

# Shultz strikes out in trip to Asia

by Linda de Hoyos

The early July trip of U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz to visit American allies in Asia—Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Australia—was designed at Foggy Bottom to bolster U.S. influence and reassure the allies on American presence in the face of both the growing Soviet strategic threat and the increasingly closer relations between Washington and Peking. The mission failed: The Shultz trip was a display of the impotence of U.S. policy toward its friends in Asia.

Notably absent on Shultz's itinerary were Thailand—which the United States has declared must rely upon China as its security guarantor—and the Philippines.

In Malaysia, Shultz ran into bitter complaints from Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir on the issue of high U.S. interest rates and trade issues and on the question of U.S. relations with China. China has long stood in the minds of most Southeast Asians as the biggest long-term security threat in the region, and the large minority of economically powerful Chinese populations in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia are generally viewed with suspicion. Given this, it could have come as no surprise to Shultz that Mahathir was emphatic that "the United States take into account the concerns of small countries on the periphery of China" in dealing with Peking. It was not the case, Mahathir told Shultz, that Malaysia was opposed to Chinese modernization; Malaysia, he said, has in fact aided China in its effort.

What concerns the Southeast Asian countries is the growing security alliance with China. There are two factors that heighten that fear. First, Mahathir, during a visit to Washington earlier this year, had told the Reagan administration that its best security policy in Asia was to aid Southeast Asian economic development. Instead of doing this, Mahathir said, the United States adopted a policy of benign neglect on economic matters, and came in at the last moment offering guns when the continuing impoverishment produced social unrest. The fact that the Reagan administration has bent over backwards to give China nuclear energy, seems to exemplify in the minds of the Southeast Asian countries everything that's wrong with U.S. policy in the region.

Secondly, for the results of this "benign neglect," the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries only need look at the Philippines. The U.S. banks pulled the plug on the Philippines in September, and the United States has backed up the banks and the International Monetary Fund 200%, to the extent that the Filipino economy has ground to a total halt. Furthermore, the State Department has cut President Marcos loose in the face of an opposition which has vowed to remove U.S. bases from the islands, trying to cut an impotent middle path with opposition leader Salvador Laurel.

To these concerns of the ASEAN countries, Shultz had absolutely nothing to offer. On economic issues, Shultz brushed aside ASEAN complaints with the ridiculous proposition that "the U.S. economy, in non-inflationary expansion, has probably done more good for world trade, including the exports of the ASEAN countries, than any other single thing."

On China, Shultz stated that the U.S. "military relationship with China is in its early stages and focuses on defensive matters and does not pose a danger."

On U.S. commitment to Southeast Asia, he offered these words in his speech to the ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Jakarta: "*Our relations with the ASEAN countries are the cornerstone of our policy in Southeast Asia.*"

Such idiocies could only have had ASEAN governments wondering why the U.S. citizens' taxes were wasted in sending Shultz to Asia at all.

## The ANZUS fiasco

Shultz was headed for even rougher waters in New Zealand and Australia. On July 14, just as the secretary of state was heading for Wellington, New Zealanders handed a national electoral victory to the Labour Party, which had run its campaign on a vow to deny permission to nuclear-carrying or nuclear-powered U.S. ships to utilize New Zealand ports. This commitment rips up the ANZUS treaty between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, and Prime Minister-elect David Lange is demanding a full renegotiation of the treaty, thus opening a gaping hole in the South Pacific defense perimeter of the West.

The Labour Party in Australia had made the same promise when it came to power and everything turned out all right, said Shultz, so why should we be worried about this? But, of course, David Lange's Labour Party in New Zealand has so far stuck to its guns. Accordingly, the rumor is now circulating that the United States is considering a moratorium on U.S. naval visits to New Zealand until early 1985 to give Lange a "chance to modify his policies and avoid souring bilateral relations."

The United States now faces the same drive for decoupling as Henry Kissinger and the Soviets have produced in Europe. The U.S. secretary of state's arrogant vacuousness in the face of the crisis is no reassurance to patriots anywhere.