CHAPTER - III

THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

The inception of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) marked the beginning of a new era in the history of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. On August 8, 1967, five nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) made a collective endeavour to establish a firm foundation for common action to strengthen and accelerate economic growth, social-progress, and cultural cooperation in the region, and to "ensure their stability from external interference in any -

---

1 Tenku Abdul Rehman of Malaysia was the first leader to suggest the formation of ASEAN. He made the proposal at Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in London in 1966. He argued that regional cooperation would be the best means to ensure the stability and strengthen the economies of each country in the area. See, Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), December 4, 1969, pp. 491-92.

2 Brunei Darussalam - The Southeast Asian Sultanate in East Indies, which attained full independence on January 1, 1984, is the sixth country to join ASEAN in 1984. Earlier, it was under the British rule for a century. Its capital is Bandar Seri Begawan. It is an oil rich area and is exotically labeled as 'Gulf state of Southeast Asia". Brunei's absolute oil and gas export is increasingly rising. It was 'B $ 3.2 billion in 1976 and B $ 3.9 billion in 1977". Figures cited in Hamzah Ahmed, "Oil and Security in Brunei", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol. 2, n. 2, (September 1980), p. 184.

3 For the details of diplomatic background to the creation of ASEAN see, Arnfinn Jorgensen Dahl, Regional Organisation and Order in Southeast Asia, (London, 1982), pp. 28-44.
form or manifestation in order to preserve their national identities in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their peoples". Reflecting the heritage of ASA (1961-67) and Maphilindo (1963), ASEAN was established by the Bangkok Declaration which, it should be noted, itself does not have the binding effect of a treaty, but is rather a declaration of good intent.

ASEAN seems an indigenous and unique regional organisation partly because its creation and evolution are truly indigenous, and partly because all its members belong to the Southeast Asian region. It is an international grouping of market economy countries, and "embodiment of an almost telepathic belief in partnership".

Background of the Association

As noted in the preceding discussion, the formation of ASA and its modicum success, undoubtedly, provided much needed impetus to the inception of ASEAN, but it alone can hardly be singled out as the most important variable-motivating, conditioning and perhaps, compelling the above named five nations to throw away their spectacles of morbid and heroic nationalism overnight, and pool their resources

4 Asian Recorder, November 6-12, 1967, p. 7923.
6 Dr. Mothathir Mohamad, Malaysian Prime Minister, as reported in Far Eastern Economic Review (Hereafter referred to as FEER), February 29, 1980, p. 34.
together to promote economic growth, social progress, cultural development (and) peace and stability in the region, the region having just one common feature - diversity.

In passing, a glimpse of pre-independent history of ASEAN countries may briefly, but fruitfully, be constructed. Located between the two great civilizations of India and China on its peripheries, ASEAN region is predominantly Malay and has historically witnessed a swirl of converging migrant communities. From eighth through fourteenth century, the kingdom of Shri-Vijaya dominated the area, followed by the Madjapahit Empire which reigned over ASEAN region upto the sixteenth century. From then on, western colonizers dictated territorial boundaries which also resulted in the redistribution of people and transnational settlement of ethnic groups.

During the colonial period, despite strong religious and blood-ties, each ASEAN nation was exposed to the cultural influences of different colonizing nations - Indonesia to Holland, Malaysia and Singapore (Malaya) to the United Kingdom, and the Philippines to Spain, and subsequently the United States. Thailand, the lucky exception, was rather obliged to remain independent by its

7 Asian Recorder, November 6-12, 1967, p. 7923.
adherence to a policy of appeasement of colonial powers by allowing them to have access to her markets and giving them a share in the exploitation of her natural resources. Nevertheless, it was somewhat influenced by Europe. Thus, it seems that geo-political setting and historical background moulded the ASEAN nations into prototypal colonies. Further, the western colonial domination led to the virtual compartmentalization of ASEAN countries and has left different but indelible imprints on ASEAN countries. Naturally, this virtual isolation from the fellow ASEAN countries resulted in the irony of a basically common people knowing their colonizers and even their major trading partners, such as Japan, better than they knew each other. The protracted colonial rule, thus, resulted in the development of marked differences of attitude among ASEAN countries. Consequently, the ASEAN region, today, comprises a heterogenous region in terms of history, culture, religion, language, ethnicity and tradition.

That is why, the scenario had been one of diversity and marred by centrifugal and subvertive tendencies cutting at the very roots of regionalism viz; territorial disputes, religious prejudices, ethnic conflicts, mutual distrust, personal disputes — to recapitulate but the important few. In addition, in the years preceding the formation of ASEAN, there had been apprehension over possible Indonesian

9 J.R.E. Waddell, An Introduction to Southeast Asian Politics (Sydney, 1972), p. 11.
aggression against Malaysia and Singapore arising out of Indonesia's displeasure over the formation of Federation of Malaysia. The tension in the region had been further fanned by the revival by Indonesia of its 'Konfrontasi' campaign against Malaysia. Against this backdrop, it is really flabbergasting that the prospective member nations decided to sink their differences to join hands in partnership to form ASEAN in the mid-1960's; the formation of which constituted nothing short of a sort of 'anti-climax' in the international relations of Southeast Asia.

However, it seems that certain background conditions as well as the contemporary situation greatly helped in the inception of ASEAN.

A vital permissive factor facilitating the formation of ASEAN was the prevailing political conditions in the region. Around 1967, Indo-China was in turbulence mainly because of the activities of the communist guerrillas. They were very active in the region, and in Vietnam an open war between North and South of the country was raging and had a distinct possibility of spilling over into Thailand. The major communist countries viz; the Soviet Union and the Peoples' Republic of China were providing moral and material assistance to the North Vietnamese to fight the South Vietnamese and the United States. Thus, the Indo-China conflict had the potential to turn Southeast Asia into an arena of great power rivalry. Further, the fear of "domino
theory" was being felt in the entire region. It was believed that if South Vietnam fell to the communists, there would start a chain reaction and the countries in the region would fall, one by the one, to the communist expansion. In addition to the fear from the North, these countries were facing problems of domestic conflicts, threatening their very survival.

Viewed thus, it appears that the Indo-China imbroglio and the fear of the 'domino theory' being materialized resulted in the convergence of security interests among the majority of the non-communist states of the region. Anticomunist attitude being their common denominator, these countries decided on a sort of 'preventive medicine approach' of solidarity and formed ASEAN which, they perceived, might act as a bulwark against the rising tide of communism and help in containing domestic dissent.

10 As a matter of fact, the objective of inhibiting the communist threat in the region was at the time of its inception and continues to be one of strongest unifying forces for the ASEAN countries, the disintegration of Soviet Union notwithstanding. Their approach towards communist countries reveals the following idiosyncrasies: (i) since all ASEAN members face guerrilla problem in one form or the other, the fear of subversion and escalation of terrorist activities is common denominator of all; (ii) their move towards rapprochement with the communist neighbours is founded on their communist threat perception; and (iii) by normalizing relations with communist neighbours, they seek to neutralize their support to the guerrillas.

Further, it appears that the changed role of external powers in the region and the perception of Southeast Asian countries of this changed role also significantly contributed to the inception of ASEAN. It seems to have many dimensions. First, was the British decision to withdraw its armed forces from the east to Suez. This decision, it may be noted, was the result, among other factors, of the British failure to realize its objective of turning the Common Wealth under its leadership into a powerful security organisation. Through such an organisation, Britain had sought to protect its security interests in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. The British decision to withdraw from the region had important implications for the security of not only Malaysia and Singapore but also affected the overall security environment of the region. Second, was the reverses suffered by the United States against North Vietnam in the period immediately preceding the inception of ASEAN. This 'irrational US military engagement and the miserable performance against North Vietnam eroded much of its credibility as a guarantor of peace in the region, and soon it reached its lowest ebb. Third, was the realization of negative impact of the great powers' presence in the

12 Chintamani Mahapatra, American Role in the Origin and Growth of ASEAN (New Delhi, 1990), p. 20.

region i.e., it appears that in the changed situation, the non-communist states of the region not only became skeptical of the dubious security cover which the external powers provided to them, they also became increasingly aware of the negative effects of the great powers' presence in the non-communist countries of the region. Now they held these powers largely "responsible for the internecine feuds which had not only imperiled their security but also their economic development".

Thus, it may be argued that the changed role of the external powers in the region, and the consequent changed perception of non-communist states of their role resulted in the convergence and eventual evolution of a new thinking among these states that if they were not to become the "cockpit of the great powers' " rivalry (a favourable ASEAN phrase), they would have to sink their differences and manage their security problems themselves. Probably, they also realized that only by acting unitedly at a regional level they would be able to deny any opportunity to the outside powers to increase their sway in the region by exploiting their differences. Therefore, it appears that the disillusionment with the security provided by the great powers, and a strong urge to minimize the scope for the domination and manipulation of the region by them served as powerful incentives for Southeast Asian countries to make a

14 Ibid., p. 87.
fresh attempt at regional cooperation in the form of ASEAN. However, it seems that a more positive impetus for the inception of ASEAN sprang from the changes in governments and leadership in Indonesia and the Philippines. The change in Indonesian leadership came in the aftermath of the abortive coup d'état of October 1965 which resulted in the political demise of President Sukarno. Indonesia, under President Sukarno, had close ties with the communist countries, particularly China, and there seemed to be emerging a Jakarta-Beijing axis. During this period, it may be noted, Indonesia enunciated the concept of "New Emerging Forces", consisting of the newly independent national states and the communist world; confronting the old established forces, consisting of the western capitalist world. But after the abortive coup and in view of the revelations strongly indicating the Beijing's involvement in it, Indonesia's special relationship with China came to an abrupt end. Now, there was seen a clear shift in Indonesia's foreign policy from pro-communist to the pro-west. Under the new government of President Suharto, Indonesia reassessed and then reversed the policies of the Sukarno regime and evinced keen desire to have closer and friendlier relations with the fellow Southeast Asian countries. With a view to achieve this objective, it abandoned its 'Konfrontasi' campaign against Malaysia and

\[\text{15} \quad \text{R. Abdulgani, Nationalism, Regionalism and Security: Problems in Southeast Asia (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 40-41.}\]

156
restored diplomatic and trade relations with the latter.

Similarly, change of leadership in the Philippines following Ferdinand E. Marcos' election as a President in November 1965 helped reduce intra-regional tensions. It resulted in the soft-pedaling of Sabah claim by the Philippines, and led to the normalization of relations with Malaysia.

Thus, it appears that the emergence of Suharto's 'New order' in Indonesia and change of leadership in the Philippines brought about 'detente' between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, and these developments gradually but smoothly paved the way for the establishment of ASEAN.

Also, it seems that ASEAN was born out of a realization among the prospective members for a necessity to provide some sort of an indigenous institutional arrangement or a mechanism at a regional level whereby intra-regional conflicts could be minimized or at least controlled, if not totally resolved. Viewed thus, ASEAN may be regarded as the enlightened product of intra-regional conflicts. It may,


therefore, be argued that its inception not only reflected a progressive realization of the self-defeating and wasteful nature of local disputes in the light of a perceived common internal threat made more potent by an uncertain regional environment, but also a keen desire of the prospective ASEAN members to reduce the ruinous consequences of such conflicts in the "post-Konfrontasi" era.

In addition, it appears that successful working of the EC served both as a model and threat for these countries. From the experience of EC, it appears, they learnt the utility of regional cooperation and futility of individual efforts for rapid economic development. As Donald Puchala rightly observes that the original impetus to cooperation among nations occurs when nations face problems that defy optimum solution domestically, and from which nations experience penalties and frustrations from attempts to solve them competitively. In the light of this observation, it seems probable that the ASEAN countries realized that they could improve their bargaining power in international trade, particularly vis-a-vis the developed would more effectively within the framework of regional economic cooperation than

pursuing individual and competitive economic policies. Thus, it appears that ASEAN was perceived by its leaders as a useful forum for economic gains - a 'regional springboard' for achieving an easier and speedier economic development of the region.

However, it may be stressed that ASEAN's concern for economic development had security undercurrents as well. In fact, non-communist Southeast Asian countries seemed to have discovered that there existed a close nexus between security and economic development of the region, and realized that economic development was a pre-requisite to political stability and security against communist led revolutionary forces from both within and without the region. Thus, chafed under the communist subversion, these countries, probably, viewed rapid economic development through regional cooperation as a key to ensure social and political stability in the region - a development strategy that would take the wind out of the communist sails and consequently, undermine the appeal of communist revolution in the region.

It may, therefore, be argued that the preceding background conditions and objectives provided powerful stimulus to the inception of ASEAN. But to arrange these objectives, in their order of importance, in influencing the birth of ASEAN appears a difficult task. However, a discerning analysis of these objectives would reveal that

22 Chopra, n. 13, p 87.

159
all of them directly or indirectly sprang from two primary concerns of the founding fathers of ASEAN viz ; (i) a shared perception of internal as well external threats ; and (ii) a collective recognition of internal weakness to cope with these threats through individual efforts. These two factors, it seems, converged in forging a collective political will among the ASEAN nations. Thus, ASEAN may be viewed as a "product of a combination of common fears and weakness, not of common strength".

Perhaps, the raison d'être of ASEAN is well contained in the following statement:

The identity and closeness of many political and economic interests of these countries stemming from the similarity of their socio-political orders as well as their more or less outspoken hostility towards the national liberation movements in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia provided the cohesive element and bases for the association.

Thus, it appears that ASEAN was the product of certain background factors as well as the prevailing situation in the region; and security and economic development were the

---


two pillars upon which the superstructure of regional cooperation was supposed to be erected.

**Inception of ASEAN: Expectations—Identical, Converging or Opposing?**

Although the inception of ASEAN, to a large extent, seemed to reflect the emergence of somewhat congruent perceptions, the member nations viewed ASEAN differently and joined ASEAN because of variegated considerations. Here, it seems interesting to analyse very briefly the underlying motivations of these countries for joining ASEAN.

Indonesia, the largest ASEAN country, became the member of the Association with a view to reduce its pathetic dependence on the foreign economic aid, and improve its economy through regional cooperation. Further, it appears that in the aftermath of the emergence of Suharto's 'New Order', it wanted to stick its neck out of the self-

---

26 This part of the discussion is based on Hass, classification of expectations, attitudes, and aims of nations into three viz. ; (i) Identical aims — implying identical demands based on identical reasoning patterns ; (ii) Converging expectations — based on a reasoning pattern peculiar to a national group but sufficiently similar in aim to result in support of integrative proposals ; and (ii) Opposing aims, attitudes, or expectations. See, Ernst B. Hass, "The Challenge of Regionalism", *International Organisation*, vol. 12, n. 2, (Summer 1958), pp. 440-41.


imposed regional isolation resulting from its 'Konfrontasi' campaign, and instead, have closer and friendlier relations with the countries of the region.

Thailand's joining of ASEAN, probably, reflected its struggle for survival as well as an urge to diversify its foreign policy. Being a highly security conscious state (a consequence of its geographical proximity to Indo-China and China), Thailand had been, in the post-second World War period, dependent upon the US security for its fight and survival against communist threat. It was, perhaps, because of this reason that it had always supported the US military presence in the region. But by the end of the Mid-1960's, in view of the limited success of SEATO 'paper tiger' as a guarantor of security against communism, Thailand began to have nagging doubts on its hitherto total security reliance on the US security umbrella. Consequently, there was seen a slight change in its foreign policy. In the changed scenario, while it did not walk out of SEATO, it appears that it sought to reduce its security dependence on the US, and as a result joined ASEAN with a hope that it would provide it with a "collective political defence" which might eventually supplement, if not supplant, its alliance with the United States.

Similarly, the Philippines decision to join ASEAN seems to be an expression of its desire to reduce its unilateral

security dependence on the United States, and also to establish its Asian identity. Partly because of its close relations with the West and tendency to consult regularly the US on all major foreign policy questions, and partly because of the presence of the US military bases on its territory, the Philippines was perceived by the fellow Southeast Asian countries as a 'protege' of the U.S. - a country whose foreign policy was made in the United States. To dissipate such allegations and nagging doubts, and to become genuinely a 'part' of Southeast Asia, the Philippines, perhaps, desperately needed ASEAN.

For Malaysia (which had border disputes with all the founding members of ASEAN), the primary motivation for joining ASEAN may be appreciated within the framework of its desire to improve relations with its neighbours and "establish regional acceptance of its legitimacy and independence". Therefore, it appears that it essentially viewed ASEAN as an institutional arrangement which might provide it with an opportunity to settle its political disputes, particularly with Indonesia and the Philippines at a regional level.

31 Mahapatra, n. 12, p. 25.
Singapore's membership of ASEAN was, by and large, influenced by economic considerations. Because of its large industrial and trade relations with other prospective ASEAN countries, and to extract material and economic benefits, Singapore, it appears, had very little choice but to join ASEAN. From security perspective, though not directly threatened by the communist north, Singapore probably linked its survival with the survival of the neighbouring countries as non-communist states. Furthermore, Singapore's strong urge to assert its Southeast Asian identity (in view of its about 77 per cent Chinese population) explains its commitment of ASEAN.

Thus, analysing member nations' divergent perceptions of ASEAN at the time of its inception, their positions, following Hass' classification of expectations, attitudes, and aims of the states, may be rated as 'converging' i.e., expectations based on a reasoning pattern peculiar to a national group but sufficiently similar in aim to result in support of integrative proposals.

**Objectives of ASEAN**

The Bangkok Declaration of August 8, 1967, establishing ASEAN was neither a formal treaty nor did it provide a clear blue-print for supra-national economic cooperation. Nevertheless, it did contain certain aims and objectives, which together seemed to constitute a sort of "manifesto" of ________________________

33 Poon-Kim, n. 24, p. 756.
regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Emphasising the need for regional cooperation, it recognised that "in an increasingly interdependent world, the cherished ideals of peace, freedom, social justice, and economic well-being are best attained by... meaningful cooperation among the countries of the region...", "and declared that Southeast Asian Countries "share a primary responsibility for strengthening the economic and social stability of the region... [they] were determined to ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form...."

Significantly, it affirmed that "all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of states in the area or prejudice the orderly process of their national development". It was obviously a concession made to Indonesia because it had always been implacably opposed to foreign bases. The agenda for cooperation set fourth in the Declaration was broadly stated in terms of peaceful and rather innocuous purposes:

(1) To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development of the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to

35 Ibid.
36 Abdulgani, n. 15, p. 43.
strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian nations;
(ii) promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice, and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to principles of the United Nations Charter;
(iii) promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on the matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
(iv) promote assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in educational, professional, technical and administrative services;
(v) collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, and improvement of their transportation and communication facilities and the raising of the living standards of their people;
(vi) promote Southeast Asian Studies; and
(vii) maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.

The above listed aims and objectives of ASEAN apparently portray ASEAN as a purely economic and cultural organisation primarily concerned with the promotion of peace.

---
37 ASEAN Secretariat, n. 34, p. 25.
and stability in the region. Further, they seem to give an impression that the member nations voluntarily entered into a cooperative relationship for obtaining functionally specified results in economic, cultural, and social affairs. Obviously, these purposes, hardly reflect any cooperation in political and security fields.

But the launching of ASEAN evoked hostile reaction from the communist countries. Although the member nations, at the time of its inception and thereafter, tried to down play its political and security role, and vigorously and consistently denied that it was any sort of political grouping against anyone; the Association was viewed by the former Soviet Union, Peoples' Republic of China, and North Vietnam as an organisation formed primarily to replace the now defunct SEATO, and a tool of the United States. For example, 'Pravda' commentator said that 'it is not purely economic considerations which have led to the formation of the Association... while the United States in ostentatiously keeping aloof from the Association, the leading role is played by Thailand and the Philippines who have organised the Bangkok Conference to formally set up an organisation". He compared the new organisation with a 'Trojan Horse' which wanted to draw in other states by

39 Indian Express (New Delhi), February, 24, 1976.
40 Asian Recorder, November 6-12, 1967, p. 7923.

167
talking of peace and economic and cultural cooperation but was really an attempt to resuscitate the dead organisation of SEATO which was thoroughly discredited by other means. Similarly, 'Izvestia' commentator observed that the American objective in encouraging the Association was to draw the Southeast Asian countries into a Vietnam war, and that the Chinese perceived the ASEAN states as "the lackeys of U.S. imperialism". Likewise, Vietnam viewed ASEAN as an implacably anti-communist grouping, mere SEATO in disguise, and hence, no more than an instrument of US imperialism.

At a hindsight, the allegations of these communist countries, to some extend, might be justified. Practically all ASEAN countries are western-oriented with strong anti-communist proclivities and ideologies, and had been dependent on the west for economic aid and security needs. Two members of ASEAN viz., the Philippines and Thailand were staunch allies of the US and were members of the US sponsored SEATO. Also, in the post-Second World War era, both these countries had made no bone about seeking the strongest commitment from the United States for their security, each had separate bilateral security arrangements

41 Ibid.


with the US and provided base facilities to it. Furthermore, both the countries were not only actively involved in Vietnam war and used as bases of operations of the US war against Vietnam, they also sent a civic action group and combat troops to assist the anti-communists. Similarly, Malaysia and Singapore, too, had concluded defence arrangements with the United Kingdom and United States respectively, and since the latter powers were members of SEATO, these arrangements provided indirect linkages to the SEATO. Indonesia, it may be noted, was the only ASEAN country which had close relations with and procured military assistance from the communist countries. But with the emergence of Suharto's 'New Order' in the aftermath of the abortive coup by the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Kommunis Indonesia or P.K.I.) ; and in view of the consequent deterioration of its relations with Moscow and Beijing, Indonesia, while restructuring its foreign policy, had almost made a U-turn and was really keen to improve its relations with the west.


45 Malaysia had an Agreement of External Defence and Mutual Assistance (1957) with Great Britain. It provided for the British aid in return for the maintenance of British Military Bases in Malaysia. Singapore, soon after it was 'thrown out' of Malayan Federation in August 1965, concluded an agreement with US providing for the use of Singapore as a rest and recuperation centre for Vietnam based military forces and ships of the Seventh Fleet. See for details, Mahaptra, n. 12, pp. 34-36.
Thus, the scenario which emerges, from a brief analysis of the relations of the ASEAN countries with the West on the eve of its inception, makes it abundantly clear that ASEAN countries (with the exception of Indonesia) were not only pathetically dependent on the West for economic aid and defence needs but also had direct or indirect security linkages with the West. Viewed against this backdrop, one should not raise an eyebrow over the communists' perception of ASEAN as an anti-communist construct closely associated with the 'free-world', particularly the United States. However, in this context, a question may be raised i.e., what was the nature of the US role, if any, in the formation of ASEAN? Was ASEAN, as perceived by the communists, really an attempt at a revival of SEATO? At least one recent work by an Indian author, Mahapatra, tries to highlight and answer this question. The author analyses from historical viewpoint the US-ASEAN relations and views ASEAN as a brain-child of the United States - a US instrument to promote its economic and security interests in Southeast Asia and Asia in general. The correct position, however, seems to be that although the US 'encouraged' the formation of the ASEAN, it was not instrumental in its inception as such. It seems true, as Mahapatra argues, that in pursuance of its policy of containment of communist, the US had since the early 1950's encouraged and wanted to promote such a regional organisation in the Asia-Pacific.

46 Mahapatra, n. 12, pp. 19-37 and 57-104.
region which might be formed as a result of 'local initiative' and gave such an impression. In other words, the United States wanted to keep its hands off the region directly, and it encouraged regionalism in Southeast Asia only indirectly. But the author's perception of ASEAN as a brain-child of the US would be correct if the United States had been successful in forming such an organisation in the earlier stages of its efforts. However, all that the United States could achieve during the earlier period was the establishment of the regional organisations such as the SEATO and ANZUS, but then, these were not 'indigenous' organisations formed through 'local initiative'. To put it differently, the United States failed in its desired objective and despite the best of its efforts, such an 'indigenous' organisation with 'local initiative' could not be established till as late as the inception of ASEAN. Thus, it appears that it was the changed political scenario in Southeast Asia, briefly dealt with in the preceding discussion, which played decisive role in the formation of ASEAN, the US 'encouragement' and 'discreet role' notwithstanding. Further, a question may be asked; Had the US not encouraged the formation of regional organisations in this part of the world, would it have been impossible to establish ASEAN? The answer seems to be 'No'. Moreover, it may be argued in this context that every regional organisation, whether economic or otherwise has a strategic significance and explicit or implicit linkages. For
example, it would be naive to imagine that the EC or OECD would have come into existence and succeeded to the extent they have, without security linkages among these countries within the framework of NATO. Similarly, in the Eastern Europe, COMECON was the economic manifestation of the strategic cooperation and coordination existing under the now defunct Warsaw Pact Organisation. And ASEAN could hardly be singled out as an exception in this respect. Moreover, in retrospect, it seems that ASEAN nations had, probably, anticipated that if the new organisation had explicitly declared cooperation in political field, it might be construed as the pro-West, anti-communist or a revival of SEATO. Therefore, it may be conjectured that the founding fathers of ASEAN took a cue from other contemporary regional 'economic' organisations, and deliberately chose to soft-pedal security content of ASEAN. As Etzioni says, in the EC, no mention of political unification was made in the early years, the thrust having been put only on economic goals. But "now the EEC is safely launched, its President and many of its initial designers state that its aim is political unification, not merely economic". Thus, it may be concluded that the founding ASEAN members put the entire thrust an economic cooperation and related innocuous


objectives, and deliberately under-played political cooperation with a hope that ASEAN might eventually assume political role if the situation so warranted.