry said Hendrickson had met with opposition lawyers to urge them to "contest the elections against the government and had involved himself in Singapore's domestic politics." The State Department retorted that, according to U.S. embassy spokesman Richard Gong, Hendrickson was doing what American diplomats are expected to do in any country."

The Singapore authorities' evidence came from opposition lawyer Patrick Seong, who represented some of the 22 Singaporeans arrested in May and June 1987 for a Marxist plot against the government. Seong reported that two visiting "very senior" State Department officials had taken part in Hendrickson's meetings with the lawyers, and "apparently approved of his activities." Hendrickson had suggested that financial support for the opposition would not be a problem.

One of Hendrickson's meetings was arranged by lawyer Francis Seow, who was arrested on May 6, and is now being held under the Internal Security Act "for purposes of investigation into foreign interference in Singapore's internal affairs." Both Amnesty International and the Asia Watch Committee, represented by Harvard's Jerome Cohen, are protesting Singapore's court proceedings.

The U.S. response was to expel the first secretary of Singapore's embassy in Washington, Robert Chua. Several thousand Singapore trade unionists rallied against U.S. interference on May 4, and protested the expulsion. National Trades Union Congress Secretary General Ong Teng Cheon said the U.S. actions were "childish" and "unbecoming of a superpower."

Security threats

Singapore and Malaysia's governments are well aware of how vulnerable their nations are. The Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs stated in its white paper, "Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country, which has been exposed to various types of security threats even before Independence," including communist insurgency and communalism.

Singapore, too, which is about 76% ethnic Chinese, 15% Malay, and 6% Indian or South Asian, "is a young island state whose historical experience and multi-racial and multi-religious society makes it especially fragile and vulnerable,"

as Singapore High Commissioner to London Abdul Aziz Mohmood wrote in a letter to the *Financial Times* May 17, protesting coverage downplaying the seriousness of the dissidents' threat to the nation. "We do not have the luxury of surviving with an IRA in our midst."

On Dec. 30, the government ordered the dissolution of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Asian regional headquarters of the Geneva-based World Council of Churches. A Home Ministry statement accused the CCA of using Singapore as a staging-ground for organizing pro-communist "liberation movements" throughout Asia. CCA personnel had not only supported the "Christian-Marxist" conspiracy against Singapore's government in early 1987, but also played a leading role in organizing the radical opposition in South Korea.

Malaysia's opposition groups include the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party and the Islamic fundamentalist party, PAS, which precipitated the government crisis of last autumn. The Mahathir government's attempts to bring forward the Malay majority in the country, to equalize control of the economy (as much as 90% controlled by Chinese at the time of independence from British colonialism) are a particularly sensitive issue.

The so-called Marxist Group, founded several years ago by university students "who were converted to the Marxist ideology while studying in several universities in the United Kingdom, United States of America, and at home," is linked to such Philippine communist fronts as the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA) and Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU). Both West German and Dutch church organizations have donated thousands of dollars to programs linked to these groups. The paper also details the "liberation theology" faction of the Catholic Church, which had infiltrated several Christian organizations such as the Catholic Welfare Services (CWS), Young Christian Movement (YCM), Catholic Student Society (CSS), and the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) through the CCA's Urban-Rural Mission (URM) program. Church social worker Theresa Lim Chin Chin said the purpose of the URM is "to organize and conscientize [sic] the grassroots—i.e., estate and factory workers and squatters—with the aim of forming a mass-based peoples' movement that would challenge radically the structures of society; political and socio-economic system; government policies; etc."

The National Office of Human Development (NOHD), is another church group active in Malaysia, the report says. *EIR* has learned that NOHD is a member of the Asia Partnership for Human Development, an umbrella organization based in Hong Kong which used the funds it receives from European, American, and Australian church and non-sectarian donors to fund the Philippine Catholic Church's NASSA, just disbanded by the Church for funding NPA and NDF front groups. Several members of this group participated in demonstrations in the Philippines, the government reported.