

Book Review

THE UNITED STATES AND THE SINO-SOVIET BLOC IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. By Oliver E. Clubb, Jr. The Brookings Institution, Washington, 1962. 173 pages. Maps, index.

Since the Second World War the United States has been concerned almost continuously with Southeast Asia. Few will deny that the region remains of grave interest to the United States. This monograph, written by a Research Associate in the Foreign Policy Division of the Brookings Institution, undertakes an analysis of US policy toward Southeast Asia against the background of the Cold War. Assessing this policy frankly and presenting well-reasoned arguments on its strengths and weaknesses, while at the same time proposing alternatives, the monograph is a meaningful contribution to the expanding shelf of political literature about this vital area.

The author sees Southeast Asia as a complex locality with three powers, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Communist China competing for influence. Clubb points out that it is Communist China and not the Soviet Union that poses the main threat of armed aggression or subversion, and observes that the latter has tried to restrain Peking on occasion. It is in this context that he probes the structure of US policy in Southeast Asia, scrutinizing a number of major issues, among them SEATO [Southeast Asia (collective defense) Treaty Organization], subversion, and a judicious basis for US relations with the government of South Vietnam. Clubb lays emphasis on SEATO as perhaps the heart of the matter, touching as it does such corollary questions as the US attitude toward the nonaligned nations and an appropriate American policy thereto. He also raises the possibility of an increasing role for the United Nations, given its successful performance in Laos and in the settlement of the West New Guinea problem, in trying to reduce regional tensions.

Keeping primary US objectives in view, such as preventing any part of Southeast

Asia from coming under Communist domination and helping non-Communist states with their security and economic difficulties, Clubb believes that SEATO has political and military shortcomings which circumscribe these aims. These defects are apparent enough, he feels, to warrant replacement of the alliance by a more flexible policy, particularly one that would be more palatable to the nonaligned countries.

Designed to counter direct Communist aggression, SEATO has been found wanting, in the author's view, in opposing the so-called wars of national liberation and subversion that are now taking place in South Vietnam. These situations, he underlines, are more likely to occur in the future than open conflict. Moreover, the author notes that SEATO has only three Asian members (Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines), thus the defense treaty is not truly representative of the region it endeavors to shield. US power, its essence, could be adjusted to a less obvious framework while being just as effective.

Therefore, Clubb proposes a neutralized buffer zone to include Indonesia, Ceylon, India, Burma, Nepal, Laos, Cambodia, and possibly the pro-West states, Malaya and Vietnam. Guaranteed by the major powers of East and West, this area would exclude all foreign troops and military bases from its boundaries. This alternative, the author holds, would accomplish what SEATO seeks to do now, i.e., keep the region free of aggression, while US power would still be at hand in case of need. The assurances given by the guarantors would make it embarrassing for one of them to set in motion any adventurous schemes. Having indicated the benefits that might accrue from such a formula, the author then estimates what a departure from SEATO might mean both in Southeast Asia and in the United States.

Undoubtedly such a move would be interpreted as a US withdrawal from Southeast Asia. Pro-West nations, Thailand, Malaya, Pakistan might wish to establish closer relations with the Communist bloc. Yet this might not be so serious as it would seem at first. It is the contention of the

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author that the virtues and failings of SEATO are understood better by US well-wishers and adversaries in Southeast Asia than in some quarters in the United States where SEATO has become a symbol of anti-Communism in Asia, and its disappearance would be harder to accept. Congress might be less inclined to vote the funds necessary for the physical security and economic welfare of a neutral bloc than it has been for governments committed directly to US support. Nevertheless Clubb believes that the fundamental economic and other ties that these pro-West nations have with the United States would restrain them from reaching a point of no return with the Communist countries. Consistent with his suggestion that regional security arrangements become less dependent, at least in the formal sense, on the United States the author also recommends that coping with subversion would be better left to the Asian governments.

With the examples of Laos, South Vietnam, and Nationalist China in mind Clubb points out that governments relying on the United States for their virtual existence are frequently negligent in giving attention to needed social and economic reform. Like other specialists of Southeast Asian affairs, Clubb states that correction of domestic abuses is a basis for answering subversion. Accordingly, he thinks that the United States should help in the popularization of existing governments so that the intellectual elite can share in the process of government and not be vulnerable to revolutionary subversion as it is now. The author also finds merit in consigning the fight against subversion to the governments themselves, a step (witness Burma and Indonesia), he indicates, that would have a twofold result. It would remove the onus of US interference in domestic affairs, and it would give the governments involved a sense of responsibility. The questions of SEATO and subversion are joined for a review of an appropriate US policy toward South Vietnam.

The depth of the US commitment in South Vietnam vs the results so far achieved warrant comment on US relations toward that country. Certainly the United States has shown that it has been unstinting in its efforts to wrestle with the persistent problems

of counterinsurgency whose dimensions, it is realized, are nonmilitary as well as military. As the counterinsurgency goes on, one inevitably looks for comparable cases in the recent past, such as Malaya and the Philippines. As the author makes plain, there are reasons why certain measures were successful in these two countries. These lessons, however, are not necessarily applicable to South Vietnam.

Geographically the Malayan and the Philippine Communists were isolated from outside aid. In Malaya the Communists, almost exclusively Chinese, were easily identifiable. In both Malaya and the Philippines the guerrillas operated in small bands. The activities of the enemy in South Vietnam, however, are different.

With a friendly North Vietnam close by the guerrillas in South Vietnam are assured of steady assistance. Unlike the Malayan Communists the enemy in South Vietnam are indistinguishable from the rest of the population and they fight in units of up to battalion in size. Whereas eventually an admixture of military and nonmilitary measures was found to dispose of the Communist menace in Malaya and the Philippines, the United States and the government of South Vietnam are still seeking a solution. In the late Ramon Magsaysay, the Philippines was fortunate in having a leader of stature who took the initiative in pressing for reforms that assumed significance in subduing the Philippine Communists. Clubb believes that the United States should give consideration to encouraging or acquiescing in ". . . the replacement of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime by a new, non-Communist government."

This useful and concise study served as the basis for the Midwest Seminar on United States Foreign Policy under the auspices of the Universities of Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in March 1962 in Racine. It is a reminder once again that the Cold War is so vast in scope that a simple blueprint for victory is hard to find. In the search for means to gain this victory the equality of political factors with the military is emphasized. One may not agree with all the author says, yet his conclusions represent a thoughtful effort to come to grips with sensitive issues in a critical region.