

THE STAKES OF THE FREE WORLD IN SOUTHEAST ASIA *

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We need to have closer understanding and cooperation if we are to survive as free nations. The crucial drama of our times—the deadly struggle between the forces of democratic freedom and communist imperialism—is moving rapidly toward a climax in Southeast Asia. The vortex of today's struggle for freedom has been shifted from Europe to Asia and the Far East. The whole continent of Asia has undergone radical changes within the last few years. Nationalism has reached its peak in Asia. Six new States, such as the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia, received their independence since the end of the last world war. The total population of these countries is over 600-million people, which is nearly one-fourth of the entire population of the world. Technically speaking, India, Pakistan and Ceylon are within the ambit of South Asia. Within Southeast Asia proper are Burma, Thailand, Indo-China, Indonesia, Malaya and the Philippines, having approximately 180-million people. Southeast Asia is a region of vast dimensions and is placed along the Western and Southern fringes of Communist China mainland. It is the next door neighbor of Australia in the Near North.

The peoples and problems of Southeast Asia are diverse and complex. There are differences in races, in ideas, in languages, in religions, in cultures, and in civilizations. Even in industrial development, there is a vast diversity. It is through these diversities and complexities that we can find their common attitudes in mind. These will also help the West in evolving a realistic and definite policy. However, there are important common interests and problems among the peoples of this area.

There is a strongly developing Asian consciousness to revolt against misery and poverty as the normal condition of life, and against foreign domination, either in the form of colonialism or imperialism. These two revolts—political and economic—have gained notable victories. In the political sphere, as I stated at the beginning, six new independent states have been proclaimed. It is a paradox but nevertheless true that the occupation of these countries by the Japanese during the last World War has intensified their burning desire to be free. On the economic front, substantial gains—particularly in

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raising their standards of living and education—have also been accomplished, since the end of the war. However, much remains to be done along this line.

There are many Asian leaders who are also conscious of the fact that the population problem, a serious and acute one, must be solved if the standards of living and education in this region are to be raised. Prime Minister Nehru of India, an outstanding Asian leader, was courageous enough to come out openly in favor of birth control as one of the practical solutions of the population problem of Asia.

Co-ordinated, comprehensive, and realistic policies on the part of the Western Powers toward Southeast Asia are imperative. The meeting of the military chiefs of staffs of the United States, France and England, with observers from Canada, Australia and New Zealand, on January 10, 1952, in Washington, D.C., to consider, among other things, the over-all defence of Southeast Asia against further attacks from Communist China was undoubtedly a forward step toward the co-ordination of their policies in the area. Constant consultations and conferences among the leaders, not only among the Western Powers, but also among the countries concerned, will go a long way in solving the many manifold problems confronting the region. There should be greater regional understanding and co-operation not only among the Western Powers, but also among the countries concerned. A round-table conference among the powers having vital interests in this region and the Southeast Asian countries should be called to discuss their common problems. This plan will pave the way for a better understanding and co-operation among themselves.

After having described in a cursory manner some of the main problems confronting Southeast Asia today, it is pertinent to ask: What are the stakes of the free world in Southeast Asia?

Southeast Asia is an area of strategic importance, economically and politically, for the East as well as for the West. Without the valuable raw materials of this region, Communist China could not be economically sound. Two-thirds of the exportable rice of the world and one-half of the exportable rubber, tin, abaca and oil are produced in this region. There is a sufficient manpower. These resources—physical and human—are great assets to a dynamic free world. You could imagine the serious consequences upon democracies if these vital war materials and manpower were to fall into the hands of the Communists! We already have the sad experience of losing the vast mainland of China to the Communists. Let us hope that it is only for the time being. Southeast Asia is an integral part of the

Western Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand, where the most vital air and naval bases of the United States are located. It forms a vital and strategic link in the chain of the global defence of the free nations which must be preserved.

The Soviet and Communist China rulers have become increasingly aware of the strategic importance of Southeast Asia. They have accelerated their efforts in pushing their objective by increasing their aids to their "proxies" or "stooges" in Indo-China, in Malaya and in Burma. Communist China has become the base of operations. Documents have been submitted to the United Nations showing that the weapons being used by the Chinese communists in Indo-China are supplied by Communist China and manufactured by Soviet Russia. As a result of the suspension of hostilities in Korea, some of their equipment, material and weapons are being diverted to Indo-China. Undoubtedly, Indo-China is the most explosive in the region. The strategic importance of Indo-China to the free world was dramatically stressed by both Vice-President Nixon of the United States, and Foreign Minister Casey of Australia only one week ago when they observed that if Indo-China falls into the hands of the communists, the whole of Southeast Asia will be seriously endangered.

It would be a tragic mistake if the free world were to underestimate the strategic importance of Southeast Asia in the global strategy. Today's challenge to freedom is that no nation, however powerful and rich it may be, can stand alone. The serious threat and assault against freedom in Southeast Asia involves more than the conflicting political ideologies. Democracy, and the police state have no common denominator and their struggle is not confined to certain geographical limits. The clash between these two philosophies of life is reaching its turning point in Southeast Asia.

It is significant that the forces of freedom are gaining ground gradually over the forces of communism. This is particularly notable in Malaya due to the vision and courage of General Templer, the High Commissioner. The successful campaign in Malaya against the bandit guerrillas was mentioned in the speech of Her Majesty the Queen to Parliament last October 29, when she said: "In Malaya my forces together with the local security forces have been increasingly successful in their campaign."

The conditions of poverty, ignorance and disease in Southeast Asia have been exploited by the communists in their propaganda against the Western Powers. Communist imperialism offers the hungry and underprivileged people of the world the promise of economic security at the price of political and spiritual enslavement. Even the nationalist movements in Asia have been capitalized by the

communists to advance their cause. They try to make common ground with nationalism in order to increase the Asian's distrust toward the West. The peoples of this region, however, have realized the folly of this assertion because the majority of them are convinced that the worst form of colonialism is Soviet domination.

The other free and strong nations cannot stand indifferent to the fate of the countries of this region, which have difficulty in recovering from the serious consequences of the last world war and also from the existing conditions of poverty, insecurity and ill-health. This is a challenge to the more favored nations to lend assistance to the peoples of Southeast Asia. Under normal conditions, the peoples of this region would prefer to tackle this job by themselves. We live now under extraordinary conditions, hence, we have to apply extraordinary remedies.

The problems of the world have become global in scope and extent. Their solutions must be met in a similar manner. Southeast Asia problems are in a real sense world problems. Healthy, educated and hopeful people are the best insurance against communism.

As I have seen most of these countries during the last few months, I can state that substantial economic developments have been going on in many areas. The Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, a specialized agency of the United Nations, whose headquarters is in Bangkok, has been particularly instrumental in the increased production and the increased use of industrial processes. Mobilization of the rich resources of the countries demands an increase of private capital investment, both local and foreign. Many of the countries have enacted laws which provide encouragement for foreign private investment. For instance, a law was just enacted this year in the Philippines increasing the period during which new and essential industries are exempt from taxation from four to ten years. This piece of legislation is applicable to both domestic and foreign-owned industries or enterprises.

It is encouraging to know that many agencies are contributing toward this positive peace offensive—a total war against poverty and social injustice—such as the United States military, technical and mutual security assistance; the United Nations Technical Assistance Programme; the Ford Foundation Plan; the British Commonwealth of Nations under the Colombo Plan. All these creative and generous acts of statesmanship cannot be effective without the material help, firm determination, and moral courage of the peoples concerned. However, it is important to bear in mind that the building of economic and social progress of Southeast Asia must be the primary responsibility of the nations in this region. Let it be made clear that these

various forms of assistance and other similar enterprises are not magic panaceas. Fast results must not be expected, as the progress will be slow. All these various aids are practical demonstrations of democracy in action and will undoubtedly contribute to the stability and prosperity of Southeast Asia.

It is axiomatic that the economic well-being of the people is the sound foundation for political resistance to Communism. The economic development of the countries of Southeast Asia is the essential ingredient to ensure their security and freedom. The free peoples of the world can not live happily if one-half of them are in a state of dire poverty and misery.

One observation might be pertinent in this regard. Many Asian peoples are mistaken in their belief that if they have their independence, relief from poverty and misery will inevitably follow. Political independence does not necessarily carry with it economic and social independence. National independence would be meaningless and illusory if it is not accompanied by economic and social security. Be that as it may, as a result of the independence of some nations of Southeast Asia, there has been a growing consciousness of their grave responsibilities in improving their lot. They have realized that they have a vital part to play in building a healthy and prosperous Southeast Asia. Undoubtedly, in the performance of these heavy responsibilities, they will make mistakes but they do not like other peoples to dictate to them.

Land reform is vitally needed in Southeast Asia where most of the lands are not in the hands of the tenants or workers who cultivate them. Majority of the owners are absentee landlords. The evils of landlordism have already been the subject of study by certain technical agencies of the United Nations. This is more important if one considers the fact that the economy of the region is primarily based upon agriculture. This question of land reform is not only limited to this area. It is a world-wide problem because three-quarters of the world's entire population depend upon the land for their livelihood.

There is a desperate need for increased goodwill and understanding in the dealings of the West with the peoples of Asia. The granting of economic, technical and military assistance to most of these countries can be more effective and far-reaching in its effect if accompanied by sympathetic understanding toward them. There should be a new and realistic approach to the relations between the East and the West, based upon mutual trust and confidence. The sooner that the peoples of the West forget that they were the former colonial rulers in the East, the better for all parties concerned. Likewise,

whatever past mistakes had been committed by both parties should not be used as barriers toward the present and future economic development of the rich natural resources of Southeast Asia. The important problem right now is not the past; it is the future. Furthermore, the sooner that the East provides a favorable political climate for the wider use of capital investment, the better for its economic development.

In the task of building a stable and prosperous Southeast Asia, the East and West should cooperate with each other. By pursuing sympathetic and intelligent policies, the West will find it possible to work with the Asian nations. The peoples of Southeast Asia should also be given encouragement and support to their genuine desire to improve their lot. They are longing for better things in life. They are aspiring toward a higher standard of living. They seek better systems of government which can fulfill their desire for real freedom. They are determined to resist communist imperialism and aggression. Although some of the countries in Southeast Asia have adopted a neutral or independent attitude in the East-West struggle for power, there is no doubt that all of them are fighting communism within their borders.

The free world is facing a serious challenge in Southeast Asia. The stakes are too high and the risks too great. The whole area, if it is to become a strong bulwark against communist aggression, must continually develop economically and socially. All these efforts must be integrated in the common efforts and defense of the free world.

The free nations must not permit the newly established states in this region to surrender or capitulate to communist expansion by default. A victory for freedom, for peace and for democracy is not only a victory for Southeast Asia but also a victory for the rest of the free world. Such a victory likewise will enable millions of Asian peoples to develop a robust faith in themselves in the ideals of freedom and justice.

Let us go forward, trusting in the wisdom of Divine Providence, and with a renewed sense of dedication—to reach the goal we seek—to keep forever alive the vestal fire of freedom in all the countries of Southeast Asia.