CHAPTER V

SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS ASEAN, 1979-1985

Our study in the previous chapter has shown that the Soviet Union succeeded in establishing friendly relations with all the ASEAN countries by 1978. The leaders of the five ASEAN states visited the USSR and discussed many regional and international problems concerning them. Soviet leaders also visited the ASEAN countries. Moreover, the Soviet Union cast a positive view of ASEAN proposal for Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, and recognised ASEAN as a regional organization. It could be seen that detente period was perfectly utilised by the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia.

In this chapter of our study, we shall analyse the political and international conditions and investigate how these gradually pushed the ASEAN countries and the USSR away. The period from 1979-85 saw the Soviet Union and the ASEAN countries at the opposite sides of the road. Vietnam's action in Kampuchea, Soviet Union's massive involvement in Vietnam, refugee problem in the region, and above all, presence of Soviet army in Afghanistan, all contributed to the strained relations between them and evoked criticism of each other.

Changed Political Conditions in Southeast Asia

With the end of the seventies the period of detente was over and the symptoms of the new cold war were marked. International conditions generally, and the political conditions in Southeast Asia
particularly, changed since 1979. The relations between the USA and the USSR, as well as between the USSR and the PRC were embittered due to Vietnam's military action in Kampuchea. Pol Pot government of Kampuchea was overthrown and with the help of Vietnam, Heng Samrin government came to power there in 1979. This aroused sharp reaction of the regional powers and the big powers, involved in Southeast Asia. In 1979 one more controversial event took place in Asia. At the request of the new socialist government of Afghanistan, the Soviet military entered in Afghanistan in December 1979. This Soviet act was condemned by the ASEAN countries along with other Asian countries. In fact, Vietnam and the Soviet Union both are the socialist countries and their action in the bordering states had an adverse affect on the smaller Asian countries. They doubted the motives of the stronger socialist countries. On the other hand, the US, the PRC and Japan also criticised Vietnamese action in Kampuchea and the Soviet role in Afghanistan. They tried to exploit this crisis condition to their own advantage.

As it has been stated before, in November 1978 the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the SRV. According to this treaty both the signatories agreed to consult each other in case of a threat from a third power and "take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard the peace and security of the two countries." Therefore when Vietnamese army entered into Kampuchea and overthrew the Pol Pot regime, the Soviet Union supported the action.

1. Article 6 of the treaty reads that "in case either party is attacked, the two parties signatory to the treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating that threat, and shall take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and security of the two countries". *International Affairs*, (Moscow), No.1, 1979, pp.146-47.
In fact, Vietnam was a new born state and for its secured existence it was in need of Soviet help and support. On the other hand, to fulfil its aims in the pacific region and in Northeast Asia, the Soviet Union was in need of a friendly Vietnam. Here one should try to visualise limitations to the Soviet power in Northeast and Southeast Asia. In Northeast Asia a normalization of Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations was against its interests. Besides, in Southeast Asia, except Laos and Vietnam, none of the countries was pro-Soviet. Even Vietnam did not agree to provide base facilities to the Soviet navy prior to 1979. Hence, while vietnam found herself more dependent on Soviet aid after the mid-1978, for the Soviet Union, a friendly Vietnam was of a great strategic value.

International conditions deteriorated further when the Vietnamese success in Kampuchea resulted in the PRC-Vietnam war at the border during mid-February to mid-March 1979. It was a self-restrained invasion by the PRC, which took place to 'teach a lesson to Vietnam', as she had overthrown a pro-Peking regime in Kampuchea.

**ASEAN and the New Indochina Crisis**

All these developments of late seventies, near the border of ASEAN mentioned above, made the ASEAN members cautious and active. These also generated the organization to adopt a common outlook on the international events.

Immediately after Vietnam's action in Kampuchea, the ASEAN countries, arranged a special meeting of ASEAN foreign Ministers in Bangkok on 12 and 13 January 1979. They called "for the immediate and
total withdrawal of the foreign forces from Kampuchean territory". The Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee on the Escalation of the Vietnam-Kampuchea conflict issued a statement in which they welcomed and supported "the convening of the United Nations Security Council to take the necessary and appropriate actions to restore peace, security and stability in Indochina". In mid-February 1979 when the PRC attacked Vietnam, ASEAN again circulated a draft Resolution in the UN Security Council and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Indochina. Thus, the ASEAN played a neutral role during the early stage of this crisis.

The SRVs action in Kampuchea made the ASEAN members doubtful about the SRV and Soviet motives in Southeast Asia. Rajaratnam, Foreign Minister of Singapore, said "that this is the first instance of a whole country being invaded and occupied by a progressive, anti-imperialist third world neighbour". Prime Minister Hussain Onn of Malaysia said that, "we are adopting a wait-and-see attitude". Deputy Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed said that "Malaysia is unhappy about the unrest in Kampuchea because it smacks of political interference". The Philippines was very much "concerned but not worried". Thus the Kampuchean issue remained a matter of discontent between Indochina and the ASEAN members.

2. "ASEAN joint statement issued at the special meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, Bangkok", Documents were collected from The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

3. Statement by the Indonesian Foreign Minister as Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee on the Escalation of the Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict. Ibid.


5. Asia Week (Hongkong), 2 February, 1979, p.18.


In December 1979, at the end of the ASEAN Foreign Minister's meeting in Kuala Lumpur, they decided to send Malaysia's Foreign Minister Tengku Ahmed Rithauddeen to SRV as an ASEAN representative. He was supposed to initiate a direct dialogue with the SRV regarding Kampuchea. But Vietnam was not ready to accept him as an ASEAN representative and criticised ASEAN. The ASEAN members maintained a consensus on the Kampuchean crisis though the degree of vigourness differed. Indonesia and Malaysia did not take a tough anti-Vietnam stand like Thailand. However, none of them recognized Heng Samrin's government and they supported Pol Pot government to retain its seat in the UN.

The ASEAN members were also deeply concerned with the problem of Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam working as an unified bloc against the ASEAN. This new bloc was stronger than the ASEAN and had backing of a super-power like the Soviet Union.

The refugees from Indochina are also a matter of conflict between the ASEAN members and Vietnam. In 1975 when the communists came to power in South Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, the former armymen and policemen, civil servants and businessmen started leaving these countries and took refuge in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Hongkong.

Again, in March 1978, the Vietnamese government took up a programme of socialization of the economy of South Vietnam. In Southern Vietnam, business had been controlled mainly by the Chinese. Therefore their interest was affected and the masses of Chinese left Vietnam for Kampuchea and China. As a matter of fact, this caused a deterioration
of Kampuchea-SRV and Sino-SRV relations. The PRC called off her aid programme to Vietnam in May 1978. Refugee problem became acute after Kampuchea-Vietnam and the Sino-Vietnam wars in 1978-79. In 1979 there were nearly half million refugees in most of the ASEAN countries. The boat people of the South Vietnam (i.e. the refugees) became problem who sailed either into Manila Bay or to the east coast of Malayan peninsula. General Kriangsak of Thailand said that "boat refugees arriving from Vietnam will not be allowed to enter Thai territorial waters". Singapore's Foreign Minister, Rajaratnam maintained that the SRV's refugee policy was part of war plan against the ASEAN. It was the preliminary invasion to pave the way for the final invasion. These refugees were politically and economically burden on the countries of asylum. Moreover, sometimes they helped the communist insurgents on the borders. Again, most of the refugees in 1979 were ethnic Chinese and except Singapore all the ASEAN members had economically powerful Chinese minority. Therefore, these refugees became cause of unrest in the ASEAN countries.

But when the foreign ministers of ASEAN met in 1979 at Bali in Indonesia, they accused Vietnam for creating refugee problem in ASEAN countries, thereby causing de-stablisation in the region. They declared that the problem had created severe political, socio-economic and security problems in the region. They further "agreed that Vietnam


11. Joint Communique, Twelfth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting Bali, Indonesia, 30 June 1979. Material was collected from Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, p.45.
is responsible for the unending exodus of illegal immigrants." These foreign ministers "appealed to the international community to prevail upon Vietnam to stop the exodus." they supported the proposal for the convening of an "international conference on Indochina refugees under the auspices of the UN Secretary General".

There was yet another aspect of this refugee problem. Refugees on the Thai-Kampuchea border were the cause of anxiety for Vietnam and Kampuchea. Both these countries charged that these refugees were used by the countries of asylum as anti-Vietnam and anti-Heng Samrin guerilla forces. Thus both the communist and non-communist countries of Southeast Asia blamed each other for the subversive role played by the refugees.

**Effect of the New Crisis on the Region**

These Kampuchea-Vietnam and PRC-Vietnam conflicts had a significant effect on the international relations of this region. It showed the importance of Soviet support, to an ally. Vietnam could successfully overthrow the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea and establish Heng Samrin's government only due to the Soviet backing. After the war, a series of treaties was signed. In February 1979 the SRV signed a treaty of "Peace Friendship and Cooperation" with Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea. Laos also signed "Cooperation Agreement" with Kampuchea in March 1979. Here let us note that Laos was a signatory of SRV -

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
Laotian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed in July 1977. Therefore, now a net-work of treaties linked Kampuchea and Laos with the SRV which was the dominating partner of these treaties, but herself allied to and dependent on the USSR. In December 1979 a Kampuchean trade mission visited Moscow and signed an agreement for free economic aid with the Soviet Union. In 1979-80 the Soviet Union gave US$ 219 million worth of non-military aid to Kampuchea in grant form.

China-Vietnam war resulted in closer relations between the Soviet Union and Vietnam. This war imposed on the SRV the military and economic burden of a two front security threat. Before 1979, Vietnam refused the USSR the permission to use former American bases as Cam Ranh Bay and Danang. But after the Sino-Vietnamese war the Soviet Union started using these two bases. The Soviet missile cruiser and missile frigate visited the base of Cam Ranh Bay in March 1979. Reports indicate that "electronic surveillance facilities, refuelling installation and maintenance workshops have already been established" in the vicinity of these bases. Thus the sea-lanes through Straits of Malacca and Singapore and around Japan have come under the range of Soviet long range bombers like Backfire bombers operating from Vietnamese bases. Soviet specialists were engaged in Vientiane air base in Laos and Kompong Som harbour in Kampuchea.


17. In September 1980 the Soviet aircraft carrier 'Minsk' also visited Cam Ranh Bay.

Soviet economic assistance to the SRV also increased in late 1970s. American Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Holbrooke estimated it nearly $3 million daily. Thus the economic presence of the Soviet Union also increased in Indochina.

On the other hand, the Soviet naval presence increased in Southeast Asia during the period from 1979 to 85. Inspite of ASEAN objections and their proposal for nationalization of Straits of Malacca and Singapore, the Soviet navy continued its periodical visits to Vietnam. Minsk, the Soviet warship was despatched to the Pacific Fleet in 1979. Again in September 1979, Moscow asked Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia to accept the port calls by two Soviet warships including a helicopter career. But Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia refused the request. After consulting its ASEAN partners the Philippines also refused to receive Soviet warships. Vietnamese ports, Haiphong, Danang and Cam Ranh Bay were freely used by the Soviet navy. Minsk visited Cam Ranh Bay in 1980. A cruiser and two destroyers visited Vietnam in 1979 and again in 1981. The presence of Soviet warships in the region were enough cause to strain relation between the Soviet Union and the ASEAN members. But, as the US navy is already in Subic Bay and the US bases were operative in the Indian Ocean, the ASEAN countries had accepted a balanced presence of Soviet navy in the region. Except these warships the Soviet Union's fishing fleets at present occupy first place among the fishing fleets of all

19. Straits Times (Singapore), 4 April, 1980.
countries. It has been alleged that these non-military fleets were some times put to military use. Therefore ASEAN members suspiciously viewed the motives of big naval powers in the region and for the safety of the region they declared Southeast Asia a nuclear free zone later in 1987.

**ASEAN Stress on ZOPFAN**

Since 1979, the ASEAN members realised that they should work hard for the realisation of ZOPFAN due to the changed international conditions in the region. The joint communique of the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting at Bali in 1979, had stated, "in view of the armed conflicts and hostalities in Indochina, which constitute a destabilising factor in the region, they agreed that the developments serve to emphasize even more strongly the relevance of and the need for ASEAN to pursue with greater vigour the objective of ZOPFAN". They further agreed that "ASEAN member countries should continue their efforts towards giving recognition of and respect of ZOPFAN, and to impress upon all concerned, including the countries of Indochina, the advantage and relevance of ZOPFAN".

In the annual meetings of foreign ministers in successive years, the ASEAN members reiterated their determination to achieve ZOPFAN. On bilateral basis they started exchanging information and intelligence,

22. It is reported that the Soviet tanks were carried to Vietnam and Angola in 1975 by these non-military fleets. It is referred in David Rees, "The Gorshkov Strategy in the Far East", *Pacific Community*, January 1978, p.146.

23. Joint Communique, *op.cit.*, p.44.

24. Ibid.
offered one another facilities for officer's training, and participated in such schemes as "holding joint exercises at sea, in the air and on the grounds", joint patrols and operation on boarder and standardization of arms. They tried to achieve national resilience and decided not to allow any of the big powers to play an exclusive and dominating role in the region. The eighties thus heralded a renewed stress on ZOPFAN by the ASEAN states.

Soviet Policy in the Region: 1979-85

In the previous chapter it has been discussed that Soviet Union wanted peace in Southeast Asia and tried its best to establish cordial relations between the ASEAN and Indochina states. We have concluded that to some extent the Soviet Union has succeeded in achieving its aim. But, in 1979, due to the renewed tensions in Southeast Asia, the Soviet policy of maintaining fraternal relations with Indochina states and, at the same time friendly relations with the ASEAN members, failed. Her attempt to bring closer the communist and non-communist groups in Southeast Asia, which saw a partial success in 1978, dashed to ground in 1979. Rather in the early eighties, the US and China provided the ASEAN members with military aid to counter Vietnam and thus unrest in the region was kept alive.

The end of the seventies and the beginning of eighties witnessed Southeast Asian region plunge into fresh crisis situations. The ASEAN states naturally felt concerned about this, and likewise these greatly

affected Soviet policy towards ASEAN and to its members. Needless to add that it was the growing strength of Vietnam in the region that has created a crisis among ASEAN states. On top of it, Vietnam's intervention in Kampuchea and its role in setting up governments in Laos and Kampuchea favourable to it, actually created the crisis for the ASEAN. These were further complicated by the adverse reaction of communist China on Vietnam's action and then in assuming conflict between communist China and Vietnam.

The Soviet Union felt directly involved in this crisis situation, because Vietnam was its after all, the only close and trusted ally in the region. Thus we may say that Soviet policy towards ASEAN during the period under review was primarily determined by the ASEAN perceptions over Vietnam's policies in the region and the actual policies pursued by the ASEAN member states towards Vietnam and its role in other Indochina states.

Against this background now the bilateral relations between the ASEAN members and the Soviet Union will be discussed in the following pages.

**Bilateral Relations between the Soviet Union and the ASEAN States**

During the period from 1979-85, the tensions revived between the big powers involved in Southeast Asia and also between the communist and non-communist states of the region. The ASEAN members opposed Vietnam's action in Kampuchea and resented Soviet backing to Vietnam. The increased Soviet naval and military presence in Southeast Asia was also disliked by them. Hence, against these developments in the region
the study of bilateral relations between the ASEAN members and the Soviet Union is essential. It will also clarify the Soviet view of ASEAN organization during this period. In fact, the role of individual ASEAN members during the period of the renewed tensions in Southeast Asia appears to have very much influenced Soviet policy towards the ASEAN organization.

SINGAPORE

In the beginning, USSR -Singapore relations will be discussed as Singapore was the major trade partner of the USSR in ASEAN region and hence Soviet Union interacted more with her.

Singapore's role in the renewed problems in Southeast Asia was not supported by the Soviet Union. Though Singapore had economic relations with Vietnam, she avoided any political understanding with the latter. Therefore the Soviet authors commented that "the pro-imperialist orientation of Singapore's foreign policy prevents it from establishing the good relations with the Indo-China states that would help stabilise the situation in the region."

The economic problems of Singapore were carefully studied by the Soviet experts. They marked the "industrial boom of the seventies" and the "decline of economic development rates" at the end of the decade of seventies. It was recognised that country's rapid progress was due to "flow of US, British, Japanese and West German capital" and also the favourable internal conditions such as, "relatively cheap labour.

and tax laws favouring foreign investors for its operation". But the Soviet Union resented massive economic role played by the US. It was commented that "the US corporations are using Singapore as a beachhead for deeper penetration into third world markets. The US is drawing Singapore into the orbit of its aggressive policies". The Soviet Union also noted that "American firms are represented by over 500 branches and enterprises and US investments exceed 3 billion dollars, the bulk of which is in the petrochemical and electronics industries."

To deepen her economic relations with Singapore, the Soviet Union declared the award on two contracts worth about 3 million dollars in 1986 for Singapore's ship-repair industry. The Soviet Union have invested joint shipping companies in Singapore. Soviet Union's ships continued to be repaired and refuelled in Singapore. In fact, their bilateral trade mainly accounts for ship-repairing business.

THAILAND

The political conditions in Thailand changed after the election of April 1979, when a stable government was formed there. The policies of the new government were positively looked upon by the Soviet Union. Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanan visited the Soviet Union in 1979. The joint communique, issued at the end of the visit stated that "the Soviet Union and Thailand will maintain mutual contacts and consultations with regard to constructive measures which could "ensure

28. Ibid.
peace and stability in Southeast Asia. The Soviet leadership believed that the new government would bring stability in the country. It was stated, "The measures taken by K. Chomanan's government to improve the economic situation, develop the backward rural areas and restore some of the democratic institution and the positive aspects of its foreign policy have to some extent stabilize the situation in the country..."

It was resented that the Thai government "followed a onesided policy" for more than 20 years. In 1979, it was noticed that "the Thai rulers decided to follow a more balanced foreign policy based on the principles of peaceful existence, and began to promote mutually advantageous relations with all countries".

In March 1979 Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanan visited Moscow. When he returned to Thailand, at Bangkok airport he said that the Soviet leaders told him that in view of their close contact with Vietnam, they knew that such a feared invasion (by Vietnam) was "not possible". But, in May 1979 their relations were again strained when Bangkok Post reported about the Soviet arm airlift to Vietnam through Thai air space. According to this newspaper, 79 flights were reported by Royal Thai Air Force's radar within the two months. These planes landed at Danang in Central Vietnam. In fact Thailand had only commercial over flight agreement with Moscow. According to this agreement only five flights could take place within a week. Extra


over-flights could be made only by authorization from Thai foreign and defence ministries. But the Soviet embassy in Bangkok opposed the blame and said that the Soviet cargo planes AN-24 was not capable of making 47 monthly flights to Vietnam, and said that the monthly figure is "sometimes eight, sometimes ten, sometimes less". It is said that in September 1979 Soviet Union requested for "increasing the present two over-flights daily to twenty daily". But this request was turned down by Thailand. In the eighties, when Thailand became more active in regional politics and took anti-Kampuchea and anti-Vietnam stand in international politics, the Soviet Union could not favour it. A Soviet author stated, "Thailand has been turned into a spring-board for espionage and subversive activity against the countries of Indochina."

In economic sphere, the Soviet Union increased her purchases of rubber, rice and maize from Thailand in 1980. The Soviet Tractor export and Thai Minsen Machinery cooperated successfully and a contract was signed in 1979 for the delivery of 500 Soviet tractors to Thailand in 1979-80. The Soviet Union also sold welding and printing equipment and metal cutting lathes to Thailand. In Bangkok, the Soviet commerce minister, Vashenko Ivanovich, promised to buy more of the Thai textiles excluded by quotas from the US. For the period during 1980-82, Thailand recorded a trade surplus with the USSR.

Cultural ties were also developed with Thailand. A big success was scored by Tajik Academic opera and Ballet Theatre in Bangkok at

the end of 1979. Soviet basketball and tennis players were warmly received in Thailand. A delegation of the Bangkok Municipality, led by Governor Thammasiri visited Moscow at the invitation of the Moscow city Soviet in 1979. Thus the Soviet Union tried to come closer to Thailand inspite of her political differences with that country.

MALAYSIA

Soviet Union had overall cordial relations with Malaysia. Malaysia's non-aligned policy was supported by the former. The Soviet Union also noticed that Malaysia advocated "peaceful settlement" of disputes and "initiated the concept of Southeast Asia's conversion into a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality, which has become the platform of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)...." Her policy toward Middle East crisis, Arab problem, racist regime of South Africa and apartheid were also favourably viewed by the Soviet Union. It was further stated that "It has developed amicable relations of cooperation with the Soviet Union resting on the foundation of equality and mutual advantage. The vital interest of the two countries are the basis for still broader bilateral cooperation on such crucial issues, as the strengthening of peace and international detente and opposition to the policy of aggression, hegemony and diktat".

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Hussain Onn visited Moscow in September 1979. In Soviet Union he said that "we have problems in Southeast Asia" and that "the Soviet Union can contribute much towards

38. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
When Hussain Onn came back, he said that Brezhnev told him that Vietnam would not attack Thailand and Brezhnev asked him to convey this Soviet understanding to the other ASEAN leaders.

Among the ASEAN countries Malaysia was the leading trade partner of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union mainly purchased Malaysian rubber and sold machine tools, welding rigs, motor vehicles, cotton and other items.

In cultural sphere, they exchanged delegations of statemen and parliamentarians, groups of cultural workers and trade missions. Thus the Soviet Union and Malaysia established cordial bilateral relations. Particularly the non-aligned policy of Malaysia helped them to come closer. But as a member of ASEAN, Malaysia took anti-Soviet side on Indochina crisis during the period of study in this chapter.

INDONESIA

As it has been stated before, the Soviet Union had friendly relations with Indonesia, "one of the pioneers of the non-aligned movement". Moreover, Indonesia is one of the biggest countries in Asia and the fifth most populous in the world. She has also a dominating position in the ASEAN organization. Therefore, the Soviet Union continued her policy of maintaining friendly relations with Indonesia. Though Indonesia had closer economic and political relations with the US, she carefully upheld her own interest in the regional and

41. New Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur) 21, September, 1979.
42. Ibid, 12 October, 1979.
international politics. The Soviet leadership noted Indonesia's sharp criticism of "Washington's protectionist policy", and demanded "the lifting of barriers to the access of the exports of the ASEAN 43 countries to the US market". It was also commented that despite the pressure exerted by anti-Vietnam forces, she did not marked out Vietnam as the "focus of evil" in the area and did not attempt for" 44 "confrontation between ASEAN six and the Indochina states". The Soviet authors marked out that "In view of the situation in the region, it must be conceded that Djakarta's line of promoting contacts with Vietnam is indicative of a measure of realism in its foreign policy."

In April 1984, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Kusumaatmadja visited the Soviet Union and helped in widening the contacts between them. In October 1984, Ali Wardhana, Minister Coordinator for the Economy, Finance, Industry and Development Supervision, visited the USSR and signed a protocol which provided for expansion of trade and resumption of Soviet-Indonesia economic cooperation. Therefore the Soviet Union praised Indonesia's more far-sighted political leaders" who "seek to counter-act the selfish policy" of the capitalist countries, "by steering a balance course in international affairs".

The Soviet Union offered a 180 million dollar loan to Indonesia to build three hospitals. She was also interested for signing a new trade agreement with Indonesia, but the latter rejected the offer. Thus the Soviet Union could play only very limited role in this country and could not convince her in favour of its own world view.

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
Soviet Union's relations with the Philippines were of very recent origin. In fact, the Soviet Union was very critical of this ASEAN member, due to the US bases in this country and her security treaty with the US. Though the changes were marked in the external and internal policies of the Philippine government, the country could not get rid of US bases. The Government negotiated with the US for 3 years and some amendments were also introduced in the 31 year old treaty, but the Soviet Union noticed that "the amendments added nothing to Philippine sovereignty over the bases". The Soviet leaders marked the public discontent about the US bases in the Philippines but hoped that, "the collapse of the Peking-backed Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, the desposition of the Shah of Iran, a loyal ally of the US, Washington's decision to abrogate its military treaty with Taiwan for the sake of "normalizing" relations with Peking, and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam - all these recent developments are bound to have a serious impact on the political stand of the Philippines and other members of the ASEAN".

The Soviet Union had joint shipping company with the Philippines. The merchant ships of the Soviet Union also carried the Philippines' copra to West Europe on a backhaul basis. She also provided feeder service for the overland routes from Singapore, Manila and Hongkong. But these efforts could not make the Soviet Union one of the major trade partners of the Philippines.


The discussion of the bilateral relations between the USSR and the ASEAN members till now have shown that the Soviet Union had political, economic and cultural relations with all the five ASEAN countries, but inspite of this she could not exert her political or economic pressure on the ASEAN members.

Now we will briefly assess Soviet Union's economic relations with overall ASEAN countries with the help of a trade chart. The following pages will briefly discuss the means adopted by the Soviet Union for closer economic relations with ASEAN countries and also point out obstructions in the smooth economic relations between them.

Inspite of the tensions of the new cold war, the total volume of the Soviet trade with the ASEAN countries increased during the period from 1979 to 1985. Table IV shows that the Soviet Union-ASEAN trade become more than double during 1979-85 in comparison to 1972-78. Table III shows the unbalanced nature of the trade relations between the ASEAN members and the USSR. The export of ASEAN countries is many times more than their imports. Malaysia is the biggest exporter to the USSR and Singapore is the bigger importer in ASEAN-USSR trade relations. But, though the volume of the ASEAN-USSR trade increased, no dramatic change was marked in their economic relations and ASEAN members continued to hesitate for having closer economic relations with the USSR.

The bilateral trade between the USSR and the ASEAN members was encouraged mainly to establish closer relations between them. The Soviet Union tried to take advantage of the protectionist policy of
## Table III

SOVIET EXPORT TO AND IMPORT FROM THE FIVE ASEAN COUNTRIES
(In Million rubles)

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Source: Vneshnya Torgoblya, SSSR, 1979-85, op.cit.
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Source: *Vneshnya Torgoblya, SSSR, 1972-85, op.cit*
the West against the developing countries of Southeast Asia and put forward herself as an alternative trading partner. The Soviet leaders again and again emphasised the mutual interests of the USSR and the developing countries. The stress was given on a system of barter trade. The Soviet Union have large fleet of merchantship. These ships carry Soviet exports and imports.

Indonesian and Malaysian trade delegates were convinced that the ASEAN and the Soviet Union had mutual interest in expanding the trade. When Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, the Soviet role in non-communist Southeast Asia increased. The Soviet ambassadors in ASEAN countries were asked to upgrade the Soviet image in respective countries. The new policy became "more active and more productive".

During early 1980s the sharp fall was marked in the world prices of the ASEAN commodities and the Soviet Union tried to avail this opportunity. In the Philippines, the Soviet Union helped for the country's ship repair yards and cooperated in fishing and processing marine products.

Trade relations with ASEAN did not take any new turn in 1980s. In fact, the trade relations with the ASEAN countries was not favourably responded by the ASEAN members. In October 1985 Prasong Soonsiri, Secretary-General of Thailand's National Security Council, said that the Soviet Union wanted to establish trade ties with Thailand to gain a foothold for recruiting "agents of influence". The Soviet initiative is also described as "a strategy of economic posturing". A Soviet

message was distributed to the key ASEAN capitals. It read, "we want to trade and improve relations. Let us concentrate on what we have in common rather than the things that divide us. The fact that we have radically different political system should not be a bar to bilateral developments". But this message did not help in developing the mutual relations between the USSR and the ASEAN countries.

The ASEAN-Vietnam Relations, the USSR, 1979-85

The ASEAN countries maintained bilateral relations with the USSR and the SRV. But, ASEAN as an organization took very stern anti-Vietnamese stand in the United Nation. Its relations with the USSR were also strained as the latter gave support to Vietnamese action in Kampuchea. The method in which the Pol Pot government of Kampuchea was removed, made the ASEAN suspicious of Vietnamese and Soviet intentions in the region. Therefore, in the UN Security Council the ASEAN organization supported the non-aligned resolution of January 1979 calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Kampuchea. All the members voted in favour of the resolution. But they could not get it adopted by the Security Council as the Soviet Union vetoed it on 15 January 1979. When in February 1979 the PRC invaded Vietnam, the ASEAN members circulated a draft resolution among the members of the UN Security Council calling on all parties to the conflict in Indochina to withdraw their forces. It was again vetoed by the Soviet Union on 16 March 1979.

51. Ibid.
Throughout 1979 Kampuchean issue was raised in the UN. Here, we should note that ASEAN members viewed this problem as an important international issue which should be resolved by peaceful means through the UN. For the peace, stability and security of ASEAN region, it became necessary for them to resolve Kampuchean problem. But, the Soviet Union observed that Kampuchean problem was an internal problem of Kampuchea which should be decided by herself. The Soviet Union did not like the Kampuchean issue to be discussed in the UN.

On 21 September a resolution was passed in the UN which reaffirmed the seat of government of Democratic Kampuchea in the UN. The resolution was passed by 71 to 35, with 34 abstentions and 12 absentees. The UN General Assembly's credential Committee also voted 6 to 3 in favour of Chinese motion to accept the credentials of the Democratic Kampuchean government of the Pol Pot. The ASEAN governments voted in favour of the Chinese motion. The Soviet Union was again voted down on the issue of putting on the General Assembly's agenda the problem of Kampuchean representation and the charges of invasion by Vietnam. The voting pattern on these issues showed that the Soviet Union and the ASEAN belong to the rival groups.

The ASEAN members, along with 20 other countries submitted a draft resolution to the 34th session of the UN General Assembly on 6 November 1979 calling for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea. The Soviet Union voted against the resolution.

52. For details see The Indonesian Times, 21 September 1979 and Straits Times, (Singapore), 14 September, 1979.
Thus, due to lack of cooperation between the ASEAN countries and the Soviet Union along with Vietnam, the United Nations was unable to solve the Kampuchean problem. Rather Kampuchean crisis became a cause of unrest in Southeast Asia.

Inspite of their differences regarding Kampuchea, the ASEAN members bilaterally maintained their relations with both the USSR and the SRV. Thai Premier Kriangsak visited Moscow in March 1979. Malaysian Premier Datuk Hussain Onn also went to the USSR in September 1979. They exchanged their views on the problems of Southeast Asia with the Soviet leaders. As it has been discussed earlier in this Chapter, the Soviet leaders assured them of Vietnam's good intention towards ASEAN states.

But inspite of the Soviet Union's assurance against future Vietnamese incursion on Thai borders, in June 1980, the Vietnamese armies attacked the borders of Thailand in search of the camps of rebels. This Vietnamese incursion at Non Mark Mun made it clear to the ASEAN members that the Soviet Union was not always in the position of influencing Vietnam's foreign policy. Therefore any future peace in the region depended on the normalization of relations with the Vietnam.

After the Non Mark Mun incursion of Vietnam in Thailand, the US government immediately ordered for airlift of arms and equipment to Thailand. Military aid was given to the other ASEAN countries too.


President Reagan submitted to the US Congress in March 1981, for increased military assistance for the ASEAN countries in 1982. The Congress approved US$ 62.5 million out of the requested foreign military sales credit of US$ 80 million. As a result the total military spending of the ASEAN countries in 1982 amounted to $1.700 million, which was an increase by 170 percent over the 1975 figure. In 1982 their military expenditure increased by another 15 percent on the average.

Regarding the government in Kampuchea the Soviet Union and the ASEAN countries took opposite stands. Soviet Union supported Heng Samrin government in Kampuchea but the ASEAN countries supported the Chinese backed Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge guerillas, and Prince Sihanouk along with Son Sahn, the leader of the anti-communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). These groups formed a government—Republic of Democratic Kampuchea on 9 July 1982, near Thai Kampuchea borders. Again, the ASEAN countries supported the conference held on Cambodia in New York. They put forward an "eight point peace plan" to solve the problems in Indochina. But the Soviet Union rejected that Plan. It supported the initiative of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' Conference in Vientiane. These foreign ministers expressed their readiness to sign non-aggression pacts with all neighbouring states and to start an exchange of views with ASEAN countries on the question of turning Southeast Asia into a zone of peace. After the third meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Indochina


56. Y.Plekhanov, "ASEAN in Washington's Plan", International Affairs, (Moscow), No.6, 1984, p.82.

in 1981, Pravda stated that the Soviet ambassadors of ASEAN countries had approached the host countries to approve a principle of consultation among the regional powers. But the ASEAN countries opposed it. The Soviet Union realised that the relation between the Indochina and the ASEAN countries should be normalised immediately and the initiative should be taken by Indochinese countries. Therefore, the Laotian Foreign Minister Phoun Sipaseut visited, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia in April-May 1982. But his visit could not reconcile the differences between the two groups on Kampuchea.

Though the Indochinese countries indicated again and again that their main enemy is the US and not the ASEAN, the relations between the two groups could not improve. In December 1984, a war like situation prevailed at the borders of Thailand and Kampuchea. There was a Vietnamese offensive to destroy the camps of KPNLF at Nong Samet, Nong Chan, Ampil and Rithisen. The Soviet Union did not oppose Vietnam's action. This is turn encouraged the US government to announce its decision to sell twelve F-16 A-100 jet fighters to Thailand to curb the pressure of Soviet MIG-23 jets in Vietnam. According to the Soviet view, the decision to sell F-16 to Thailand would fulfil US objective which "would like to have other ASEAN members emulate Thailand. For if they, following the lead of their neighbour whose military arsenal has outstripped theirs, agree to buy US war planes, that would signify a longdesired move towards the

60. No criticism of Vietnam appeared in Soviet media.
region's militarization under the US aegis." The United States gave a direct aid of $3.5 million to KPNLF and Sihanoukist group in 1985. China also gave military help to Thailand and supplied Type-59 tanks. But this increased military aid created differences within the ASEAN. Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia supported this aid. But Indonesia opposed it.

From the very beginning of its formation, ASEAN opposed big powers' dominating role in ASEAN region. Indonesia was the strongest supporter of this policy. Therefore she opposed increasing role of either the US or the PRC in Southeast Asia. Indonesian leaders tried to normalise their relations with Indochinese countries and the USSR. This policy was conducive to their non-aligned foreign policy. Indonesia also tried for greater cohesion among the ASEAN members. In 1985, trade and defence experts from Jakarta visited Hanoi and they exchanged their views. Indonesian Foreign Minister visited the USSR in 1984 and the common interest of both the countries in international politics were stressed.

Kampuchean problem could not be solved till 1985 and it became a cause of tension in Southeast Asia. The Soviet Union, the Indochinese countries and the ASEAN members, all tried for relaxation of the tensions but as they could not reach to an agreed solution, none of

them succeeded. A conference of the Foreign Minister of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea was held in Ho Chi Minh City in 1985. The three Indochinese countries favoured to hold an international conference on Southeast Asian problems in which ASEAN countries and also other states, that want to see Southeast Asia as a zone of peace, stability and cooperation, were to be invited to take part.

In 1985, the ASEAN countries held their annual foreign minister's meeting in Bangkok. In this meeting Brunei also joined and increased the number of ASEAN members to six. The six members adopted a new statement on Kampuchea. This document said about "solidarity with Thailand in the face of external provocation". The ASEAN members also recognised its "legitimate right to self-defence". Thus Soviet and ASEAN views on Kampuchea could not be reconciled till 1985.

**Soviet Attitude Towards ASEAN, 1979-85**

During the period under review two contradictory trends were marked in Soviet attitude towards ASEAN. On the one hand, it showed extreme unhappiness over ASEAN postures on Vietnam's policy in the region; so much so that it did appear that the earlier hostile attitude of the sixties appeared to be have been revived. On the other hand, it sought to increase its stake in the region by developing a close alliance relationship with Vietnam directly, with Laos and Cambodia indirectly; it also stepped up its naval activity in mid and South Pacific region as well as it maintained its bilateral economic

relations and political ties. In other words, it will be true to say that despite of this adverse perception of ASEAN, the Soviet Union was not ready to view it with hostility if not with favour.

We have earlier discussed adverse Soviet reactions to relations between ASEAN states and Vietnam. It, however, soon became clear that Soviet Union regarded ASEAN postures on Vietnam role in the region as directly inspired by outside powers like USA and China. For instance when the ASEAN countries formally brought the crisis in Indochina in the United Nations a characteristic Soviet response was: "The UN General Assembly has opened a debate on the so-called question of the 'situation in Kampuchea'. This obvious attempt at intervening in the internal affairs of a sovereign state was formally initiated by the ASEAN countries, but it is an open secret amidst circles of the international community that they are backed by the US and China."

Likewise when the annual meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers held in 1979, it took a strong stand against Vietnam. An authoritative Soviet source commented on that occasion, "attitudes were reflected which are hardly likely to lead to cooperation being established among the countries of the region... Responsibility for creating the so-called refugee problem is placed on Vietnam and this is done despite the facts known to all which testify that the departure of Chinese nationals from Vietnam was provoked by the Beijing leaders. Such positions are similar to western appraisals of the situation in Indochina. This is connected, observers believe, with the desire of

the countries of the association to obtain wider economic aid from the developed capitalist countries during the talks which begin today between ASEAN representatives and the US Secretary of State, Vance, and the Japanese, Australian and New Zealand foreign ministers." The Straits Times quoted Pravda to show that the USA, supported by China, was trying to provoke a confrontation between ASEAN countries and socialist countries of the region under the non-existent 'Vietnamese threat'."

Hence, it can be seen that by the beginning of eighties the USSR began to consider once again ASEAN as a pawn of US policies in the region, now actively supported by China. In fact the very viability of ASEAN as a regional organization of cooperation was now being questioned and trends towards militarisation of ASEAN states with US cooperation were highlighted.

These aspects of Soviet policy further developed in the first part of eighties. An authoritative editorial in a prestigious Soviet journal Far East Affairs thus commented: "Through political and economic pressure the US, China and Japan are trying to get the ASEAN countries abandon their neutral and non-aligned stand and make ASEAN a military base opposed to the countries of Indochina, which had opted for socialism." A study on Southeast Asia by a known Soviet publicist thus viewed the situation: "From 1979 to 1982 Thailand, the main American client for arms in Southeast Asia, purchased 900 million

dollars' worth of arms from the United States..." Likewise when in May 1981 President Reagan and Japanese Prime Minister proclaimed their joint efforts for supporting ASEAN, the Soviet expressed the apprehension that they wanted to use ASEAN "as a strike force against the socialist countries of Indochina..."

The Soviet Union carefully watched the affect of ASEAN members' relations with the USA. It was said: "one of the effects of Washington's growing political and economic pressure upon the ASEAN countries is their government's attitude regarding the states of Indochina." The plan of proposed tour of Southeast Asia by US Secretary of Defence, Caspar Weinberger in 1984, according to Soviet view was that "the Pentagon has not abandoned hopes to turn ASEAN into a military bloc".

During the mid-eighties the Soviet Union continued its efforts towards conciliation between the ASEAN and Indochina countries. Expressing Kampuchean view, a Soviet writing stated, "Kampuchea is ready to discuss the proposal of the ASEAN countries on the withdrawal of Vietnamese voluntary corps from the Thai border to a distance of 30 kilometres. It is only natural, however, that in this matter it is also necessary to heed the interests of PRK's security".

74. Ibid, p.27.
75. Y.Plekhanov, ASEAN in Washington's plans, International Affairs, (Moscow), No.6, 1984, p.84.
The year 1985 began with change of leadership in the Soviet Union. With Gorbachev assuming the leadership of the Soviet Union it gradually began to dawn on Southeast region that Soviet policy in the region may be poised for a change. However, such a possibility was seen only of 1985 towards the close of the year while much of 1985 saw continued Soviet concern over what the Soviet leadership regarded the growing US influence over the ASEAN. In 1985, the island state Brunei, firm believer in Western alliance system became a member of ASEAN and this brought Australia and New Zealand, close allies of the USA indirectly to ASEAN. Hence the very first meeting of the foreign ministers of six ASEAN states in 1985 (with Brunei as the new member) was the occasion of sharp criticism from the Soviet Union. Commenting on the decisions of this conference New Times declare "Its entire tone leaves no doubt about who dictated it and on whose instruction ASEAN undertook its latest hostile act in respect of Indochina countries". Further it pointed out that "Thailand has been turned into a springboard for espionage and subversive activity against the countries of Indochina." The New Times agreed with the views of the Indonesian newspaper Merdeka: "while having proclaimed the need to create zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in Southeast Asia, ASEAN in reality is pursuing a policy of confrontation... By all indication, ASEAN has become an instrument of China in sparking off a second revolution in Indochina, and a lever of Washington for promoting a policy directed against Vietnam." Perhaps as a welcome to Brunei the New Times noted

79. Ibid.
80. Ibid, pp.7-8.
that none the US can form a "military political alliance of NATO-ANZUK-ANZUZ-NEATO and NATO. Only the ASEAN consent was lacking in the formation of the Pacific Ring".

On the other hand Soviet media also began to report how the people of ASEAN countries as for example, Thailand and Indonesia were protesting against growing US hegemony in the region. Further, it was during 1985, that the Soviet media also began to reiterate Soviet interests in the ideas behind ZOPFAN, although without naming it; it began may be, for turning Southeast Asia "a zone of peace, stability, friendship and cooperation". By the end of the year 1985 new Soviet leader began to outline his global policy of making the world free from nuclear arms and threats of war and declared : "Today, all countries face the question of how to ward off the threat of war". In April 1986 a Soviet government statement pleaded: "if we fail to stop this course of events in the region, where interests of many states of the world meet and interwine, it may lead to a serious aggravation of tension in the Asia-Pacific region."

The year 1985 thus witnessed a close and unhappy interlude in Soviet policy towards ASEAN. It also marked the beginning of a new policy of friendly cooperation with the ASEAN and its member states through peaceful contacts and negotiations. These, however, developed later and as such they are beyond the scope of our study.