

ASEAN nations demand debt relief, but Bush prefers drugs and war

by Michael Billington

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), despite overt efforts by the United States to provoke war and instability in the area, emerged from its annual meeting on July 22 united behind two dramatic declarations in defense of development and sovereignty, not only for its member nations, but for all underdeveloped nations of the world.

In a two-day conference of its six member nations—Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Singapore (with Vietnam, Laos, and Papua New Guinea sitting in under “observer status”)—ASEAN declared the necessity of debt forgiveness for Third World nations “far beyond the scope of the current terms.” ASEAN also strongly defended the sovereignty of all nations against the attempts to impose subservience to International Monetary Fund dictates under the rubric of the new world order.

An additional three-day meeting between ASEAN and its major trading partners—the U.S., Canada, Japan, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, and the European Community—was the scene of belligerent threats that the U.S. was prepared to provoke war in the region if the demands of the new world order were not accepted.

The joint communiqué of the foreign ministers of the ASEAN nations endorsed the idea of a “major writeoff of debts by official donors and commercial banks as well as by multilateral institutions,” insisting that the financial resources must be applied to productive investments. The recent efforts by the Philippines to obtain a partial debt writeoff from the U.S. and Japan were rejected, in favor of a “Baker plan” reorganization of the debt which imposes extensive conditionalities on the desperate Philippine economy. The ASEAN call, however, went beyond the needs of their own member nations, demanding “steps to alleviate the debt burden of developing countries far beyond the scope of the current terms.”

In another significant move, ASEAN rejected the extensive efforts by the Anglo-Americans and their U.N. apparatus to discard the fundamental right to national sovereignty by declaring certain issues as being “above sovereignty.” The communiqué stated: “Environmental and human rights concerns should not be made as conditionalities in economic and development cooperation. Human rights, while univer-

sal in character, are governed by the distinct culture and history of the socio-economic conditions in each country, and their expression and application in the national context are within the competence and responsibility of each country.” It is this use of fraudulent environmental causes which has led to the severe disruption or sabotage of crucial economic and social programs, including dams, transportation networks, nuclear facilities, and disease eradication.

U.S. hypocrites abuse ‘human rights’ issue

The cynical use of the “human rights” issue was evident in the bellicose demands of U.S. Undersecretary of State Robert Zoellick, demanding an ASEAN confrontation with Burma (Myanmar). Zoellick was backed up by Secretary of State James Baker, as well as the Canadian, Australian, and British foreign ministers. Zoellick said the Burmese regime’s “illegitimate and brutal action were both an offense against the civilized world and a source of instability. Isn’t it time to say enough is enough?”

ASEAN responded to this threat by pointing to the steps taken over the past months in Rangoon to remove some of the most repressive measures, including the release of most political prisoners and the re-opening of the universities. ASEAN claimed that this progress was the result of “constructive engagement” between ASEAN and their Burmese neighbor, not threats of war and sanctions. However, the ASEAN member nations, especially Thailand (see article, p. 42), are privately expressing grave concern that the U.S. could decide to unleash military actions at any time, in light of the recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court supporting the Thornburgh Doctrine, which allows the U.S. to kidnap or kill at will in foreign nations.

Zoellick, for instance, told ASEAN that Burma was the “primary source of heroin for addicts around the world.” But while Burma is indeed a major source, the U.S. has continued its policy of whitewashing the primary role of communist China in the production, distribution, and money laundering for the drug trade. Also, as was revealed in a July 29 article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, the bumper opium crops in Burma are largely due to two causes: the 1988 U.S. cutoff of a bilateral drug control program which had been success-

fully eradicating the poppy crops with defoliants, and a 1989 split in the Chinese-funded Communist Party of Burma, which has led to a return to the poppy fields by thousands of peasants.

Zoellick added to his threats by declaring that the U.S. is the only power with a "truly global reach," and that it will not hesitate to use the methods applied in the Gulf war if, in their view, "new tyrants threaten our national security interests." "We have national security interests in the Pacific, too," he growled.

Making ASEAN a U.N. military arm

Other developments at the ASEAN meeting reveal policies being planned in Washington and at the U.N. to transform ASEAN into a military alliance aligned with the newly reorganized U.N., to the purpose of creating a global army under the direction of the U.S.-British-French-controlled Security Council (see article, p. 17). ASEAN is not formally tied to the U.N. in the way that the African and Ibero-American regional organizations are—a situation which the Anglo-Americans wish to change.

The attempt to rein in ASEAN is evident in the territorial conflict over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. The ASEAN communiqué called for all parties to the contested area (China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Brunei) to settle the claims through negotiation, and to proceed in the meantime with joint development of the area. This has been the accepted policy for the past several years.

But the new President of the Philippines, Fidel Ramos, who does not sneeze without permission from the U.S. embassy, attempted to judo this position according to his masters' wishes, telling the ASEAN conference: "Such ASEAN activities as defense cooperation, military consultations, and exercises at various levels should be intensified and expanded." Ramos told Reuter that he favored holding an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations to settle the dispute. ASEAN did not adopt the Ramos proposals.

While the U.S. claims that it has no view on the Spratly Islands matter except a wish for a peaceful settlement, a Chinese land grab in the area in June was in fact sponsored by the United States, which sent an official representative to the signing of an oil exploration deal between Beijing and a U.S. oil company to drill in the middle of one of the contested areas on Vietnam's continental shelf. Beijing's open declaration that China would defend the oil exploration with the full force of their growing military power, was not lost on the region's nations, who knew that the U.S. would have been the only military force capable of preventing such a Chinese military adventure. Far from providing a military umbrella against the threat, the U.S. is openly backing its "friends" in Communist China.

One effect of this Chinese belligerence in Southeast Asia

is to throw a potential roadblock between the developing alliance between Japan and the ASEAN nations. In this regard, the U.S. has not hidden its recent adoption of a strategic policy stating that no such economic powerhouse should be allowed to develop, anywhere in the world.

Vietnam, while trying to reestablish relations with both China and the U.S., has nonetheless firmly protested the Chinese move, and called on the U.S. to denounce it. Malaysia's Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told the Malaysian government news agency Bernama that besides their "positive and confidence-building statements," the Chinese must nonetheless explain what they are actually doing on the ground. He expressed great concern over China's actions, and insisted that "any country intending to play a role in the region should adhere to the principle of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation," a treaty which China has refused to sign.

Bernama also reported that on July 22 the Chinese made "another move contradicting its stated policies." New restrictions were announced on fishing in its "offshore waters," which to the Chinese regime means the entire South China Sea! These restrictions, according to Beijing's official *China Daily*, include limits on the number of fishing vessels allowed in the area, the time of year they can fish, and types of nets to be used.

The United States is willing to use the fear of China in the area to the purpose of pressuring ASEAN to accept the U.S.-U.N. military influence over the regional military forces. An aide to Secretary of State Baker cynically proposed that the U.S. "mediate" the dispute in the South China Sea, a dispute that the U.S. has itself aggravated with its support for China. Philippines Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus, another U.S. asset, called on ASEAN to look for support from outside powers against the threat of "regional bullies."

Efforts to sabotage peace in Cambodia

The ASEAN nations, with Japan's help, are trying to prevent the collapse of the peace process in Cambodia, which is threatened by intransigence and renewed hostilities by the Chinese-controlled Khmer Rouge. The conference adopted a call for all parties to the conflict in Cambodia, and in particular the Khmer Rouge, to adhere to the peace plan, but they refused the efforts of the Anglo-Americans to impose sanctions on the Khmer Rouge. ASEAN ministers told the western powers that such sanctions would destroy the peace process, according to the *Bangkok Post*.

Japan departed from the U.S. efforts to provoke renewed fighting, by proposing close cooperation between Japan and the ASEAN nations in the rebuilding of war-ravished Cambodia. Japan's parliamentary Vice Foreign Minister Koji Kakizawa said that only by beginning the reconstruction of Cambodia could a basis for real peace be established. He proposed a combination of "Japan's financial and technological resources with ASEAN's expertise to help resettle Cambodian refugees now returning to their war-torn country."