Chapter V

BIG POWERS AND MALAYSIA'S PROPOSAL FOR NEUTRALIZATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA
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Each country perceives its problem of national security differently from the others. Even then there are certain situations in which a country may understandably feel threatened. External aggression or a threat of such aggression endangers security. Foreign military presence could be an encroachment on the independence of a country. Massive and uncontrolled foreign economic investment could also lead to external interference with the independence of a country. Internal political and economic instability and insurgency movements too could undermine the security and independence of a nation. Malaysia has an internal security problem. This problem is largely a product of the activities of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the northern region adjoining Thailand, as also in the Sarawak-Kalimantan border area. Malaysia has also a potentially explosive communal situation between the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups. Can this problem of security be solved through a policy of neutralization of Southeast Asia? Let us see how far such a policy can provide security to Malaysia.

Origin and Development of the Malaysian Idea of Neutralization

On 26-27 November 1971 the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore and the Special Envoy of the National Executive Council of Thailand assembled in Kuala Lumpur and issued a declaration
stating "that the Neutralization of Southeast Asia is a desirable objective and that we should explore ways and means of bringing about its realization" and that all necessary efforts should be made to "secure the recognition of, and respect for, Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers".

The proposal for a neutralized Southeast Asia, though recently adopted by ASEAN after it had been introduced by Malaysia, is nothing new to Southeast Asia. In July 1954 the Geneva Agreements provided for a provisional neutralization of Vietnam. They divided Vietnam into two zones along the seventeenth parallel. These zones were to be kept free of foreign bases, armaments, and military personnel. However, the activities of the insurgents and the intervention of the United States led to the collapse of the Geneva Agreements, and the neutralization provisions became inoperative. Then came the neutralization of Laos. The neutrality of Laos was guaranteed by the fourteen nations which met in Geneva in July 1962. Laos on its part undertook not to enter into any military alliance, not to agree to the establishment of any foreign military base in its territory, and not to allow any country to use its territory either for military purposes or for the purpose of interference in the

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1 "The Kuala Lumpur Declaration, 27 November 1971", in Travel, Trade, and Development in ASEAN (Jakarta, 1976-77), pp. 36-37.
affairs of other countries. The participants in return stated that "they recognize and will respect and observe in every way the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, unity, and territorial integrity of Laos". Laotian neutrality, however, did not last long: the United States violated it and killed it. And then early in 1964 President Charles de Gaulle of France advocated the neutralization of the Southeast Asian region. He called for a "treaty of neutrality for the countries of Southeast Asia ... a neutrality which would be accepted by all, guaranteed internationally, and outlaw all forms of subversion, whether internal or external".

The Malaysian proposal for neutralization is the latest of such proposals. The following features distinguish the Malaysian proposal from the earlier ones. Firstly, the concept originated from within Southeast Asia. Secondly, the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN countries upheld it and went so far as to describe it as their long-term goal. Thirdly, the proposal and the problems associated with it were examined by an ASEAN committee of senior officials.

Tun Dr Ismail Al-Haj, a former Foreign Minister, was the first important leader in Malaysia to articulate the neutralization idea as a backbencher of the Alliance Party. Speaking in Parliament in June 1968, he said that Malaysia should delay agreement on the 5-Power defence arrangement

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3 Keesing's Contemporary Archives (Bristol), 1963-64, p. 19878.
"until we have explored the idea of neutralization of South-
west Asia guaranteed by the United States, the Soviet Union,
and China". Tun Ismail also advocated a series of non-
aggression pacts between Malaysia and the other states of the
region. The Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, noted the
proposal, but said that it would be difficult to secure
formal agreement with regard to neutralization or non-
aggression. The Tunku observed: "We have seen in the past
how no sooner [sic] was a treaty of peace signed by two
countries than they started to make [sic] war with one
another." He laid emphasis on the threat posed by Communist
subversion in Southeast Asia and was "more than ever convinced
of the need to work out effective defence arrangements among
the Commonwealth partners concerned".

In April 1970 as Minister of Defence, Razak took the
initiative to organize the 5-Power defence arrangement

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4 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 14 June 1968. It may,
however, be mentioned that the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party
(PMIP, now called PAS) and the former Socialist Party
(which is split into two -- the Labour Party and the Party
Rakyat) had long been advocating a non-aligned posture for
Malaya/Malaysia. See Parliamentary Debates (Malaya),
vol. 4, no. 8, 26 June 1962, cols 836-8. For a brief
historical record of the origin of the idea of neutraliza-
tion of Southeast Asia, see Vishal Singh, "Neutralization
in Southeast Asia" (a paper presented to Panel 6 of the
Sixth Congress of the International Association of
Historians of Asia, 26-30 August 1974, Yogyakarta,
Indonesia). The present author also had discussions on
some of these problems with V. David, a sitting DAP M.P.,

5 Foreign Affairs Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), vol. 1,
nos 7 and 8, March 1968, p. 82.

6 Ibid., vol. 11, nos 1 and 2, December 1969, pp. 2-4.
(comprising Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United States) in London. He assured the Malaysian Parliament that it was a temporary measure meant to provide a military cover until an agreement with the ASEAN states could be worked out as a substitute. He said that after the ASEAN states had succeeded in making the Southeast Asian region a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), the 5-Power defence arrangement would be phased out.

Under Tunku Abdul Rahman's premiership Malaysia completely depended on its alignment with the West in general and with Britain in particular for its security. In September 1970 the Tunku retired, and Tun Abdul Razak, the long-time deputy of the former, took over as the Prime Minister. Tun Dr Ismail joined the Cabinet as Deputy Prime Minister, and he continued his advocacy of the neutralization idea.

From the late 1970 onwards Malaysian policy-makers adopted a new approach to problems of foreign relations. This new approach was evolved in the context of certain developments in international politics like the withdrawal of British troops from areas east of Suez, the victory of the Vietnamese over the United States, the Sino-American détente, and the emergence of China as a factor in international politics. Malaysia redefined and readjusted its policy towards China and other countries of Southeast Asia. In short, two important developments in the international

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relations of Southeast Asia at this time were: (i) the collapse of the US-dominated system of alliances for the containment of China and (ii) the emergence of China as an object of concern and diplomacy among the countries of Southeast Asia.

Upon his assumption of the Premiership of Malaysia Tun Razak was faced with the problems arising from the gradual withdrawal of British military power from Southeast Asia. Hardly had he settled down when the United States too announced its decision to withdraw its forces from Indo-China. Razak was convinced that continued dependence upon the military support of the West would no longer serve Malaysia's needs. He therefore, started formulating plans for ensuring the security of Malaysia. These plans were based upon the long-term objective of securing the neutralization of Southeast Asian region. He hoped to achieve the neutralization of the Southeast Asian region with the full co-operation of the major Powers still concerned with the region and the non-aligned states of Asia and Africa, especially the Arab world, and with the sympathy, friendship and understanding of the countries of the West.

In September 1969 Malaysia joined the non-aligned bloc. In April 1970 Ghazali bin Shafie, then Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led a delegation to Dar-es-Salam, the capital of Tanzania, where

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the preparatory meeting of the non-aligned summit was held. Later in the year Razak, who was then Director of Operations as well as Deputy Prime Minister, himself led his country's delegation to the Third Non-aligned Summit Conference in Lusaka. Addressing the non-aligned summit on 9 September 1970, Razak said:

It is my hope that in reaffirming the right of self-determination and non-interference in the Indo-China area, the non-aligned group would at the same time take a positive stand in endorsing the neutralization of the area and possibly of the entire region of South-east Asia, guaranteed by the three major Powers -- the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. I mention the need to extend the area of peace and neutralization to include all of Southeast Asia because it is obviously easier and wiser to strengthen the fabric of peace before it is ruptured rather than attempt to eliminate disorder and conflict once they have penetrated into the region.

Razak attached great importance to these meetings and, now along with Ghazali bin Shafie, a Minister in his cabinet,

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9 Foreign Affairs Malaysia, vol. 3, no. 2, December 1970, p. 16. As early as 1968, while talking on the problem of Malaysian defence, Razak (then Deputy Prime Minister) said that as a measure of security the Government would work for a neutral Southeast Asia, Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 17 February 1968. In 1970, addressing the preparatory group which met in Dar-es-Salaam to make arrangements for the non-aligned summit scheduled to be held in Lusaka, Ghazali bin Shafie said: "It is Malaysia's hope that non-aligned countries will be able to endorse ... neutralization not only for the Indo-China area but also for the entire region of South-east Asia, guaranteed by the three major powers, the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, and the United States, against any form of external interference, threat or pressure." Foreign Affairs Malaysia, vol. 13, no. 1, June 1970, p. 37.
again attended the high-level fourth non-aligned conference held in Algiers in September 1973. He addressed the representatives of the seventy-six countries participating in the conference on 6 September 1973, and said, inter alia:

I feel that we should seek to intensify our own efforts which lead us to self-reliance and independence of action, as the underpinning for our non-alignment and the framework for shaping our own identity and independence, ... 10

The stamp of the personalities of Abdul Razak, Dr Ismail, and Ghazali bin Shafie is evident in these remarkable moves indicating a shift in Malaysian foreign policy.

The shift in favour of a policy of non-alignment was a step towards neutralization. As we have noted already, the Kuala Lumpur conference of the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN, had endorsed neutralization as a means to achieve a "Southeast Asian zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality". It had also agreed to set up a committee of senior officials "to study and consider what further steps should be taken to bring about the realization of their objectives". Such a committee was eventually established, and it met in July 1972 and came to a "common understanding of the interpretation of a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality". It, however, implied that neutralization might be one of the several steps to attain that goal.

10 Ibid., vol. 13, no. 1, June 1970.
11 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 23 November 1971.
12 Ibid., 15 July 1972.
The idea of neutralization received its most emphatic expression from Ghazali bin Shafie. The concept of neutralization implied, according to him, that each country of the region should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the others and that no country should involve itself in activities that might threaten the security of another. The countries of Southeast Asia should agree to promote regional co-operation. They should also ensure that all foreign, i.e. non-regional, Powers were kept out. As regards major Powers, Ghazali bin Shafie suggested that they should be persuaded to guarantee the neutrality of Southeast Asia and exclude the region from their power struggle. In 1975, writing on ASEAN's response to security issues in the region, he outlined his vision of a Southeast Asian neutrality system, and said that it consisted of

... the national cohesiveness and resiliency of each Southeast Asian state, the regional cohesiveness and resiliency of Southeast Asia as a whole, and the observance of a policy of strict equidistance by Southeast Asian states in political security terms in their relations with external powers, as a means of reinforcing an equilibrium situation between them.

He argued that these trends were already being pursued by most Southeast Asian states and that the rest were inclined to follow suit. According to him, a Southeast Asian neutrality system "is a realizable goal which, if pursued, will strengthen the defence capabilities of ASEAN member states".


Having floated the idea of neutralization, Prime Minister Tun Razak took it upon himself to popularize it. In December 1971 Prince Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos, paid a visit to Kuala Lumpur for talks. In September 1972 Tun Razak went on a visit to Switzerland and Austria "to see at first hand two different modalities of achieving neutrality". Earlier, in 1971, the Malaysian delegate had introduced a proposal for neutralization before the United Nations General Assembly and had succeeded in getting it embodied in Article 19 of a General Assembly declaration. The Declaration accordingly called for speedy implementation of the Malaysian proposal with a view to ridding Southeast Asia of interference by the Big Powers. It also stated that independence, territorial integrity, and peace and security would be guaranteed by neutralization. Malaysia also lobbied for support for, and the acceptance of, the neutralization proposal in the Consultative Meeting of the fifty-three non-aligned states represented in the UN General Assembly. However, strangely enough, its enthusiasm cooled down when it found another section of the UN Declaration urging the United Nations to extend material and moral support to liberation movements. "Liberation movements", among the non-aligned states and in UN parlance, meant struggles against White rule in Southern Africa. But for the states of Southeast Asia, and particularly for Malaysia, it meant

15 Foreign Affairs Malaysia, vol. 5, no. 3, September 1972, pp. 7 and 14-22.
the Communist-led insurgencies in their region. Malaysia, therefore, showed little interest in the UN Declaration thereafter.

The neutralization proposal did not receive enthusiastic support at the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government held in 1971. It received formal support at the Commonwealth conference held in Ottawa in but 1973, the conference was non-committal. Malaysia thus actively lobbied for support in various international conferences and forums. Tun Razak himself visited many countries to explain the concept.

What, then, are the motivations behind the Malaysian proposal for neutralization? A close look at Malaysian foreign policy reveals that Malaysia's attitude to neutralization was governed by its relations with its ASEAN partners, especially with Indonesia. Indonesia and Malaysia seemed to have forged a special relationship with each other based on Malay identity/solidarity.

16 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 2 October 1971.
17 Foreign Affairs Malaysia, vol. 6, no. 3, September 1973, p. 6.
18 Noordin Sopiee traces the roots of Malaysia's current policy to the following factors: "Disenchantment with the traditional alliance partners and the realization that all major alliances or patterns were undependable, a desire to learn from the Vietnam experience and to avoid the mistakes made, the new spirit of self-dependence, and the non-existence of a conventional military threat." "The Neutralization of Southeast Asia" (a paper presented at a Conference on Asia and the Western Pacific, Australian Institute of International Affairs, Canberra, 14-17 April 1973).
The strongest driving element behind Malaysia's initiative for neutralization was its concern for security. Allaying the fears of critics Tun Abdul Razak said: "If we can get outside powers to respect us, then we don't need any security arrangements." He wanted the Big Powers to declare that they had no aggressive intentions in Southeast Asia. On 10 March 1968, in an interview to Felix Abishogamaden, he remarked that his country's main concern was "not so much defence but security. The idea is to ensure security with as little expense as possible." He went on to say: "We are interested in security and non-aggression pacts with our neighbours." Thus Malaysia's diplomacy in the United Nations, the non-aligned movement, and, above all, in ASEAN can almost be described as a functional substitute for a policy of mounting defence expenditures and acquisition of weapons and arms buildup.

Until 1971 the main prop of Malaysian security was the defence agreement concluded between Malaya and the United Kingdom (AMDA) in 1957. Thanks to AMDA and the Commonwealth security system, Malaya/Malaysia was able to stand up to Indonesia and its "Crush Malaysia" policy. Peaceful relations were, however, resumed between the two neighbours following the signing of the Bangkok Accord in 1966. As an observer put it, with that, the Indonesian-

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20 For these statements and for a discussion of this aspect, see Vishal Singh, "A Report on Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia", *India Quarterly* (New Delhi), vol. 28, no. 4, October-December 1969, p. 335.
Malaysian relationship was "transformed from one of bitter antagonism to one of de facto alliance". The security situation drastically changed with the decision of the Labour Government in the United Kingdom in January 1968 to withdraw all British forces from their bases in Malaysia and Singapore by 1971. This opened up once again the question of Malaysian security. The 5-Power defence arrangement (FPDA), which came into being after the dissolution of AMDA in 1971, was only a consultative framework. In fact, expressing his misgiving as to the effectiveness of the FPDA, Tunku Abdul Rahman said in 1969, i.e., even when negotiations were still in progress, that so far as Malaysia was concerned the new defence agreement being worked out was "useless". At the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference held in January 1969, the Tunku said: "Britain has lost the power and the will to exercise the leadership expected of her."

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23 The five Powers are Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom. The communique issued at the end of the 5-Power defence conference held in April 1971 stated, inter alia: "The Ministers also declared, in relation to the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore, that in the event of any form of armed attack externally organized or supported or the threat of such attack against Malaysia and Singapore, their governments would immediately consult together for the purpose of deciding what measures should be taken jointly or separately in relation to such attack or threat." Foreign Affairs Malaysia, vol. 4, no. 2, June 1971, p. 8.

24 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 2 August 1969.
He went on to say that there was "an apparent feeling of emptiness and insecurity in the hearts and minds of those who had previously looked to Britain for leadership". Even more disconcerting to Malaysia during this period was the attitude of Australia, which made a distinction between the defence of Malaya and the defence of Malaysia. According to Hawkins: "Quite apart from the Sabah question, Australia avoided any formal commitment but sought only a 'general understanding'."

In view of Malaysia's vulnerability to external armed attack as demonstrated by Indonesia's confrontation in the 1960s, the Malaysian proposal for a neutralized Southeast Asian zone can be looked upon as a device for involving the countries of the region in a kind of security framework. Neutralization, if guaranteed by the Big Powers, would keep the region free from international intervention in regional affairs. It would also eliminate or minimize inter-state conflict within the region. Because of the diversified nature of its territories and its delayed unification, Malaysia faced serious problems of territorial and political consolidation. It now seeks to concentrate its energies on the integration and consolidation of its far-flung territories, including those which were incorporated in 1963. A security guarantee against external threat or attack would, therefore,

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26 Hawkins, n. 22, p. 37.
give Malaysia ample time to devote its energies to the task of nation-building.

Definition of the Concept

Here our purpose is not to attempt an abstract academic exercise as regards the conceptual problems of neutralization. Such an exercise is outside the scope of our study. Our objective is to define the concept of neutralization with a view to analysing the implications of the neutralization proposal for Southeast Asia. The primary objective of neutralization is to insulate the neutralized state or region from international intervention. The following definitions and functions of neutralization are relevant to our study:

1. A neutralized state is one whose political independence and territorial integrity are guaranteed permanently by a collective agreement of great powers, subject to the condition that the neutralized state will not take up arms against another state, except to defend itself, and will not assume treaty obligations which may compromise its neutralised status. In an abstract sense, neutralization is a special international status designed to restrict the intrusion of specified state actions in a specified area.

2. Demilitarization, sometimes confused with neutralization, is altogether different, although it may also involve international guarantees. Historically, neutralized states have been rarely demilitarized. Demilitarization simply deprives the inhabitants of an area of organized military force; it does not - as neutralization, if it fulfills its basic function, does - control the actions of other states towards the area involved or neutralize the area politically. However, demilitarization of a state or city, or part of a state, may be associated with neutralization.
3. Neutralism is different from neutralization. It connotes a disassociation from the global struggle for influence among the Super Powers and their respective allies. It was primarily a function of, and a reaction to, the Cold War. Neutralist states were strongly critical of this East-West conflict and sought a non-aligned posture only with reference to this conflict. They did not seek to be neutralized and accept the obligations which neutralization entailed.

4. Neutralization is also different from neutrality. Neutralism is similar to neutralism in that it describes the attitude of a state vis-a-vis a conflict — often a military conflict — between other states. It is a policy of non-involvement in current conflicts. It is not, like neutralization, concerned with preventing, moderating, or terminating intrastate coercion. Unlike neutralism, however, neutrality is a legal status as well as a diplomatic or political posture. It could be said that neutralization means permanent neutrality, rather than neutrality only in the time of a declared state of conflict. 27

The function of neutralization is, then, to bolster international order, to regulate intrastate coercion, to leave the settlement of international disputes involving a neutralized state to the play of accepted international norms and institutions and to diplomacy. From the point of view of the neutralized state, the effect of neutralization is to support its military security and its political and territorial integrity. From the viewpoint of the guarantor states with a strong and competitive interest in the status of the neutralized area, neutralization may restrain or stop them from engaging in military actions which are costly in various ways, above all, those which threaten to escalate into a major and dangerous war between themselves. 28

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27 These definitions are based upon the formulations found in Black, n. 2, pp. xi-xvii. Also see Peter Lyon, War and Peace in Southeast Asia (London, 1969), pp. 169-76 and his Neutralism (Leicester, 1963); A.W. Stargardt's "Neutrality within the Asian System of Powers" and Philippe Devillers's "A Neutralised Southeast Asia?", in Lau Teik Soon, ed., New Directions in the International Relations of Southeast Asia: The Great Powers and Southeast Asia (Singapore, 1979); and Dick Wilson, The Neutralization of Southeast Asia (New York, 1976).

28 Black, n. 2, p. xv.
Neutralization is thus defined "as permanent and guaranteed neutrality". It is a precise legal concept as distinct from neutralism and non-alignment, which are political terms. "Neutralism" and "non-alignment" came into use in the context of bipolarity, the Cold War, and "the emergence of post-colonial states". Neutralization, if agreed upon, also makes provision for some enforcement machinery, like the International Control Commission in the case of Laos. It, therefore, follows that the independence of, and the scope for initiative in the foreign policy of the neutralized state are restricted to a considerable extent by neutralization. Indeed we may even say that "a neutralized state withdraws from international politics".

As for the specifics of the proposal for neutralization, Malaysia is vague. To insist on details even before the proposal has been accepted in principle is likely to generate controversy and thus prove counterproductive. Taking the proposal in its broad outline, we may say that, if the Big Powers agree to the proposal, it would be their obligation not only to honour the status and integrity of the neutralized state but also to come to the help of the latter in the event of its status and integrity being violated by any Power. It

30 Black, n. 2, pp. xi-xii.
31 Ott, n. 29, pp. 3-4.
32 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 24 March 1971.
would also mean, as noted above, that the Big Powers should exclude the region from their politics. Neutralization would entail elimination of foreign military bases and alliances from the region. Statements by Malaysia lack clarity inasmuch as they do not say whether the guarantee would be a merely verbal commitment or whether an enforcement mechanism would be necessary.

**Problems of Neutralization**

In taking the initiative for neutralization Malaysia seems to have had before it the experience of Vietnam. Vietnam shows that foreign intervention in support of a Government, however strong, cannot be a substitute for popular support at home. External military and economic support for a regime, on whatever scale, "can easily serve to insulate it from political and economic realities and render it insensitive to the social forces with which in the long run it must come to terms if it is to survive on its own". Besides, in Malaysia the insurgents have always claimed to have been fighting for nationalism. Foreign intervention can, therefore, be counterproductive. In the event of a civil war, the involvement of outside forces on behalf of the Government would raise serious doubt about the nationalist legitimacy of the regime and provide increasing strength to the rebels.

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There are many hurdles in the way of neutralization of Southeast Asia. The attitude of the Southeast Asian states towards the People's Republic of China and the perception of China's future role in the region pose a big problem. The response of the Southeast Asian countries to the proposal of neutralization is an important factor to be reckoned with. In other words, a question can be posed: How strong is the desire of these states for the neutralization programme? For the purposes of this study certain difficult problems can be identified. If solved, they might prepare the ground for the creation of a neutralized Southeast Asia. They are as follows: (1) The problem of guarantees by the Big Powers; (2) the problem of the Straits of Malacca; (3) the problem of insurgencies; and (4) the problem of neutralization within ASEAN.

Involvement of the Big Powers in the international affairs of the region is the most intricate of the problems of peace and security in Southeast Asia. The numerous military conflicts that have shaken the Southeast Asian region in the post-war years, especially the Indo-Chinese conflict, are not the product of any Southeast Asian dispute, but the result of the machinations of certain external Powers intent on achieving their own ends. The first lesson to be drawn from the Indo-Chinese conflict is that for the attainment of regional peace and stability, Southeast Asia should be made free from the rivalries and conflicts of the Big Powers. The second lesson is that military alliances
with external Powers contain in themselves the germ of warfare, not of security. They largely benefit the Big Powers, not the dependent states. The basic question, however, is: Would the Big Powers agree to abide by a neutralization scheme which protects their economic interests in a region to the exclusion of their political and military involvement? It is against this background that the attitudes of three Big Powers – the United States, the Soviet Union, and China – towards the neutralization of Southeast Asia need to be examined.

Whenever an area or a country is neutralized, the guarantor state or states play an important role. It is they who take the initiative in concluding, maintaining, and terminating treaties. However, the procedure by which Southeast Asia is to be neutralized has not been spelt out so far by the states concerned. According to some people, it would be enough if the guarantor states make a statement of individual support for the Kuala Lumpur Declaration at the United Nations. Another question that arises here is: Who are to be the guarantor Powers? Statements made by the leaders of Malaysia on neutralization suggest that they want the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China to be the principal guarantor Powers. Of course, any discussion of the problem of guarantees would be entirely academic if the Super Powers are not genuinely interested in the neutralization of Southeast Asia. The attitudes of the

34 Black, n. 2, p. 36.
35 Sopiee, n. 18, p. 11.
Soviet Union and the United States have not been positive so far. Indeed the United States has been the most "unresponsive". This is clear from the fact that the United States was a party to the violation of Laotian neutrality. Apart from the negative reaction of the United States to the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, there is the evidence afforded by the Nixon Doctrine, the essential elements of which are defence, self-sufficiency, a regional military alliance, and a nuclear guarantee by the United States. In 1971, before the Kuala Lumpur Declaration was made public, American diplomats had warned that isolationist elements in the United States might exploit an "excessively" neutralist declaration. They had said that too much emphasis on neutralization would make extension of material support to the non-Communist countries of Southeast Asia difficult. In view of its huge investments in the Southeast Asian region, the United States is unlikely to guarantee neutralization. However, there are some Southeast Asians who believe that neutralization would serve US interests too. According to Goh Cheng Teik, many Filipinos and Thais were not in favour of the dissolution of the American-led defence system in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Says he:

36 Lau Teik Soon, "Malaysia and the Neutralization of Southeast Asia", in Patrick Low, ed., Trends in Malaysia (Singapore, 1971), p. 29.

37 James Morgan, "Peace in Their Time -- and Terms?", Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), vol. 74, 4 December 1971, p. 5.
Nevertheless, there is one way in which the United States can reconcile her new perception of China's stance with the requirements of Thai and Filipino security, namely the neutralization of Southeast Asia as proposed by the Malaysian government. The United States does not need to isolate herself from a neutralized Southeast Asia. On the contrary, she will be asked to stay, to play a great power role in concert with Russia and China in order to ensure that the neutralized status of all the Southeast Asian States is not violated - either by intra-regional and/or extra-regional forces.

The Soviet response to neutralization has not been very sympathetic either. Being a Super Power pursuing a foreign policy characterized by a global reach, the Soviet Union has naturally evinced much interest in Southeast Asia and has demonstrated its anxiety to strengthen its presence there by deploying a naval task force in the Straits of Malacca and the Indian Ocean and by setting up embassies in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Rangoon, and Jakarta. Southeast Asia's sea lanes connect the Black Sea with the Russian port of Vladivostock. This constitutes the only lifeline between the eastern and western coasts of the Soviet Union. As early as October 1970, the Red Star had expressed itself critically about Malaysia's neutralization proposal on the ground that Malaysia had simultaneously sought for joint defence arrangements with the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. The Soviet Union has, besides, its own scheme for the security of Asia - the Asian collective security.

38 Goh Chang Teik, "The United States and Southeast Asia: Past, Present and Future", in Lau Teik Soon, n. 27, p. 102.
system. It regards Southeast Asia as a region where "both Chinese and American influence can be and should be contained". China has criticized the Soviet proposal for collective security as an "anti-China military alliance ... picked up from the garbage heap of the warmonger Dulles". The Soviet Union, however, continues to adhere to its collective defence idea.

In 1973 Ghazali bin Shafie summed up the official Malaysian assessment of the Soviet position when he stated:

The Soviet Union ... appears to be moving in the Pacific region with a design and a purpose. This may be because she has never really played a role in the Pacific or because there is a clear and undivided focus of attention and interest brought about by the Sino-Soviet dispute. Because of the Sino-Soviet dispute, however, Soviet interest and activities are invariably analysed within that perspective. It would seem that any Soviet initiative that is designed or even only as to appear to further the Soviet cause in the dispute is not likely to gain the support of countries in the region. This factor is unfortunate because the Soviet Union has much to contribute to the development of the region.

The Soviet collective security system has not evoked support from most Southeast Asian states. As President Suharto of Indonesia put it as early as 1973: "We want ASEAN to strengthen regional independence and avoid having this area become a regional cockpit. Therefore, we automatically reject the Brezhnev Doctrine."

42 Malaysian Digest (Kuala Lumpur), 31 October 1973, p. 10.
Tun Razak paid a visit to the Soviet Union in 1972 and conferred with Kosygin. The Soviet Union, while appreciating the Malaysian plan for neutralization of the region, reiterated its own proposal for a collective security system for Asia. The Malaysian side sought to highlight the "essence of the proposal for the neutralization of Southeast Asia". The Soviet Union suggested that there was a similarity between the idea of neutralization as suggested by Malaysia and the idea of collective security as advocated by itself. Razak, however, made it clear that "to bring in the big countries in Asia into such a scheme will be to bring in problems which we small nations may find difficult to resolve". The Soviet proposal for a collective defence arrangement appeared to him to be fundamentally incompatible with neutralization.

In 1978 the Soviet Union violated the concept of neutralization of Southeast Asia when it signed a military agreement with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and provided military support to the latter in its intervention in Kampuchea in 1979.

The People's Republic of China has supported the neutralization proposal. China has all along been a factor in Southeast Asian politics. This is so because of the presence of a sizable section of overseas Chinese in the

44 *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 6 October 1972. Also see *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, vol. 5, no. 3, September 1972.

45 *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 4 and 6 October 1972.
region, the historical links, and the nature of Chinese interests. China's success in developing nuclear and missile capabilities has increased the concern of the Southeast Asian states. In Malaysian thinking China cannot be denied a voice in regional affairs in view of its size, geographical location, and growing power. Of all the global Powers, China has the most security interests in Southeast Asia. It is, therefore, interested in ensuring that the political and military presence of any other Big Power in Southeast Asia does not threaten its interests in the region.

Early in 1971 Tun Razak stated:

... Malaysia for its part accepts the fact that China has a right to play her part in international forums, and to have an interest in the affairs of Asia. Our support for China's membership of the United Nations and, in particular, our proposal for the neutralization of Southeast Asia are clear manifestations of this belief.

But we cannot accept or tolerate any form of interference in our internal affairs, which we shall resist to the best of our ability. In the interest of our own survival we have a right to call on the assistance of anyone wishing to assist us. This surely cannot be denied....

But China too has to reassure of her intentions and her policies. Of course the accumulation of years of bitterness, frustrations, and fear cannot be overcome overnight. We will require much patience. We will need to move step by step, feeling our way carefully in a matter which, so far as the countries of Southeast Asia are concerned, involves our very survival. 46

However, what Chiang Kai Ding, a former Singapore High Commissioner in Malaysia, once said underlines the attitude of some of the Southeast Asian states towards China. He said: "While China seems to have matured as a power vis-a-vis the

46 *Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 16 January 1971.
great powers, it nevertheless continues to serve as a source of inspiration for revolutionary communist forces in our region.""

In 1974, when Tun Abdul Razak visited China, Chou En-lai stated:

The Malaysian Government's position for the establishment of a zone of peace and neutrality in Southeast Asia gives expression to the desire of Southeast Asian peoples to shake off foreign interference and has won support from many Third World countries. The Chinese people sincerely wish the Malaysian people still greater victories on their road of advance. 48

This shows that China supports the neutralization proposal. The question that arises here is: Is China capable of playing the role of a guarantor or policeman in the event of neutralization? Lee Kuan Yew answered this question when he remarked: "China has expressed its support, but it would first need to develop a blue-water fleet to make such a guarantee meaningful." The fact that China's naval and air strength cannot match that of the United States or the Soviet Union could come in the way of getting the three Powers to agree to act as guarantors of a neutral Southeast Asia. However, in spite of Chinese support for the neutralization proposal and in the light of the recent Chinese action in Vietnam, it is difficult to say how China would behave in

47 Chiang Hai Ding, "Southeast Asian Perceptions of the Future of the Region", in Lau Teik Soon, n. 27, p. 25.
49 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 28 May 1973.
Southeast Asia in the event of neutralization.

The second hurdle in the way of neutralization is the issue of Malacca. If we examine the interests of the three Great Powers in the region, we shall find that "their interests are basically strategic and, in a sense, negative and that it is part of the big power game to establish spheres of influence and, therefore, to desire to ensure that countries in the region, if not hostile to others, would be friendly to them." The strategic importance of the Straits of Malacca cannot be exaggerated. This important waterway has always been a focus of international contention and controversy. This is an area where an internationally guaranteed neutralization would affect the strategic interests of the Great Powers.

The controversy over the Straits is due to three important factors. The first is the claim of the straits states, Indonesia and Malaysia, to the right to control traffic in the Straits as against the demand of the maritime Powers for freedom to go through, under, and over the Straits. The second is the November 1971 accord between Indonesia and Malaysia, which Singapore merely noted, apparently without approval. The third is the joint declaration made by Indonesia and Malaysia in 1969 extending their territorial waters to twelve nautical miles.

Being coastal states, Indonesia and Malaysia jointly assert their sovereignty over the Straits. They stress the

50 Zain Azraai, "Neutralization and Southeast Asia", in Lau Teik Soon, n. 27, p. 132.
need to control pollution in the Straits and to exercise strict control in the matter of navigational safety. Besides, they seek to explore and own the resources of the sea-bed. They also regard control over the Straits of Malacca as vital to their security.

The Indonesian-Malaysian claim of sovereignty over the Straits of Malacca has been rejected by the Great maritime Powers - the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and others - on the ground that it is not in conformity with international law. It may, however, be noted that in the Third Law of the Sea Conference the coastal states and the maritime Powers have agreed to permit transit passage and have thus worked out an adjustment of their mutual interests. Nevertheless, considering the naval and nuclear strategies of the two Super Powers, it is doubtful whether international recognition of the neutralization plan and guarantee from the Super Powers would at all be forthcoming.

The third obstacle in the way of the neutralization of Southeast Asia is the problems posed by the frequent insurgencies. These insurgencies, which often attract external intervention, are of two kinds: (1) insurgencies influenced by a religious ideology, as in Southern Thailand (by Thai-Muslims)

51 In the Law of the Sea Conference a proposal made by the United Kingdom on transit passage was adopted. Malaysia's attempt to force through some amendments seeking to preserve the interests of the straits states failed. The straits states were prevailed upon not to insist on the amendments. See Commodore O.P. Sharma, "Navigation through International Straits", in Ram Prakash Anand, Law of the Sea: Caracas and Beyond (New Delhi, 1973), p. 135.
and in the southern part of the Philippines (by Filipino Muslims); and (2) insurgencies influenced and inspired by the Communist ideology, as in Malaysia and in some other countries of the Southeast Asian region. Insurgencies inspired by the philosophy of revolutionary armed struggle preached by the Communists constitute the more difficult problem. This problem can be solved only through a radical implementation of socio-economic programmes so as to meet the aspirations of the masses. Such programmes have not so far been taken up for implementation on a large enough scale.

Some of the Southeast Asian states which have military alliances with outside Powers (particularly with anchor Powers) either at the bilateral level or at the multilateral level are not prepared to abandon their defence ties (external). This is so because they are not in a position to tackle the problems posed by the insurgencies without external aid or support. For example, it is doubtful whether the Philippines, which faces a security problem from armed Muslim insurgents in its southern islands and also from the Communist Party, is at all sincere in its support for the attainment of neutralization. Besides, the Philippine elite are closely linked to the United States and are consequently more likely to seek help from the latter to quell rebellions than to ask all external Powers to keep out of the region.

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52 Murugesu Pathmanathan, "Conflict Management in Southeast Asia: A Neutralized Malaysia", in Murugesu Pathmanathan, ed., Readings in Malaysian Foreign Policy (Kuala Lumpur, 1976).
Yet another relevant aspect of the problems posed by the insurgencies is that the neutralization plan is regarded in certain circles as an instrument of the status quo. The leaders of the various insurgencies have criticized the Malaysian proposal for neutralization. On 17 April 1971 the Voice of Malayan Revolution called the proposal to get the Big Powers to guarantee the neutrality of Southeast Asia a by-product of the Nixon Doctrine. It described Razak's policy of non-alignment as a cover for the service he was doing to imperialism by opposing "Communism, the people, and China".

In any consideration of the problems posed by the insurgencies in Southeast Asia, the attitude of the People's Republic of China to "liberation wars" (People's Wars as Mao Tse-tung called them) will have to be taken into account. The clandestine radio station, the Voice of Malayan Revolution, which is believed to be operating from some place on Chinese territory, beams propaganda on behalf of the Communist insurgents in Malaysia. The Voice of the Malayan Revolution and the Voice of the People of Burma have severely criticized the Malaysian proposal for neutralisation. Some of the regimes in Southeast Asia believe that China has given asylum to the leaders of the various Communist parties

in Southeast Asia. China's secret support for the Communist insurgencies in the region does not square with its open endorsement of the neutralization proposal.

Neutralization and the ASEAN States

Having explained the idea of neutralization to the world, Malaysia directed its diplomatic efforts towards its four ASEAN partners - Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. As stated above, the basic objective of neutralization is spelt out in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration of November 1971. The Declaration says: "Efforts should be made to secure recognition for Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality." The committee of senior

54 U Ba Thein Tin, the first Vice-Chairman of the Communist Party of Burma, and Yusuf Adjutorop, a leading Central Committee member of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), are believed to be residing in China. Chin Peng, Chairman of the Communist Party of Malaya, is believed to be moving back and forth between China and Southern Thailand.

55 On 16 December 1978 the People's Daily (Peking) welcomed the "proposal put forth by ASEAN" for making Southeast Asia a "Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality" and accused Vietnam of seeking to use the aims of "genuine independence, peace, and neutrality" as a counterpoise to the neutralization proposal. Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay), 20 January 1979.

56 "Kuala Lumpur Declaration, 27 November 1971" in 10 Year ASEAN (Jakarta, 1978), p. 11. The "Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality" is acrostically expressed as ZOPFAN by the Wisma Putra (Malaysian Foreign Office). There is a separate division in the Wisma Putra called ZOPFAN.
officials (SEOM), which met on 11-13 May 1972 and again on
6-8 July 1972, examined the proposal and agreed on a
definition of the zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality.
According to its:

A Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality exists
where the national identity, independence, and
integrity of the individual states within such
a zone can be preserved and maintained, so that
they can achieve national development and well-
being and promote regional co-operation and
solidarity, in accordance with the ideals and
aspirations of their peoples and the purposes
and principles of the United Nations Charter,
free from any form or manner of interference by
outside powers. 57

The Bali summit meeting of ASEAN heads of State and
Government 1976 was a landmark in ASEAN co-operation: for the
first time the member states agreed there to discuss politico-
security matters. They declared that "each member state
resolves to eliminate threats posed by subversion to its
stability, thus strengthening national and ASEAN resilience". 58

57 Current Notes on International Relations (Canberra),

58 "Declaration of ASEAN Concord", 10 Year ASEAN, n. 56,
pp. 111-15. On 23 February 1976, Datuk Hussein Onn,
who took over as the Prime Minister after the death of
Tun Razak, declared: "For our part, we in Malaysia are
fundamentally geared to the politics of co-operation.
Internationally, we seek the creation of a new
international system based on peace, order, and justice.
We feel that we can best contribute to this process by a
policy of true non-alignment. It is a policy that is as
valid and vital today in a world fraught with the dangers
of great power hegemonism - politically, economically and
militarily - as it was when the world was split ideologi-
cally between East and West. Malaysia will not be a party
to international confrontation and rivalries. Our values
of freedom and democracy, we shall defend at all costs.
But we also stand ready to co-operate with all countries,
irrespective of political ideology or social system, on
the basis of mutual respect and friendship." Federal
Department of Information, Malaysia 1976: Official
Yearbook (Kuala Lumpur), vol. 16 (1976).
This clearly shows that there is agreement among them as to the source of insecurity. The Bali summit also agreed on the line of action to be taken by the member states. Thus the heads of State called for "continuation of co-operation on a non-ASEAN basis between the member states in security matters in accordance with mutual needs and interests". Besides, the ASEAN concord declared that "member states, individually or collectively, shall take active steps for early establishment of the zone of peace, freedom and neutrality".

The five member states of ASEAN ratified the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in Southeast Asia. Indeed this was the high point of the Bali summit. To Malaysia the treaty constituted a significant step towards the attainment of a Southeast Asian zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality — still a long-term goal of its foreign policy. The preamble of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in Southeast Asia, which was also signed at the Bali summit, states that settlement of disputes between the ASEAN countries should be guided by rational, effective, and flexible means. Article 11 provides that the parties

... shall strengthen their respective national resilience in their political, economic, socio-cultural as well as security fields in conformity with their respective ideals and aspirations, free from external interference as well as internal subversive activities in order to preserve their respective national identities.

59 10 Year ASEAN, n. 56, pp. 111-16.
60 Ibid., pp. 118-19. Emphasis added.
Success of neutralization would depend to a great extent on the success of regionalism. In a sense, successful regional co-operation and ASEAN solidarity is a *sine qua non* of neutralization or a zone of peace. Indeed, as Tun Razak once put it, ASEAN is "the solid foundation for the realization of the neutralization proposal".

Here it would be useful to discuss the reactions of the four ASEAN states - Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand - to the Malaysian proposal for neutralization. The reactions of these states to the proposal have been varied. The comments made on their behalf show that they look upon the proposal with some scepticism. Neutralization is not likely to be of any interest to a state which is eager to play a "major role in international politics". Whether all the states of Southeast Asia would accept this implication of the neutralization of the region is open to doubt. Indonesia perceives for itself a major role in the region and an active role in international politics. It is the largest and most populous nation not only in the ASEAN area but also in the whole of Southeast Asia. It is a large country with vast natural resources and potential wealth. Its position thus limits the attraction of neutrality for it.

62 Black, n. 2, p. 151.
63 A.W. Stargardt, "Neutrality within the Asian System of Powers", Lau Teik Soon, n. 27, p. 110,
Indonesia feels that to have China as a guarantor of the neutralization of Southeast Asia would mean "recognizing the right of China to shape the regional order of Southeast Asia". It accuses China of having supported the abortive PKI coup of 1965. Its suspicion of China has not diminished over the years. In March 1972 President Suharto stated that guaranteed neutrality should not mean protection by the Big Powers. Guaranteed protection, according to him, would amount to another form of "collective colonialism" for the whole of Southeast Asia. Indonesia has not shown much confidence about the Big Powers arriving at an accord on such a complex matter as guaranteeing the neutralization of an important region like Southeast Asia. Adam Malik once made the comment that even if an agreement were achieved, it would "prove as brittle and unstable as the inter-relationship between the major powers themselves". Indonesia is interested instead in

64 Yong Mun Cheang, "Power Relationship within a Neutralized Southeast Asia", Southeast Asian Affairs (Singapore, 1974), p. 11.

65 Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 16 March 1972. The same daily said later in an editorial that Indonesia interpreted the conditions of neutralization as a new form of collective colonialism inasmuch as the Southeast Asian states would be required to fulfill certain obligations towards the Big Powers. Ibid., 25 June 1973. For instance, if neutralization was to be realized, the neutralized states of Southeast Asia would be required to observe impartiality and refrain from involvement in any form of conflict within or outside the zone. See Current Notes on International Affairs, October 1972, pp. 501-2.

peace and stability coming to the region through the building up of its "indigenous socio-economic strength". It, therefore, concentrates on the task of developing national and regional "resilience" with a view to achieving regional stability.

As for Singapore, it has expressed reservations about neutralization notwithstanding its endorsement of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration. Rajaratnam, Singapore's Foreign Minister, remarked years ago: "We are all agreed on the concept itself. To be quite frank, we all have different approaches to this goal," Singapore feels that, now that the Vietnam War is over, there is need for a balance of power and that such a balance of power could be achieved by allowing the Big Powers equal access to economic and political interests in Southeast Asia. Consistently with this approach, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew proposed in May 1973 the establishment of a special joint naval task force in Southeast Asia on which Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, and the United States would all be represented so as to thwart all attempts by China and the Soviet Union to dominate Southeast Asian waters. This proposal by Lee did not elicit any response from Malaysia or Indonesia. Singapore is clear

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., no. 74, 4 December 1971, p. 5.
69 V.H. Nair, "Suharto Silent on Lee's Move for Naval Task Force", The Statesman (New Delhi), 30 May 1973. On another occasion Lee told the visiting Yugoslav Prime Minister: "For small countries the question now is not how to avoid being sucked into the warring camps of the two big powers, but how to have their interests taken into consideration when the great powers reach their compromises." Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 18 March 1973.
that China poses a serious threat to the security of the Southeast Asian countries. It, therefore, regards US withdrawal from the region with concern. It asks the question: Is not security more likely to be safeguarded by allowing a countervailing presence of several Big Powers than by seeking to exclude them, i.e. by means of a balance of power than through neutralization?

Singapore’s apprehensions about China and its concern about US withdrawal are shared by Thailand and the Philippines. These two ASEAN partners have entered into a military alliance with the United States, and they consider this alliance to be vital to their security. President Marcos of the Philippines is emphatic in his assessment of the need for US military presence in Southeast Asia, although his country has endorsed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration. It is relevant in this context to note that the Philippines has not altogether waived its claim to the Malaysian State of Sabah so far.

In the light of this analysis, we might conclude that the proposal for the neutralization of Southeast Asia has

70 The Mirror (Singapore), vol. 7, no. 49, 6 December 1971, p. 1.

71 Yong Min Cheong, n. 64, pp. 13-14.

72 President Marcos of the Philippines continues to declare from time to time that his country would "take steps" to "eliminate" the Philippine claim to Sabah. He has said this so often that the Wisma Putra (Malaysian Foreign Office) officials even refuse to discuss it seriously. See Far Eastern Economic Review, Asia Year Book, 1972 (Hong Kong), p. 241.
thrown up a number of problems which are by no means easy to solve. The prospects for neutralization are, therefore, bleak. If the security of any state in Southeast Asia is threatened, it may seek help from outside Powers rather than from within the region in view of the fact that the Big Powers are endowed with superior technology and military strength. It would appear as though the presence of the Big Powers - economic, political, and military - was likely to increase, and the potentialities for conflict were also likely to grow rather than diminish.

And yet the neutralization proposal is significant inasmuch as it reflects Malaysia's anxiety to pursue an independent foreign policy. As noted earlier, the Malaysian leaders view the proposal for a neutralized zone in the context of their deep concern for their country's security. Tun Razak knew that the neutralization proposal with its emphasis on the exclusion of interference by the Big Powers in regional politics would appeal to nationalist sentiment at home. Tunku Abdul Rahman's policy, which was pro-Western and anti-Peking, had never achieved the same popularity. The neutralization proposal also appeals to the divergent sections of Malaysian opinion - the Chinese, the Malays, and the "Young Turks" within the Alliance Party (from 1974 onwards Barisan Nasional or the National Front). Thus neutralisation is a link between the domestic and foreign policies of Malaysia.