

Thailand, Vietnam Normalize Relations

Thailand and Vietnam issued a joint communique this week calling for the normalization of diplomatic relations as a contribution "to the cause of genuine peace, independence and neutrality in southeast Asia." This diplomatic breakthrough was foreshadowed when Thailand's Prime Minister and military Commander-in-Chief, General Kriangsak Chamanand, told a correspondent for the Soviet daily *Pravda* two weeks ago that he hoped to develop "mutually beneficial and equal ties" with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. At the same time, Thai Foreign Minister Uppadit Payariyangkul also announced the resumption of talks with the Vietnamese on the question of overflights of Thai commercial airlines in Vietnamese airspace.

These developments come as somewhat of a surprise and a reversal of the anticommunist hostility of the previous military-backed government of Prime Minister Thanin, who was removed in a military power play Oct. 20. What is indicated is that Thailand has been brought into the mainstream of efforts by countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Japan, and the Soviet Union to promote detente and economic cooperation between the communist and noncommunist states in the Southeast Asian region.

If Thailand continues to move out of its confrontationist posture, the major loser in the area would be the People's Republic of China. The Chinese have recently made moves to build their own sphere of influence in the region, reminiscent of the ancient Han dynasty control of the area. The chief Chinese client in the region, the xenophobic Cambodian regime, has been the major resource for the Han chauvinists. Chinese Vice Premier and Communist Party Politburo member Chen Yung Kuei is currently heading up a delegation now in Phnom Penh as a follow up to Cambodian Party chief Pol Pot's recent visit to Peking.

Another objective of Chinese wooing has been the shaky government of President Ne Win in Burma. Returning a recent visit to China by Ne Win, Chinese Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping is currently in Rangoon. Teng, a protégé of the late Chou En-Lai, is considered the major architect of China's anti-Soviet diplomacy and helped arrange Ne Win's recent visit to Cambodia, the first head of state to be received in Phnom Penh since the Khmer Rouge took power. Teng's Burmese visit is his first foreign trip since his second "rehabilitation" earlier this year.

Chinese methods involve not-so-subtle forms of blackmail. Chinese-backed guerrilla insurgencies in Burma, which have been a major source of trouble to that government, and in Thailand are de facto offered as bargaining chips for friendship with the Peking regime. Informed sources report that Burmese President Ne Win sought withdrawal of Chinese support for the guerrillas on his last visit, but got merely a noncommittal "keep

him on the hook" response from Peking. It is similarly thought that the Chinese will offer their influence over the Cambodians to seduce the Thais, who have had severe border clashes with the Cambodians in the past months.

Chinese maneuvers in Southeast Asia place them squarely in the path of Vietnam, which is a major power in the region and not too eager to see the Chinese dominate it. Since unification, the Vietnamese have been actively promoting a policy of détente and economic cooperation in the spirit of peaceful coexistence. But, their continuing support of the Soviet Union's right, along with other powers, to maintain an economic and diplomatic presence in the region has brought them into sharp conflict with their erstwhile fraternal allies to the north.

This was made most apparent during Vietnamese Party Secretary General Le Duan's recent visit to Peking where, in a clear diplomatic snub, Chinese Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping neither appeared at the welcoming ceremony nor took part in subsequent talks.

According to diplomatic sources, Le Duan's visit was a Vietnamese initiative to help patch up the Sino-Soviet rift. Teng's boycotting of the visit is laid to the Vietnamese rejection of the Chinese "Three World" stratagem of pitting the two superpowers against each other in a war in which, allegedly, only the Third World will survive. Teng, who is said to be responsible for resuscitating the theory four months ago, is considered a "deviationist" by Le Duan. The frosty visit was capped off by a speech by Le Duan praising the Soviet Union's role in the world, while Chairman Hua mouthed the familiar anti-Soviet line.

Despite his apparent failure in Peking, Le Duan took the opportunity of a visit by East German party leader Erich Honecker to declare Vietnam's resolve to heal the split. He declared: "The party and people of Vietnam will henceforth unceasingly work for the strengthening of militant solidarity and fraternal cooperation between Vietnam and other socialist countries."

He also took the opportunity to reiterate Vietnam's policy towards Southeast Asia, saying, "The government and people of Vietnam fully sympathize with and strongly support the struggle of peoples in Southeast Asia.... standing ready to establish and promote relations of friendship and multiform cooperation with other countries in the region...."

Developments in other countries of the region indicate that Chinese and Western attempts to rekindle past suspicions and tensions will run up against policies aimed at promoting broader economic cooperation. In an unprecedented move, Philippine President Marcos played host to Honecker this week, and signed a trade agreement. It should not go unnoticed that Honecker's visit, his first to a non-communist government in

Southeast Asia, occurred during negotiations between the U.S. and the Philippines over U.S. military base agreements.

In Indonesia, a Vietnamese trade delegation concluded a week-long visit. Commenting on the visit, the official Indonesia Army newspaper, *Berita Yudha*, predicted the expansion of relations between the two countries. An editorial commented, "We consider this mission very important because it will further a bigger understanding

that none of the countries of the Associations of Southeast Asian Nations are only interested in the region's prosperity." After holding a meeting with President Suharto and discussion with numerous Indonesian officials, the delegation discussed cooperation in petroleum development, territorial disputes, and Vietnamese importation of Indonesian fertilizer.

— *Dean Andromidas*

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