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Introduction

Just like human beings, states cannot live in alienation.

This is due to the fact that, to meet their political, cultural, and economic needs, the states become dependent on other states. The relations guiding the way in which one country relates to another is referred to as foreign policy. Primarily, a country's foreign policy is a blend of its internal and external factors, such as the historical backdrop, needs to be at peace with the neighboring countries, and the role played by the international society such as the UN in the current worldwide politics, among others. Moreover, superpowers like the United States end up influencing the foreign policies of other small countries[1]. The South East Asia comprises of eleven states namely: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Burma, Brunei, Cambodia, east Timor, Laos, Vietnam, and Philippines. These states have undergone transformation in many perspectives including political, economic, and military.

This has occurred right from the Cold War era to the devastation of the World Trade centre in 2001, which triggered a lot of collaboration between these states and America to wage war against terrorism[2].

The United States role in the security of the Southeast Asia

The future role of the United States to Southeast Asia can be understood by first looking at the security threats faced by the region. Right from the defeat of its Indochinese cronies in 1975, the United States has not shown much interest in Southeast Asia[3], and particularly in five of its nations (Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand). This could be

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because the region has not experienced any emerging crises. The only issues at hand could be the reconcession of the United States base agreement in Philippines and the restoration of the United States association with Vietnam. Whereas some Southeast Asian leaders had expressed concerns that the United States leadership could be ignoring the region, some had raised questions as to whether the United States was concerned with the security of the region.

Most people formed a negative conclusion as to whether America was still concerned about the security of the Southeast Asia because the whole issue was addressed within an extraneous context of whether America could offer military intervention on behalf of its cronies in the area[4]. To conceptualize the basis of the United State's responsibility in Southeast Asia, it is primarily prudent to look at the scenery of the security threats that were bedeviling the region[5]. Both direct threats and external aid insurgencies have not been of major concern in the past; indeed, former fears of Vietnam supporting their fellow communists did not happen. However, the manufacture of Soviet central power was of much concern to some leaders within the Southeast Asian area, though this can only aggravate if the United States does not intervene.

Various types of subversion from several multinationals also posed security tussles, only that the Southeast leadership was quite confident that this one could be contained. The main security threats to the Southeast region were domestically recognized. Some of these included the probability of eruption of civil war in Thailand, pronounced racism in Malaysia, and upcoming radical

organizations in Indonesia and Philippines[6]. Their long-term existence and domestic nature was what posed a great security question in Southeast Asia.

The graph below shows the political stability, ability to govern and, law and order in Indonesia between 1995 and 2004. Source: International Business Risk: a handbook for Asia Pacific region, volume 2002 (p. 147). There ought to be a demarcation between national security threats and ruling group threats. For example, whereas Japan and the United States may regard criticism as necessary political differences, Southeast Asia views this as a real threat to the security of the nation[7]. On the other hand, policies adopted by these leading global economies as means of enhancing national security could be deemed by internal opposition cliques as a danger to national security. Therefore, the United States should reduce its influence on the security matters of Southeast Asia, since it is political development that these countries are undergoing as they seek to define the foundation of their national development.

Moreover, the leaders within the Southeast Asian area acknowledged the fact that, the involvement of the United States in matters pertaining to their national security cannot bear much fruits due to the domestic nature of the issues[8]. Military and civilian leaders within the Southeast region did not anticipate the United States military intervention except for the case of very rare circumstances of being directly confronted by Vietnam, Soviet, or Chinese warlords. However, the biggest worry among the Southeast Asians was the complete abandonment by America rather than America's intervention in their internal issues.

The best way for the United States to demonstrate its security concern towards Southeast Asia should be in response to their state during the post - Vietnam period, rather than a perpetuation of the earlier military involvement[9]. The security situation that has recently prevailed in the Southeast region implies that the sole responsibility of the United States military should be to enhance a fulltime naval operation in the region. This has targeted to enhance a balance against the Soviet's naval operation, and to prevent the Southeast Asians from being entangled in a Sino - soviet invasion between Moscow and China[10]. At the time, the United States' leadership has been lobbying for the preservation of its base in the Philippines, a gesture that shows United State's willingness to retain its position as the strongest naval force in Southeast Asia. However, what is uncertain is the ability of this base to let the US have a long-term naval presence there[11]. Many Filipinos felt uncomfortable about the bases remaining in the hands of the United States.

First, the Filipinos did not see the connection between the bases and their internal security intimidation. They questioned whether the bases would trigger the American military to act incase of a rare incident of the Philippines being invaded. Some also termed it as a psychological impediment to the establishment of the Filipino army. Moreover, most Filipinos, including some of their leaders, had a feeling that the presence of the United State bases was harmful to their lives, in that, incase of any antagonism, it could easily spark war between the United states and its enemies[12]. Secondly, the Filipinos were also anxious about the presence of

an alien military base on their soil, which they termed as a breach on their sovereignty.

In the international perspective, the bases were a disgrace to developing countries, since the country's image of sovereignty was misconceived. Repeatedly, America's feedback to Filipino's concerns about its sovereignty has been either inclusion of cosmetic agreements like placing A Filipino flag on the bases or substituting American army by Filipinos. Therefore, the general anticipation was to make President Marcos become convinced that technically, the bases were not under foreign influence[13]. This move could not necessarily give a solution to the problem of sovereignty especially regarding such issues as the United State military officers engaging in crime.

The Filipinos believed that an American military base compelled them into over - relying on the United States, especially economically. The America's take was that although the Filipinos did not openly accept it, they found the presence of the American base psychologically relieving. Besides the two-sided reassurance, the chief significance of the bases for the Philippines was purely economic. In addition, the United States government was ready to release aid for the use of the bases and the Philippine authority sees the base as a means for obtaining more aid from the American government. Although this might have been the case, it was presumed that the American government would only continue to release economic aid if the bases were retained. Apart from the bases indirectly affecting the internal security issues, they also strengthened President Marcos' politically, which caused anxiety among his opponents concerning his relationship with the United States. There is no direct way through which the American aid would benefit

the Philippine's economy. However, the bases are seen as an economic asset to the communist compatriots.

Both the United States and Filipino authority concede that the New People's Army benefits greatly from the results of the black market transactions. It was not certain as to whether Washington and Marcos would arrive at a decision that would last until 1991, a period for the expiry of the United States bases. Some American diplomats began arguing that the United States does not require the use of the bases as doing that would sour its relations with Philippines and that the political and economic value of the bases had really increased[14].

There was an alternative for the establishment of bases on Guam and Tinian, a suggestion that was based on the efficacy, cost, and the expressed willingness of other Southeast Asians to preserve the bases. The United States was partly for the idea based on the aspect of effectiveness, but still asserted that the whole move could lead to logistic challenges such as a decline in the number of naval assets in both the Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, deceleration in reaction time and difficulty in carried out repairs due to insufficient infrastructure. The cost of putting up the bases in Marianas seemed to be exorbitant although the United States had no intentions of establishing bases at Marianas that would be very different from the ones in Philippines. There was also a challenge of the unwillingness of other Southeastern nations (particularly the Singaporeans) to allow the transfer of bases from the Philippines to Marianas. Therefore, remaining at Philippines on American - owned territory would imply the United States willingness to continue exerting naval influence in the region. A shift of the <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-thailand-this-could-be-because-the/>

bases to Marianas would be likely to be uneconomical both in time and money. A new approach was therefore necessary[15].

The United States future role to the five Southeast Asian nations is not necessarily in terms of direct military assistance, but rather, in form of provision of military technology that will enable them to be both independent and able to address their internal security concerns. There is also need for the United States to provide economic aid and investment to the region[16]. Additionally, the United States should ensure a non-aggressive Vietnam by helping to strengthen the fiscal relationship between it and other Asian nations. This can be attained by ensuring the normalization of the U. S – Vietnam relations. Moreover, the panacea for Southeast Asia's internal security challenges lie in their hands, rather than in the hands of the United States[17].

Although statistics reveal that the United States has been investing heavily in military (54%) to enhance security in other nations and its own, the solution to Southeast Asia's defense issue ought to emanate from the Southeastern states themselves. Below is a pie chart showing the federal budget for the year 2009 and how it spends on military. Source: Voice of Revolution.

Relations between Southeast Asia and America from 2001 onwards

Since the American war in Vietnam, the Southeast Asia had not been in the United States limelight until September 2001 when the American World Trade Centre was destroyed[18]. Washington made it clear that Southeast Asia was the second facade in worldwide war on terrorism.

Therefore, South Asian leaders joined into that war with noticeable ecstasy. For instance, Philippine president called for American's assistance to help eliminate a terrorist gang from its bowels, while Singapore and Malaysia sprang into action to marshal suspected terrorists from within their boundaries. The October 2002 bomb blast on Bali, sweeping away the lives of many foreigners and Indonesians was a confirmation that there was collaboration between Osama Bin Laden's al Qaeda some Indonesian Islam groups. Indonesia then became a battleground in fighting terrorism. Although the Thailand Prime Minister feigned neutrality; he eventually reversed his position and termed Thailand as a partner. This caused Thailand to be plunged into the battleground on terrorism.

The United States Engagement with Pakistan

The first of the three main US-Pakistan engagements took place during the cold war (1950-1960). Pakistan's concerns about power disparity in the region and its need for economic growth triggered it to seek help from the United States. At the same time, the United States attempted to initiate a strategic association whose aim was to assess the soviet influence in the Asian region. The United States buttressed Pakistan's defense mechanisms while at the same time supported undemocratic trends in the country. However, as reality proved, the US relationship with Pakistan was not founded on common viewpoints.

Whereas Pakistan showed no concerned with the US view, that communism was weakening and thus a threat to Pakistan, the US did not take India's intimidation to Pakistan to be real. As the condition within the region and across the nations gradually grew, the two parties reacted to upcoming

trends with policy restructuring that produced their own strains. For instance, Pakistan's reach-out to China and the change in the US interest with India to put a check in China's growing power are a case in point.

Finally, United States lost Pakistan's attention up to when we had the soviet assault of Afghanistan in 1979 [19](Hussain 4). Pakistan's help was so immense in assisting the US eject out Soviets that it raised fears that the US could have had interests towards Pakistan like those attributed to democracy and nuclear creation. Although the relationship between the United States and Pakistan saw the ceasing of the Cold War, it also set a stage for threatening not only the security of the two nations, but also the world as a whole.

During 1990's, a set of sanctions were directed to Pakistan from the US. These sanctions did not only have an adverse effect between the US relations with Pakistan, but also they also caused a division in the army. Pakistan's alienation with the rest of the world plunged it into political instability that saw the rise of some forces like the Taliban, the AQ Khan affair, among others. The United States did not respond to these actions in any way. After the September 11 terrorism attack in the US, Pakistan knew that it had the potential to assist the US fight against terrorism, only that it lacked both economic empowerment and military support. Pakistan is reported to have played a significant role in its fight against terrorism. The US has also been funding Pakistan since September 11, which has seen the latter step up its efforts against fighting terrorism. The table below shows the economic assistance that Pakistan has been receiving from the United States between 1999 and 2002.

Source: Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U. S Policy (P. 62) The current engagement between the two countries focuses on war against terrorism. As this unfolds, the Pakistan president is also focused on solving the country's internal problems to see to it that its future engagement with the United States is sustained. Musharraf's vision of Pakistan is in line with the US objectives and thus allows for the latest US-Pakistan realignment. Anxiety that the US has towards Pakistan especially after Musharraf is misinformed and may hinder its future policies with Pakistan. To see the fruition of its future policies with Pakistan, the US faces the challenge of dealing with Islam forces that is repulsive to social change and liberalism.

In addressing this challenge, the United States will have to combat anti-Americanism.

Conclusion

The growth in the Southeast Asian region has taken many dimensions from long ago with emerging attributes that have made the United States to develop interest in it. During 1975 and 2001, the United States had become particularly interested in nations that seemed to play a vital role in both Asia – Pacific and global political /economic dealings. After the cold war, the direction and standing of the Southeast Asia was transformed by Bill Clinton's 1993 declaration that the foundation of that region rested on three elements: financial growth, political equality, and security[20]. After sometime, the five promising economies of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore) had developed economically.

The local economic crash of 1997 was great test for them but apart from Indonesia, strong grounds for both future plans and economic growth were formulated. These countries engage in international trade. There is also development in democracy and technology in the region.

The United States relation with Pakistan has seen the two countries support one another during the cold war after which they had contrary perspectives. The US sanctions to Pakistan in the 1990's saw the latter face alienation from the world as well as political instability. However, the two seem to have been re-united especially in the anti-terrorism war.

As they seek to realign their future policies, challenges are still ahead of them.

Appendix

George W. Bush, the then American president made a move to confirm that the counterterrorism being experienced in Southern Asia at the time was within the American interests. This was during his visit to the region in the year 2003.

The conspiring between the United States and the Southeast Asian region implied that after such a long time, America still had an interest in the region. The distinction is that for the American battle within Vietnam was the Southeast Asian stage of Cold war. The consecutive American attribution of the fight on terrorism to the conflict and regime transition in Iraq, did not improve the new collaboration with Southeast Asia on anti - terrorism war. Apart from Singapore and Philippines who supported it, Malaysia and Indonesia were vividly against America's policy in Iraq. On the other hand, <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-thailand-this-could-be-because-the/>

the operation that targeted to wage war against the al Qaeda and Taliban tenure in Afghanistan received full support from the Southeast Asia area. There is however, a continual concerted effort from all on fight against terrorism.

The anti - terrorism fight shows the way in which the international systems of the Southeastern Asia are still under the control of some political economic global powers. The acknowledgement of the latest development of American security interests and involvement in Southeast Asia depicts very intricate and profound political, social, and economic interests that are connecting the United States with Southeast Asia. These interests are motivated at transnational levels. American interests compete with those of other countries like Europe and Japan, among many others.

Security is just but one entity that makes the Southeast Asia play a unique role at the international level. A map showing the Southeast Asian nations (Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam)Source: Asean-Japan Center: Establishment of ASEAN

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