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SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 40/50-69

Prospects for Regional Security Arrangements in East Asia Over the Next Five Years

Submitted by



DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

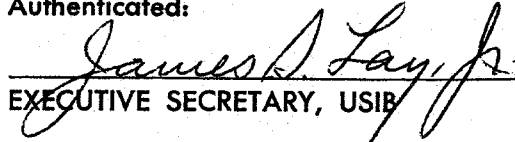
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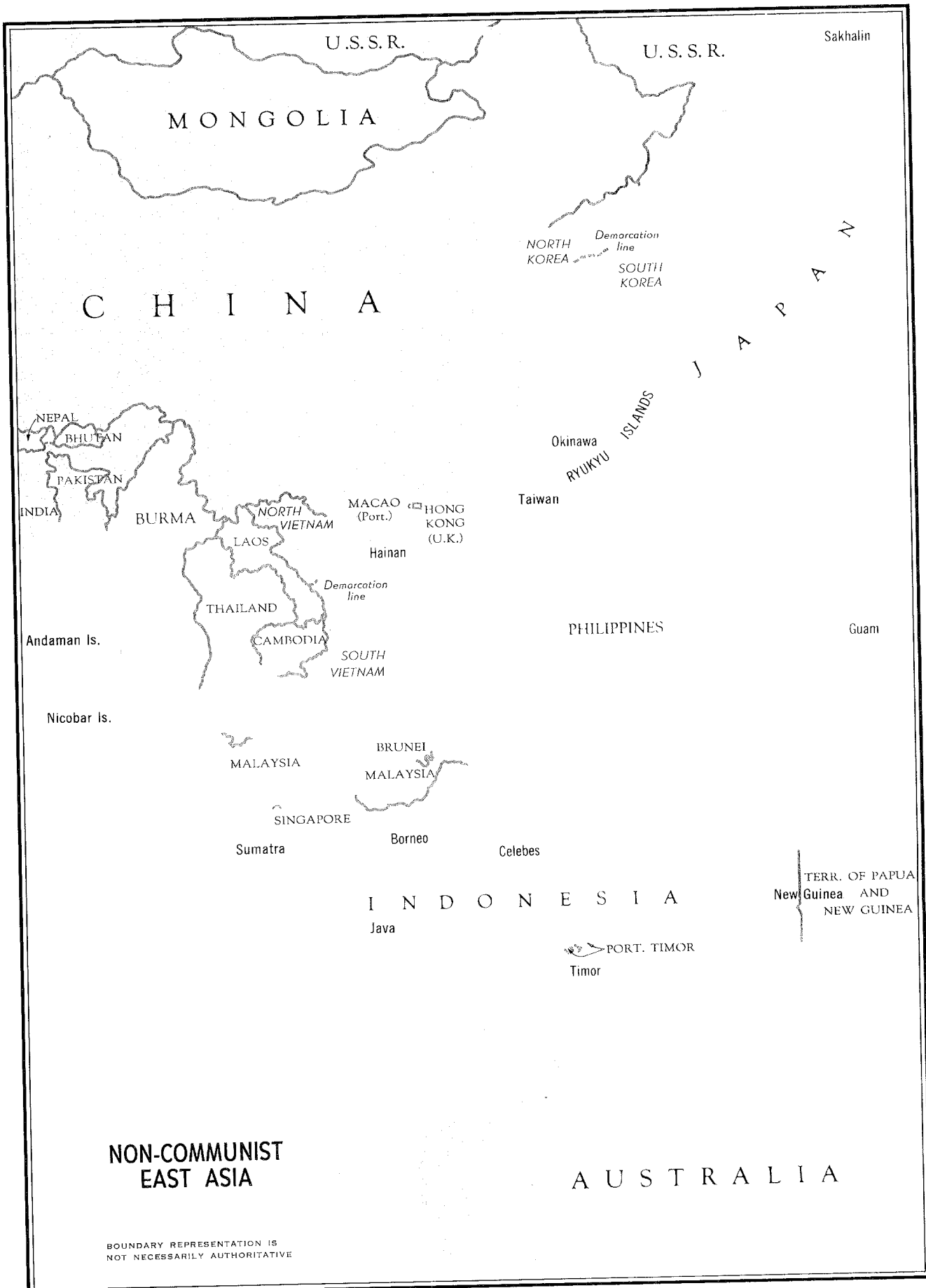
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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
THE PROBLEM	1
CONCLUSIONS	1
DISCUSSION	3
I. BACKGROUND	3
II. GENERAL FACTORS AFFECTING EAST ASIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD REGIONAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS	5
A. Varying Perceptions of the Threat	5
B. Other Variations in National Perspective	6
The Divided Nations	6
The Neutralists	7
The Other Nations	8
C. Military Considerations	11
III. THE OUTLOOK	13

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**NON-COMMUNIST
EAST ASIA**

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PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS IN EAST ASIA OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

THE PROBLEM

To examine the factors which affect the attitudes of the non-Communist countries of East Asia toward regional security arrangements.¹

CONCLUSIONS

A. We see very little prospect of uniting the non-Communist states of East Asia in a formal security organization at any time soon.

B. The East Asian countries most concerned with an immediate Communist threat to their security—the Republic of China (GRC), South Korea, and South Vietnam—rely primarily on their bilateral defense pacts with the US. They regard regional security organizations as a means of encouraging the US to maintain its security role in the region rather than as an alternative to the US commitment.

C. The nine other countries of the region, whether allied to the US or nonaligned, also regard American military power as their only real shield against Chinese Communist military attack. Their view of the likelihood of such an attack varies, however, as does the degree of their concern with the threat of Chinese or other externally-sponsored subversion. Although Thailand has made a substantial contribution to the defense of South Vietnam, none of the other countries is prepared to tie its fortunes to the outcome of longstanding conflicts by joining in collective defense arrangements involving South Korea, the GRC, or the states of Indochina.

D. Many countries threatened by Communist insurgency are prepared to cooperate with non-Communist neighbors in bilateral efforts

¹ See map at frontispiece.

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to control insurgent activities along common borders. But there is little faith that regional security arrangements would provide a useful way to cope with this threat.

E. Japan, the only East Asian country potentially able to make a substantial military contribution to the defense of the area as a whole, is constitutionally and politically inhibited from undertaking the required arms buildup and, even more, from assuming military commitments to its neighbors. Many of these countries, in turn, would be uneasy about any Japanese attempt to assert a leading military role in the region.

F. Despite the poor prospects for any early development of regional security arrangements, it seems likely that interest in a regional approach to common problems in East Asia will persist. Regional institutions established for particular purposes of economic cooperation are not likely to emerge as building-blocks for a future security edifice. Groupings concerned with broader sorts of political consultation might in time concern themselves with specific security problems, although premature efforts to turn them in this direction could lead to their fragmentation. Whether or not these or similar organizations would move beyond the consultative stage and become active in the military-security field would depend heavily on circumstances, particularly the nature and dimension of the Communist threat as perceived in the post-Vietnam environment.

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DISCUSSION

I. BACKGROUND

1. Over the past 10 years or so, East Asian countries have increasingly expressed support for the concept of regional cooperation, and some new groupings have emerged. Unlike earlier regional organizations—ECAFE, the Colombo Plan, and SEATO—some of these new groupings have resulted essentially from East Asian initiatives and have drawn their membership exclusively from the region.

2. The Association of Southeast Asia—ASA—was formed in 1961 at the initiative of Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaya. It was to be concerned primarily with cooperation in various economic, social, and cultural fields, and included Thailand and the Philippines, as well as Malaya. ASA foundered in 1963 as a result of Philippine opposition to the incorporation of the Bornean territory of Sabah in the new state of Malaysia, but was formally revived in 1966 when the dispute had cooled and diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the Philippines were established. The desire of Suharto's Indonesia to join its neighbors led to the establishment in 1967 of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—ASEAN—which includes the three ASA members plus Singapore and, of course, Indonesia. ASEAN has absorbed the varied projects of ASA, which is now virtually defunct.

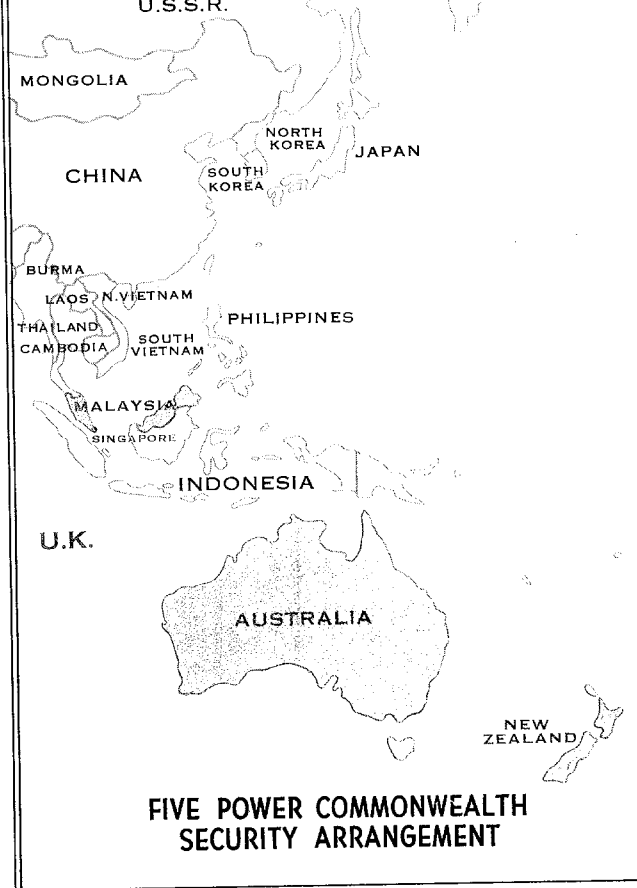
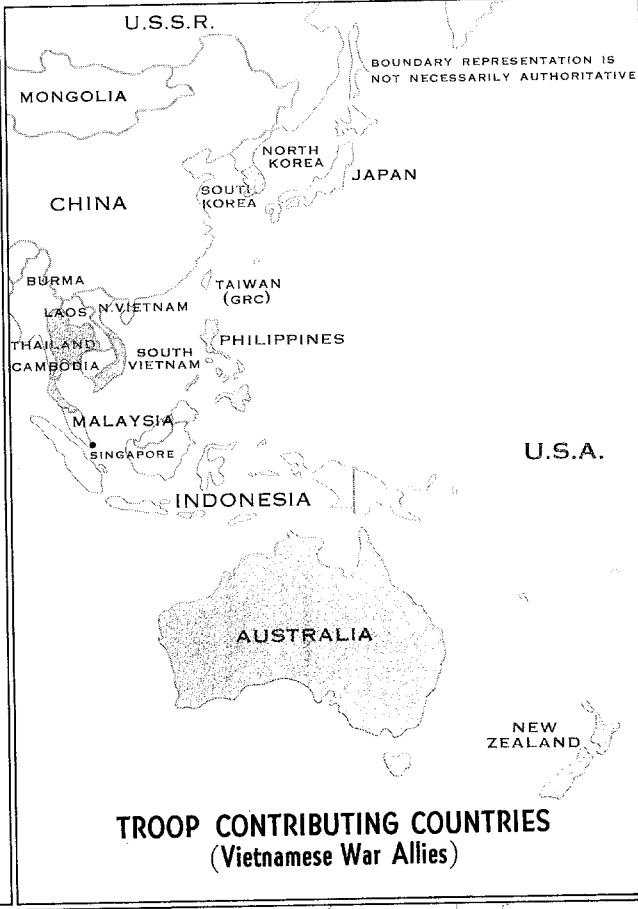
3. The Asian and Pacific Council—ASPAC—was formed in mid-1966 to promote consultations among its nine member nations on a broad range of regional problems.² It was organized at the initiative of a South Korean Foreign Minister who had been pressing the concept of a Seoul-based, anti-Communist regional alliance since 1964, mainly to enhance his personal prestige at home. Credit for its widespread acceptance among the Asians, however, belongs primarily to Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman.

4. In part, this awakening interest in regional cooperation reflects the further development of trends in evidence since World War II. One of these has been the search for ways of asserting national identity and providing a more effective Asian voice in international councils and in relations with friendly or allied Western nations. The changing attitude of the US has also been a factor. East Asian leaders have noted the expressed US desire for the development of regional associations and may believe that more US economic aid will be available for such associations than for individual states. There is also concern over the willingness of the US to maintain its role as a security shield. The course of the war in Vietnam has introduced an element of doubt that the US has the will to turn

² ASPAC membership includes: South Korea, Japan, the GRC, South Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and from outside the region, Australia and New Zealand; Laos has been an observer at ASPAC meetings. (See maps which show membership of ASPAC, ASEAN, and two other regional arrangements.)

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back any further Communist challenge in the region, or the capability to do so except perhaps at an unacceptably high cost to the target nation. And in South-east Asia, interest in regional organizations has been stimulated by the prospective British withdrawal from "East of Suez" military commitments.

5. Despite this increased attention to regional association, accomplishments in multilateral cooperation in East Asia remain limited. The most promising starts have been in the economic field. Even in this sector, however, the most ambitious organizations—the Asian Development Bank and ECAFE's Mekong Committee—are products of local cooperation with advanced Western countries. On the other hand, ASEAN and ASPAC, although undertaking joint projects only in the economic and cultural fields, do serve as informal political forums. As yet, however, joint consultation on security matters has not become the province of any wholly Asian organization. Such new security groupings as have appeared—the informal council of seven countries contributing troops to Vietnam and the five-power defense arrangement developing among Malaysia, Singapore, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand—are essentially carryovers from existing Western-dominated alliances. In short, many complications stand in the way of progress toward effective cooperation among the East Asian nations on security matters.

II. GENERAL FACTORS AFFECTING EAST ASIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD REGIONAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

A. Varying Perceptions of the Threat

6. The East Asian countries lack a common perception of the threat to their security. While all are concerned about China's ambitions and its long-range power potential, only South Korea and the GRC see any early threat of overt Communist military aggression. The nations on the mainland of Southeast Asia, and Indonesia as well, are concerned in varying degrees with the threat of Chinese-sponsored subversion and revolutionary activity, but Japan and the Philippines see no immediate security threat, military or subversive, from China.

7. Concern over the Vietnamese Communists also varies greatly and, even where it is high, there is no agreement on the proper response. Aside from the former French Indochinese states, only Thailand sees Hanoi as a direct and immediate threat to its own security. Indeed, some East Asian leaders tend to view the North Vietnamese as basically hostile toward Peking, and hence as potentially useful allies in any long-range effort to contain Chinese ambitions in Southeast Asia. Moreover, most East Asians anticipate an uncertain settlement that could permit an eventual Communist takeover of South Vietnam and Laos (and some would add Cambodia). In Southeast Asia, at least, there is concern over the long-term implications of such a takeover. But most countries in this area see little that they can do to ensure the maintenance of non-Communist regimes in Indochina and wish to avoid the risks of trying to do so.

8. The USSR is not presently regarded as an aggressive threat by any of the East Asian nations, in part because of the deterrent effect of the US presence.

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While some are concerned with Soviet subversion, most East Asian governments believe that they possess sufficient knowledge and sophistication to counter it and that, in any case, the opportunities for Russian agents to make significant political gains among Asian leftists are inherently limited. Many, moreover, tend to view the USSR as a useful counterweight to Peking.

9. Finally, many East Asian states are as concerned over threats from non-Communist neighbors as over those from Communist states or Communist-supported insurgencies. Cambodia, for example, feels its very existence threatened by what it sees as a centuries-old campaign of Thai and Vietnamese expansionism. Singapore is concerned that its future is jeopardized by racial tensions with the Malays and suspects that a close association between Malaysia and Indonesia might work to its disadvantage. Malaysia sees its territorial integrity menaced by the Philippine claim to Sabah and, over the longer term, distrusts the intentions of Indonesia. Anti-Japanese sentiments remain strong in South Korea, while some other countries are generally uneasy about any Japanese attempt to assert a leading role in the region.

B. Other Variations in National Perspective

10. The following discussion of the interests and attitudes of the non-Communist East Asian states toward regional security arrangements treats the 12 states concerned in three categories: the divided nations, the neutralists, and the others. These categories are convenient for purposes of presentation and analysis, the countries in each category having certain problems in common. As will be apparent, the categories themselves do not represent potential groupings of nations for security purposes.

The Divided Nations

11. Most East Asian countries recognize that *South Korea*, though sheltered by US military power, faces a continuing threat from its Communist opponent and that security links with it could therefore prove somewhat risky. Nevertheless, there are countervailing considerations which have made Seoul a welcome partner in several multilateral undertakings in the region and which would make it a desirable ally in a regional security pact. South Korea's effective military performance in South Vietnam has enhanced its standing in the eyes of some East Asian nations. There is also general appreciation of South Korea's demonstrated ability to manage its domestic affairs and to outdistance its Communist rival in Pyongyang, and of the relative absence of public dissent to the government's activist anti-Communist policies. Furthermore, except for the Japanese, there are no significant national enmities which might block cooperation with the South Koreans.

12. For its part, South Korea has long been an advocate of broad regional security alliances on the SEATO pattern, provided the US thereby would be

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more surely involved in Korea's defense.³ The South Koreans are not interested, however, in any purely Asian security coalition which might involve them in antiguerrilla campaigns in Southeast Asia without the certainty of major US support. The South Koreans would not want to rely on Japanese forces for their defense, not only because of the ancient animosity against Japan, but because they would fear that existing US guarantees might thereby be vitiated.

13. Over the years, *the GRC* has become more acceptable to its non-Communist neighbors. But almost none wants to become involved in what clearly appears to be the weaker side of China's civil war; to include the GRC in any regional alliance would work against its widespread acceptance almost from the start. Recognizing this, Taipei has not pressed for a new regional security arrangement much as it might want one. The Nationalist Chinese have been content to offer private support for ROK initiatives in this field, meanwhile promoting a variety of low-keyed bilateral intelligence contacts with the South Koreans, the South Vietnamese, and the Thai.

14. For *South Vietnam and Laos*, of course, the outcome of the Vietnamese war will be crucial in determining future regional security interests and roles. Saigon, so long as it is not under Communist control or bound to a neutral status by the terms of a settlement, would welcome the participation of others in its defense. But only South Korea and Thailand have shown any inclination to contribute substantially to the defense of South Vietnam; and even their assistance has had to be heavily subsidized by the US.

15. The Royal Lao Government has been constrained from overtly accepting external military assistance by the terms of the 1962 Geneva Accords, although it has in fact relied heavily upon US air and other support for its defense. So long as the Lao leaders, particularly Souvanna and the King, see the RLG's chances of survival as resting essentially on agreement among the big powers, not on arrangements among much smaller and less powerful neighbors, they will be disinclined to throw down the gauntlet to Peking, Hanoi, and Moscow by any formal alignment with security organizations likely to be deemed hostile by these powers. Thus, the Lao attitude toward regional arrangements is likely to conform to the shape of any settlement with the Communists and to the military and political realities of the post-Vietnam situation in Southeast Asia generally.

The Neutralists

16. *Cambodia and Burma* are unlikely to join any multilateral security grouping so long as they retain hope of mollifying the Communist powers on their borders. Both countries long ago adopted a policy of neutrality on world issues,

³In recent months, Seoul has been advocating the formation of a "PATO" (Pacific Area Treaty Organization) to include South Korea, the GRC, South Vietnam, Thailand, and the US. In theory, the Asian members would pledge ground forces to each other's defense while the US would provide naval, air, and logistical support to these forces in the event of need; the US military response would, in concept, be automatic.

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and both believe that events elsewhere in Southeast Asia have confirmed the correctness of their choice.

17. In practice, Cambodian and Burmese neutrality are quite dissimilar. Cambodia has sought to involve all the powers, Communist and non-Communist, in a delicate balance designed to safeguard its independence from the neighboring Thai and Vietnamese nations. Unless the Communist-sponsored insurgency within Cambodia becomes a much more serious threat, Prince Sihanouk would probably steer clear of any pact opposed by Moscow or Peking, or obviously aimed against the Communist countries. Moreover, no matter how the Vietnamese war is settled, Cambodia would probably not join any regional security grouping, except possibly one that associated the Indochinese states in neutrality and nonaggression commitments, perhaps with international guarantees.

18. Burma has become almost pathologically isolationist, immersing itself in its domestic affairs and adopting an unequivocally negative position on regional cooperation in virtually all its aspects. As a UN member, Burma participates in ECAFE and it has retained ties with the Colombo Plan; but it has shown no interest in newer economic groupings, even the Asian Development Bank. The Burmese recognize the potential security threat from across the border and have objected vigorously to Peking's open support of Burma's Communist and ethnic insurgents. There has also been some limited anti-insurgent cooperation with India. But Burma will almost certainly continue to regard involvement in any more formal security arrangement as provocative to Peking and, therefore, contrary to Burmese national interests.

The Other Nations

19. The attitudes of the six other East Asian nations toward regional security arrangements are less predictable and would be more dependent on the nature of the particular arrangements proposed and on attendant circumstances. Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore may well feel more need of a new security arrangement at this time than do Indonesia, the Philippines, and Japan.

20. Heretofore, *Thailand* has been a leader of almost every East Asian grouping of whatever stripe, a role to which the exceptional talents of Foreign Minister Thanat have made an important contribution. Though a member of SEATO and further assured by the language of the Rusk-Thanat agreement of 1962, Thailand has been unsettled by the apparent unwillingness of the US to seek a clear-cut military victory in Vietnam. It is casting about for supplements to the US commitment to its defense and for alternatives should this commitment prove to be less than firm. Conversion of ASPAC and/or ASEAN into security terms has been considered, but Thai reactions to recent South Korean proposals for a formalized "PATO" have been mixed. Apparently, Bangkok would prefer to get a better "fix" on US intentions in the region before committing itself to any new multilateral proposal. It may hope for a formal bilateral security arrangement with the US after the Vietnamese war.

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21. The Thai are also freer than South Korea or the GRC to explore such alternatives as "accommodation"—a significant reduction of security and political ties with the US and a concomitant warming toward the Communist powers, particularly Peking. Thai leaders are at least able to conceive of a situation in which their Communist neighbors would be disposed to abandon their threatening posture in favor of a conciliatory policy. Some responsible Thai elements probably believe that after Mao dies, overtures from Bangkok might strike a responsive chord in Peking, and that this possibility might be foreclosed by further Thai involvement in US security policy in the region. We do not believe, however, that this view will gain much support among present Thai leaders, so long as they are confident of an effective US security role in Southeast Asia.

22. The five-power alliance which links *Malaysia and Singapore* with the UK, Australia, and New Zealand is destined to lose most of its military muscle when the British withdraw from the area in 1971. Meanwhile, the precise nature and scope of the ANZAC commitment remains hazy, though both countries have declared their intention to maintain forces in the area after 1971 for defense against external attack and externally-supported Communist insurgency. There is also concern over the extent to which the US is committed under the ANZUS treaty to support ANZAC forces in the area. Beyond this, as noted earlier, there is apprehension in Malaysia and Singapore over the latent ambitions of Indonesia and the unpredictable Filipino course of action with regard to Sabah.

23. Both Malaysia and Singapore are considering other ways to bolster their national security, including bilateral nonaggression pacts with neighboring nations and big power neutralization of the area. Singapore, in particular, still has some interest in preserving a posture of nonalignment. As for regional security arrangements, neither Malaysia nor Singapore has a current and active interest in any new organizations. If circumstance were to lead them in this direction, however, both would probably wish an arrangement in which Indonesian participation would be balanced by that of Australia and New Zealand, with a US presence in the background.

24. For the near future, however, Malaysia and Singapore are building up their military and police forces to strengthen their internal security, to repel small-scale invasion attempts, and to contribute to their five-power defense effort. Malaysia also has bilateral agreements with Thailand and Indonesia for cooperative action against Malaysian Communist guerrillas in the Thai border area and in Indonesian Borneo close to the East Malaysian border. Neither Malaysia nor Singapore, however, would want foreign Asian troops stationed on its territory to combat insurgent elements, though Singapore might be willing to deploy some troops to Malaysia's defense. Neither nation sees any immediate likelihood that ASEAN could usefully be converted into a security grouping; they would probably oppose any such proposal, particularly if it appeared to sanction the deployment of a substantial Indonesian force to their territory.

25. *Indonesia's* size, strategic location, and potential strength are such that, unless it were a member, no wholly indigenous security arrangement in South-

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east Asia could be effective. Yet few Indonesian leaders see persuasive security reasons for establishing a regional pact at this time. Moreover, they have many inhibitions against joining in any such venture. Membership in an arrangement of patently anti-Communist cast might alienate the USSR, the East European countries, and many Arab and African states, and would also generate political opposition within Indonesia. Foreign Minister Malik and other civilian officials would be concerned lest such a pact lead to vast military outlays at the expense of essential economic programs. Nor would Indonesia be inclined to join any arrangement in which its role would be overshadowed by larger and more influential nations such as India and Japan. For the present, therefore, Indonesia's leaders are more interested in relatively limited forms of cooperation with their neighbors to deal with specific insurgency problems along their common borders on a bilateral basis.

26. Over the longer term, Indonesia may choose to do more to help meet security threats in Southeast Asia. Suharto's concept of national defense, for example, envisages deployment of Indonesian forces to countries as distant as Thailand should they request Indonesian assistance against external aggression. Arrangements along this line appeal to Indonesians as one way of asserting themselves among their neighbors and improving prospects for gaining the leading political position in Southeast Asia.

27. Despite its close ties with the US and a strongly anti-Communist foreign policy, the attitude of *the Philippines* on the regional security issue might be somewhat equivocal. Nationalism in the Philippines is expressed most often as anti-Americanism; thus, any suggestion of US pressure on Manila in connection with a new multilateral pact would generate opposition to it in certain government, press, and intellectual circles. Another handicap would be the apparent lack of concern among Filipinos for events overseas, even on the nearby Southeast Asian mainland. (The token Philippine troop commitment to South Vietnam, for example, was extracted only painfully by the US; the Filipinos did not feel directly threatened by events in Indochina.) If a number of other Asian nations joined in a security pact, the Filipinos would probably join, seeking a more Asian orientation and lessening dependence on the US. For the next five years or so, however, Filipino efforts in the security field will probably be focussed on securing alterations to existing bilateral arrangements with the US which will make the relationship a more "equal" one.

28. Still another complicating factor is Sabah. The Philippine claim to this Malaysian territory has greatly disturbed relations with Kuala Lumpur and caused widespread disgust with Manila's inept diplomacy and concern about Malaysia's response. The conflict also threatens to bring the work of ASEAN to a complete standstill.

29. *Japan* operates under many more political constraints on security matters than Indonesia or the Philippines. It has a strong leftist movement which opposes even the continuation of the security pact with the US. Moreover, virtually all

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Japanese oppose any costly and potentially dangerous military commitment in Southeast Asia. This view is bolstered by the Japanese constitution which, in effect, forbids dispatch of troops overseas. Moreover, Japan generally wishes to avoid actions which might unnecessarily jeopardize prospects for trade with China or an eventual political settlement. The Japanese, at least at present, see their regional role as primarily one of developing trade relations and providing economic assistance to promote political stability, and, in the case of China, to erode its doctrinaire hostility toward the non-Communist world. There is no prospect, therefore, that Japan will move toward a formal regional security grouping over the next five years or so.

30. On the other side of the coin, many East Asians fear that military alignment with Japan could lead to its domination of the region. Thus, it seems probable that Japan would not be a welcome member of any regional security grouping unless the US were also present as a political and military counterweight.

C. Military Considerations

31. The military forces of the non-Communist states of East Asia vary greatly in their capabilities. The ROK and the GRC could make significant contributions to their own defense. But their forces and those of Japan could not move beyond their own borders in any substantial strength without major and continuing US logistical support. And even transported to Southeast Asia, they would almost certainly be insufficient to repel direct attacks by Peking and Hanoi in this area. Any regional security arrangement designed to cope realistically with a conventional military threat to Southeast Asia, therefore, would require very heavy increases in the military forces of many states in this area. We do not envisage any such development over the next five years or so.

32. For the foreseeable future, the smaller nations of Southeast Asia could do little more than supply token combat forces to one another and would be almost wholly dependent on US logistical systems for their transport and upkeep in the field. Such forces might be useful in demonstrating regional solidarity in any prolonged counterinsurgency campaign, but their value in a conventional defensive role would almost certainly be very slight.

33. It is at least conceivable that the Indonesian military establishment could be increased and, more important, upgraded so as to provide significant ground force contingents for duty outside Indonesia, though they too would require US logistical support. Indonesia's air force and navy are large by Southeast Asian standards, but they lack the capability to contribute much to regional defense in the near future. Their equipment is mainly of Soviet origin and, in general, has been poorly maintained. They could be developed into a formidable defensive force only if substantial quantities of US or other Western aircraft and naval vessels were provided, along with lengthy programs of orientation and training; Indonesia could not afford to pay for even a small portion of any such arms package.

SECRET

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34. Japan is the only East Asian country capable of becoming a major nuclear power, possibly within five years of reaching a decision to do so, and hence the only one potentially capable of coping with the Chinese military threat without US support. Moreover, excluding Communist China, it is presently the most important air and sea power in East Asia, and it could supply much of the equipment and technical assistance required to bring indigenous Southeast Asian forces to higher standards. If Japan wanted to do so, there is no question that it could become a major air and sea power in the 1970's.

35. Australia and New Zealand (along with the UK) are presently committed to the defense of East Asian states—in this case, Malaysia and Singapore. The ANZAC countries are pledged to maintain small ground, air and naval detachments in these countries until 1971 and for an indefinite period thereafter. The Australian force could probably be doubled or tripled comparatively quickly, and detachments could be employed elsewhere in the region under existing SEATO arrangements—e.g., in Thailand. But Canberra would be reluctant to undertake such moves because of the economic costs and the political opposition at home to any heavier commitment to Southeast Asian security, at least without a parallel US involvement. In any case, Australia's military resources are inadequate to fill the defense role handled so effectively by the UK during the Malaysian "confrontation" with Indonesia in 1963-1966.

36. So far, India has shown no interest in involving itself in Southeast Asian security problems, though it is beginning to think of economic and other limited consultative arrangements with states in the area. India is concerned to defend its own threatened frontiers with Pakistan and China, and has little strength left over for employment elsewhere, even if it had the logistical capability to support an expeditionary force. Moreover, East Asians tend to view India as relatively impotent militarily, disorganized politically, and economically unpromising. There would be little local sentiment for and considerable opposition to its inclusion in regional security arrangements.

37. None of the East Asian nations is presently desirous of further European involvement in the security of the region. Although Malaysia and Singapore would have preferred the UK to remain, they no longer see any prospect that the British decision to withdraw can be reversed. Further UK involvement after 1971—except in minor military exercises, or on a consultative basis in SEATO, or under the terms of the Anglo-Malayan defense agreement of 1957 in the event of a direct attack on Malaysia—seems highly unlikely. Although a small British force will remain in Hong Kong, the Colony is not a tenable base for East Asian operations.

38. France has been inactive in SEATO for several years. Moreover, its Southeast Asian policies no longer accord with those of most members and its presence is vigorously opposed by at least one—Thailand. France would almost certainly not accept any security role in the region except perhaps as a guarantor of a neutralized Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam. West German, Dutch, or other

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Western European security involvements are even less likely; none of these nations perceives vital interests at stake in the region, nor would any wish to antagonize China or the USSR unnecessarily.

39. For the next five years at least, US military strength and logistical capabilities would be crucial to the development of any credible East Asian arrangement intended to provide security against Communist military aggression. Most members would look mainly toward the US for the training and equipment they would feel necessary to raise the standards of their respective forces. Though they would probably seek to avoid dependence on US ground forces as long as possible, they would expect some sort of tacit or explicit commitment of US air and naval forces (including nuclear weapons) to their defense in order to deter the Chinese and nullify any efforts by Peking to employ nuclear blackmail. They would prefer that such forces were positioned nearby to increase the credibility of US deterrent power. They would also like the US to supply, at low cost, sufficient air and naval equipment to indigenous forces to permit a respectable defense against a wide range of enemy actions short of major war.

40. East Asians have mixed feelings about the role of the US in relation to any regional security concept. Countries possessing bilateral security ties with the US would not regard a regional security organization without US participation as a satisfactory substitute. Other countries regard their security as ultimately dependent on a US presence in the area, but have preferred for various reasons not to seek a bilateral security relationship with the US. They would not necessarily welcome a formal defense tie with the US even if it came under a multilateral guise. For all of the countries moving toward closer regional ties of any kind, moreover, the concept of Asian initiative and leadership has become of increasing importance; a good deal of the impetus toward regional thinking derives from the belief that only jointly can Asian countries equalize what is otherwise too clearly a patron-client relationship. If and when a regional security arrangement is contemplated in East Asia, the preferred arrangement from the overall East Asian view would probably be the formation of an indigenous grouping with low-keyed though firm assurances of political and military support by the US.

III. THE OUTLOOK

41. It seems likely that interest in a regional approach to common problems in East Asia will persist. For one thing, most of the countries in the area have specific national interests which impel them in this direction: Japan's wish to exorcise the image of aggression and imperialism and promote its economic interests; the desire of the GRC, South Korea, and South Vietnam to demonstrate international acceptance in their competition with opposing Communist regimes; and the urge in many countries to enhance national prestige by exercising regional leadership. The belief that economic stabilization and betterment will contribute to political stability and hence reduce the threat to national security is another factor that will help maintain interest in regional economic and social cooperation.

SECRET

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42. The existing regional institutions inspired by these considerations are not necessarily building-blocks for some future security edifice. Premature efforts to turn them in this direction could lead to their fragmentation. It is evident, nonetheless, that such groups as ASPAC and ASEAN are developing into political forums of some importance, and might in time concern themselves with specific security problems. Whether or not these or similar organizations would move beyond the consultative stage and become active in the military-security field would depend heavily on circumstances, particularly the nature and dimension of the Communist threat as perceived in the post-Vietnam environment.

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