CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Historically speaking the Soviet Union is one of the major states which has advocated the cause of cooperation among the states. One of the fundamental principles of Soviet foreign policy, as enunciated by Lenin, was peaceful co-existence among the states. In practical terms the Soviet foreign policy aimed at cooperation and friendly relations among the states of diverse socio-economic formations and the non-use of force. In the thirties Soviet advocacy of collective security in Europe was a case in point. Later, in the sixties Soviet policy of peaceful cooperation among states finally led to institutionalization of collective security in Europe, when the famous Helsinki Accord was signed in 1975.

The Soviet Union began to show similar interest in Asia. In 1969, it came out with a formal proposal of collective security in Asia. The main thrust of this proposal was on the non-military cooperation among Asian states, including the Soviet Union. Since then the idea of regional cooperation in Asia has become one of the main thrust of Soviet Asian policy.

The attempt of Asian states for regional cooperation started in 1947, when twenty seven Asian countries met in New Delhi. In this Asian Relations Conference, the idea of regional cooperation was first expressed. Gradually in 1960s many regional associations were formed in Asia, viz. the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC, 1960), Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD, 1964), Association
of Southeast Asia (ASA, 1961), Asia Pacific Council (ASPAC, 1966), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, 1967) and Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC, 1968). Though the Soviet Union was in favour of the regional cooperation, the advent of these regional associations posed a challenge to the Soviet foreign policy. In fact, after the second world war, she had to cope with the anti-communist organizations, such as, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Therefore, the formation of the indigenous regional organizations in Asia, like ASEAN which included some of the members of the anti-communist pacts in Asia created an entirely new situation for the Soviet Union to deal with.

We began our study by attempting to define and discuss Soviet policy framework for regional cooperation in Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular. Our main concern here has been to understand the ideas and concepts relevant for Soviet foreign policy in general and cooperation among states of different social system in particular. Thereafter, we discussed the actual reality in Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular. Both these aspects were taken as interlinked, so as to see how ideas and concepts actually sought to be implemented by Soviet policy makers in the concrete realities of Southeast Asia in the sixties and beyond.

In this connection we have also examined the historical development of Soviet policy towards regional cooperation in Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular. Thus the first two chapters of our study helped us to understand the framework of Soviet policy which is relevant for understanding Soviet views, postures and attitudes concerning regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Here the framework appears to be determined by inter-relationship between two constant factors viz., ideology and reality. Various policy postures
adopted by the Soviet policy on the problem of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia by its consistent preoccupation which is striking a balance between ideology and reality. Various changes in policies towards the ASEAN thus can be easily explained. We find that the primary objective of such a framework was directed towards creation of non-military cooperation outside the sphere of influence of Western powers. Further, we find that in Soviet view such a cooperation must be economic, based on good neighbourly relations under Soviet patronage. The primacy of Soviet role in Southeast Asia thus emerges as a practical concern of Soviet policy makers in Southeast Asia.

The detailed analysis of Soviet policy towards the ASEAN during the period 1967 to 1985 shows that the Soviet policy towards ASEAN has gone through various phases and stages; each of these phases and stages was deeply affected by the concrete situation developing in Southeast Asia, policies and postures of ASEAN member states, and bilateral Soviet relations with each one of them. On the other hand there has been remarkable consistency in the pursuit of main objective viz., the creation of the non-military and non-Western oriented ASEAN, drawing closer towards the Soviet Union directly or indirectly through its only ally in the region viz., Vietnam.

The first stage of Soviet policy towards ASEAN during 1967-71 may be considered as a probing phase. For, after all the establishment of ASEAN, which included such staunch traditional military allies of United States as Thailand and the Philippines as well as a distinctive common anti-communist orientation of all its five members was a novel experience for the Soviet policy makers in Asia. However, a positive factor here was that the ASEAN was not strictly a collective armed alliance like NATO or SEATO directed against Soviet Union and its allies. On the contrary it was conceived as a culmination of the
natural urge of smaller Southeast Asian states to play a more effective role on common issues concerning them.

Hence, we find during this phase, after initial doubts and suspicion of the aims and objectives of ASEAN, the Soviet Union after initial reluctance began to take interest in ASEAN. A clear example here was the emphasis on bilateral relations with ASEAN member states. However, Soviet policy during this period remained at a low key.

The second stage covering most of the years of seventies may be viewed as a period of genuine Soviet interest in ASEAN and various regional issues which the organization initiated and supported. It was a period of active Soviet policy towards ASEAN. Our study has shown that a number of important factors led to development of such a Soviet policy. First of all there was the period of detente among the two Super Powers followed by the emergence of a unified Vietnam gaining in strength through Soviet support and alliance. We find that the Soviet Union was interested in ASEAN to include Vietnam and develop its own bilateral relations with ASEAN member states. It was also the period when the ASEAN states did not react very unfavourably to the increasing Soviet interest in the region. For this, they saw an opportunity to balance the US stakes in the region and to face its immediate giant neighbour communist China. However, Soviet role in the region had its own self-imposed limitations because after all it was not yet capable of standing upto the USA or to the China. Soviet policy appeared to be satisfied by keeping intact the non-military orientation of ASEAN and by continuing to develop its own bilateral relations.

The year 1979 was a watershed in Soviet policy towards ASEAN and it heralded a new stage of Soviet policy towards it. The analysis of chapter Five explains how the international situation in Southeast Asia...
drastically worsened as a result of Vietnam's role in Indochina states, Sino-Vietnamese conflict and above all the beginning of a new cold war in international affairs with the two Super Powers once again reigned against each other almost directly. We find that the Soviet Union took a critical view of ASEAN's role in the region and showed apprehension had began to tilt towards military orientation, under US patronage, actively helped and abetted by a hostile communist China, mainly directed against its main ally in the region Vietnam.

The first half of 1980's was marked by a critical, often hostile Soviet policy towards ASEAN. The discussion also explains how the ASEAN member states were also no less responsible in contributing to such a Soviet policy by adopting hostile and unfriendly postures towards Vietnam. Indeed from the seventies onwards Vietnam has emerged as a key factor in Soviet policy towards ASEAN. Inspite of these unfavourable developments we have shown how the Soviet Union did not entirely write off ASEAN, when it continued to develop its bilateral relations with ASEAN member states. Thus it is logical to conclude that the main thrust of Soviet policy towards ASEAN has always continued to be a development of bilateral relations with member states with a view to lessening their traditional dependence on the West and Japan. Besides, Sino-Soviet rivalry in the region may also be seen as a contributing factor to pulling off Soviet relations with ASEAN as a regional organization.

By the close of the year 1985 it began to be seen that the new leadership in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev was poised for a change of better relationship with ASEAN. However, the actual policy began to be operative after 1985 and this is beyond the scope of this study.

How one should take an overall view of Soviet policy towards ASEAN during the period under review, 1967-1985? First of all it may
safely be concluded that it was a novel experience for the Soviet Union to deal with an organization like ASEAN. ASEAN was not a military alliance like NATO, yet could not have been created and developed without active patronage of the USA and Japan; moreover, its very survival also depended on support and encouragement from communist China. On the other hand, it also symbolised an urge for cooperation among the smaller states to assert their role in international affairs concerning the region and keep the outside powers from overt interference and domination.

Hence, for the Soviet Union, ASEAN had positive and negative features. Therefore, there was a zig-zag in Soviet policy towards ASEAN and its various stages and phases of development can be seen in such a nature of ASEAN as perceived by Soviet policy makers. On the whole one may argue that the Soviet Union is enriched its experience in dealing with the urge for cooperation among states in Asia. Such an experience may be considered as not entirely unwelcome to the objective of Soviet policy in Asia as well as on the very development of international politics in the region. Had the Soviet Union not gained such an experience, Gorbachev's new thinking in international politics and his policy on Asia-Pacific, as unfolded during later half of the eighties, perhaps would have been more problematic. What thus stands out is, the remarkable consistency in the commitment of the Soviet Union to the goal of cooperation among states with diverse social systems, regionally and globally.