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THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MALACCA STRAIT

BY
R.G. Boyd



ORAE MEMORANDUM NO. M86



ORAE

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OPERATIONAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS ESTABLISHMENT
DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

OTTAWA, CANADA

APRIL 1977

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ABSTRACT

The Malacca Strait has strategic significance with reference to the movement of cargo ships and naval vessels between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Strait will be within the territorial waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, if a twelve mile territorial sea limit becomes part of the internationally accepted body of Ocean Law. Efforts by the coastal states to assert jurisdiction will affect Japanese commerce with Western Europe and the Middle East, and the transit of US and Soviet naval vessels from the Pacific into the Indian Ocean.

The interests of the coastal states relate to an ASEAN plan for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia. The implementation of this plan however is affected by a Chinese naval presence in the South China Sea, and by Chinese claims to the islands in this Sea. Not all the ASEAN members are disposed to accept China as a state having territory within the area to be neutralised. Such a situation however could be difficult to avoid if the Chinese presence were strengthened after the exclusion of US and Soviet naval forces from much of Southeast Asia as a consequence of assertions of jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, whose claims are supported by Peking.

RESUME

Le trafic des navires de fret et des bâtiments navals entre la mer de Chine méridionale et l'océan Indien confère au détroit de Malacca une importance stratégique de premier plan. Si la limite de la mer territoriale de douze milles devient internationalement reconnue par le droit de la mer, le détroit fera désormais partie des eaux territoriales de l'Indonésie, de Malaisie et de Singapour. Les efforts des états riverains en vue d'exercer leur souveraineté ne seront pas sans incidences sur les relations commerciales qu'entretient le Japon avec l'Europe occidentale et le Moyen-Orient, ainsi que sur le passage des bâtiments de la Marine américaine et soviétique de l'océan Pacifique à l'océan Indien.

La revendication des intérêts des états riverains coïncide avec un projet de l'Association des pays de l'Asie du sud-est visant la neutralisation de sud-est asiatique. La mise en oeuvre de ce projet est toutefois gênée par la présence de la Force navale chinoise dans la mer de Chine méridionale, et par les revendications de la Chine à l'endroit de l'île qui s'y trouve. Les pays membres de l'Association des pays de l'Asie du sud-est ne sont pas tous d'accord pour reconnaître des droits territoriaux à la Chine, à l'intérieur du secteur même qu'ils cherchent à neutraliser. Cependant, pareille situation pourrait être difficile à éviter si la présence chinoise était renforcée par l'exclusion des forces navales américaines et soviétiques d'une grande partie de l'Asie du sud-est par suite des pressions revendicatrices des droits territoriaux exercées par l'Indonésie, la Malaisie et Singapour à l'égard du détroit de Malacca, lesquelles sont d'ailleurs appuyées par le gouvernement de Pékin.

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THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MALACCA STRAIT

INTRODUCTION

1. The Malacca Strait is one of five major passages which can be used by ships moving between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, and is the only one of the five that is regarded as an international strait by its major users, who include Japan, the USA, and the Soviet Union. The other four passages go through the Indonesian archipelago, and are used only infrequently by international shipping.

2. The volume of traffic through the Malacca Strait is large; most of the vessels handling trade between Japan and Western Europe, and Japan and the Middle East, move through this passage, as do many of the ships trading between Western Europe and Southeast Asia. The Strait is congested, and there is a growing need for regulation of the traffic. This is desired by the coastal states, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, who regard the strait as being within their territorial waters; they accept the principle of a twelve mile territorial sea; favoured by most states at the Law of the Sea Convention, and this would justify their claim, as the Strait is only eight nautical miles wide at its narrowest.

3. Singapore, because of heavy dependence on trade handled by vessels moving through the Strait, is very cautious about asserting jurisdiction over the passage. Indonesia and Malaysia are more assertive, but also show some caution, mainly because of unwillingness to strain relations with their large industrialised trading partners, especially the USA and Japan. The primary concern of the Indonesian and Malaysian administrations is to exercise effective control over their territorial waters, especially to regulate international traffic in the Strait, and to restrict its use by foreign naval vessels. With Singapore,

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Indonesia and Malaysia are seeking, in conjunction with the other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, to transform Southeast Asia into a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality.

4. Most of the major outside states which have interests in using the Strait are maintaining quite cordial relations with Indonesia and Malaysia, and can anticipate responsible use of the claimed jurisdiction if this becomes effective. If shipping through the Strait were subjected to delays, however, or became hazardous, vessels moving between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean would have to round Australia, unless one of the four passages through the Indonesian archipelago could be used.

5. The twelve mile territorial sea principle and the claims of the coastal states to jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait are supported by China, principally, it seems, because the Chinese wish Indonesia and Malaysia to restrict the use of the passage by the naval vessels of the superpowers, in line with the plan for a neutral zone in Southeast Asia. For their part the Chinese are claiming all the islands in the South China Sea, and are utilising some of these for the support of a growing naval presence; in addition, they are claiming jurisdiction over a larger shelf which extends beneath this sea down towards Malaysia and Indonesia.

6. The Soviet Union endorses the twelve mile territorial sea principle, but affirms that Malacca is an international strait, through which there should be free passage for all ships. The USA and Japan also argue that the Strait is an international passage, but appear ready to compromise to the extent of accepting some controls by the coastal states if there are significant pressures from interested developing countries in support of Indonesia and Malaysia.

7. Canada, as an outside country seeking friendly relations with Indonesia and Malaysia, and with the other ASEAN members, has an opportunity to assist the coastal states in their endeavours to make their jurisdiction effective in the Malacca Strait. The need to regulate traffic in the passage will continue to grow, as will the related navigation and pollution problems, and if the legitimate concerns of the coastal states are ignored by the major users, the Indonesian and Malaysian administrations may experience acute frustration if the necessity for adequate controls in the strait is dramatised by serious collisions, oil spills, and damage to local fisheries.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STRAIT

8. The Malacca Strait is a passage about five hundred nautical miles long between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, that is the West Coast of Malaysia and island of Singapore. The governing depth is only seventy-five feet, which makes submerged passage hazardous for submarines, and which also makes the strait unsuitable for tankers over 250,000 tons. But large numbers of ships use this waterway, including most of the approximately 40,000 vessels which enter and leave Singapore each year.¹

9. The four alternative passages through the Indonesian archipelago, going West to East, are Sunda, Lombok, Ombai-Wetar, and Torres. Sunda, between Java and Sumatra, has a depth of about one hundred and twenty feet, and at its narrowest is twelve nautical miles wide; it is used by laden tankers over 250,000 tons which cannot pass safely through the Malacca Strait. Lombok, between Bali and Lombok, has a depth of six hundred feet, and a minimum width of eleven nautical miles; because of its depth it is very suitable for the passage of submerged submarines, and this is also true of Ombai-Wetar, between Indonesia and Timor, which has a depth of six hundred feet and a minimum width of

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twelve nautical miles. Torres, between West Irian (Indonesia) and Australia, has a depth of only thirty-nine feet, and a minimum width of ten nautical miles.

10. Malacca and the other passages would be vulnerable to weapons systems on the coasts, and to mining. If all five passages became unsafe, ships moving between the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific would have to round Australia. The diversion would add 3,000 miles to a voyage from Guam to Diego Garcia, and would approximately double the distance for a ship moving from the Philippines into the Indian Ocean.² At present there are no major security problems in Malaysia or Indonesia which would have serious implications for users of the Malacca Strait, but at a later stage Communist guerillas operating in Malaysia could pose dangers for vessels using this passage.

11. Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore declared in November 1970 that the Malacca Strait was within their territorial waters, and was not an "international strait". No moves were made to enforce jurisdiction, but in October 1971 Indonesia and Malaysia ratified a treaty delineating their boundary in the Strait. At the 1972 United Nations Seabed Committee meetings the USA and the USSR argued that the passage was an international strait, through which there should be guaranteed freedom of transit for all vessels, but subsequently the USA appeared to be ready to move to a negotiating position which would involve acceptance of some controls over traffic by the coastal states, in line with the principle of a twelve mile territorial sea.³ The need for adequate controls over the movement of vessels in the passage was made especially evident in 1975 by large oil spills, one caused by a collision involving a tanker. Meanwhile, Indonesian and Malaysian concerns with preventing the use of the Strait by foreign warships appeared to increase after the Communist victories in Indochina, which confronted both states with new problems of co-existence with Peking. In February 1976 Indonesia and Malaysia, together with

Singapore, joined other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in reaffirming their commitment to work for the establishment of a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality in Southeast Asia.⁴

12. Control over the Strait as part of the territorial sea would make it possible for Indonesia and Malaysia to prevent the movement of foreign warships between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, except by rounding Australia, and would help to exclude the military forces of outside powers from Southeast Asia. The denial of transit through the passage to naval vessels from outside the area, however, would probably contribute to the development of a strong Chinese presence in the South Sea, and to a growth of accommodative policies towards Peking in the area. While the passage continues to be used, in effect, as an international strait, the expansion of the Chinese presence in the area appears to be significantly checked by a Soviet presence, and by the substantially reduced but still significant involvement of the United States.

INDONESIA'S INTERESTS AND POLICIES

13. Indonesia has an interest in asserting control over the Malacca Strait, in collaboration with Malaysia and Singapore. This interest is political, strategic, economic, and environmental. There is a concern with giving full effect to a concept of sovereignty to which there is a strong attachment, but which entails frustration because the state's weakness and dependence on external aid prevent firm action to make the claimed control effective. Resentments at the perceived insensitivity of the major users to the rights of the coastal states seem to accumulate, tending to reinforce long standing Indonesian antipathies towards the colonial mentality still exhibited by some Western states. Strategically, control of the Strait is necessary for adequate defence of the archipelago, and this consideration will assume

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greater importance if Communist guerillas in Malaysia attempt infiltration into Sumatra.⁵ Denial of the use of the Strait to foreign warships is clearly intended, but for a considerable period the claimed jurisdiction could be used with special consideration for the interests of the USA, in order to limit opportunities for the development of a strong Chinese presence in Southeast Asia, and especially to avoid a situation in which the establishment of a neutral zone would be followed by a substantial strengthening of the presently small Chinese naval forces in the South China Sea, supported from bases on the islands under Peking's control.

14. Economically, the Strait evidently represents a potential source of revenue for Indonesia, as for Malaysia, at least to cover the cost of navigation aids, control equipment, and dredging. Small fees imposed on each vessel in transit would provide adequate compensation for expenses relating to the control of traffic and could also help to support exploration and the development of resources in the economic zone which Indonesia can claim offshore, up to a distance of two hundred miles, in line with what appears to be a consensus - among countries participating in the Law of the Sea Convention - that coastal states have sovereignty over offshore resources in such an area. In accordance with the economic zone concept, Indonesia and Malaysia can claim exclusive rights over the resources of the Malacca Strait, and of a substantial area in the South China Sea, while Indonesia can also affirm sovereignty over a large zone around its islands, from Sumatra to West Irian.

15. The environmental concern, shared with Malaysia and Singapore, is to ensure that the Strait will not become polluted as the volume of traffic grows. Pollution in the Strait can affect coast fishing on which local inhabitants are dependent, and could hinder exploitation of the Strait's mineral resources. With the expansion of all forms of cooperation between the ASEAN

members the control of pollution in the Strait is likely to become a concern that will be shared with Thailand and the Philippines, and that may be broadened to cover environmental issues in the economic zones of all the ASEAN states.

16. For the time being, however, Indonesia's interests in relation to the Strait cannot be pressed. That is not possible because of the country's military weakness and economic backwardness, which prevent firm bargaining with the United States and Japan, the principle friendly powers which demand use of the passage as an international strait. Indonesia sends roughly half its exports to Japan, and nearly a fifth to the USA. Japan and the United States, moreover, are Indonesia's main sources of foreign investment and economic assistance. The country's needs for external private capital and public aid are very large, as there was little economic growth during the first sixteen years of independence, on account of the maladministration of the Sukarno administration, and this has severely limited the possibilities for development over the past ten years.⁶

17. The acquisition of external resources to assist economic growth is given very high priority by the Indonesian ruling group. This is a military elite who acquired power after the failure of an attempted Communist Coup in 1965; it rules in partnership with civilian officials, including the Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, formerly associated with one of the small leftist parties that were active during Sukarno's period. Most of these officials, including Malik, appear to share a consensus with the army leaders that the requirements of modernization should largely determine the direction of the country's foreign policy, and that the other principal concern in their foreign relations should be to maintain adequate security against internal and external Communist threats. The army leaders, on account of their experiences in 1965, when many of their colleagues were assassinated by Communists, are extremely hostile to the underground

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Communist movement, and to the Peking regime, with which its leadership is identified. Unlike the other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Indonesia has not sought a new relationship with China in order to establish a basis for co-existence in the unfavourable situation produced by the Communist victories in Indochina. The Indonesian administration is sensitive to indications that Chinese influence in the immediate environment may increase, through cultural and political penetration of Thailand and Malaysia, and the development of a naval presence based on islands in the South China Sea, but evidently hopes that the USA will continue to make some contribution to the preservation of security in the area.⁷

18. Regionally, the Indonesian leaders show some ambition to establish their state as the strongest power in Southeast Asia. This appears to be linked with the objective of establishing a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality, especially as the exclusion of outside military forces from such an area would tend to enhance the strength of Indonesia's position in relation to the other members of ASEAN. There is clearly no intent to push for the removal of US military power from the area, however, as that would open the way for a stronger Chinese role in the immediate environment. The gradual development of a Chinese naval presence in the South China Sea is not welcomed, and the establishment of the proposed Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality may be seen as a move that will discourage the growth of a Chinese naval presence in the Southern part of the South China Sea. On this matter, however, there seems to be a lack of rapport with the other ASEAN members, including Malaysia and Thailand, who are evidently less willing to risk antagonising Peking by opposing Chinese naval intrusions into what is claimed to be an area of islands under Chinese sovereignty.

19. In the longer term it is evidently hoped to build up ASEAN as a regional organization, under Indonesian leadership,

for collective management of the area's security problems, and to provide adequate backing for Indonesian and Malaysian controls over the Malacca Strait. The presently weak cohesion within ASEAN however obliges Indonesia to emphasise self-reliance in the handling of relations with powers outside Southeast Asia, and this means adjusting diplomacy to suit the limitations of the inferior bargaining position which has to be accepted in dealing with the USA and Japan. Indonesia's interests would be furthered substantially if the USA and Japan adopted sympathetic and cooperative attitudes on the question of jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait, and that would enable Jakarta to concentrate on the problem of establishing a neutral zone that would limit China's scope for the deployment of naval forces in the South China Sea.

20. Indonesia's armed forces, which can be developed slowly as the country modernizes with external assistance, are too weak to support a significant regional security role, and are barely adequate for the internal security functions which will have to be anticipated over the next five years if Chinese solidarity with the Indonesian Communist movement is translated into forms of military support for guerillas on the various islands of the archipelago. The Indonesian army is a partially modernized infantry force of slightly less than two hundred thousand men; it has little mobility, and few supporting arms. The air force has less than one hundred effective combat aircraft, and most of these are obsolete craft on which maintenance is difficult because they are Soviet models, obtained during the early 1960's, before the severe deterioration in relations with the USSR that followed the attempted Communist coup in 1965. The navy is a small coastal defence force, comprising mainly outdated Soviet ships, including two destroyers, five submarines, and seven frigates.⁸

21. The development of the Indonesian armed forces, and, more importantly, the evolution of the Indonesian political system,

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depends very much on the degree of unity which is maintained within the ruling military group. This group is divided by personal rivalries, and there appear to be some antipathies towards it in the secondary elite of the military establishment, many of whom are non-Javanese, because most of its members are abangan Moslems from Central and East Java. Under President Suharto's leadership the group functions as a rather collective executive, but with very little accountability to the elected legislature, in which its officially sponsored party, the Sekber Golkar, has a large and well controlled majority. This low degree of accountability, as in other army-dominated regimes, contributes to the development of power struggles within the dominant group, and makes the performance of that group as a political leadership heavily dependent on its own motivations and resources - that is, in the absence of challenges from the legislative level.⁹

22. If Indonesia experiences the kind of instability that is often present in praetorian systems its policy regarding the Malacca Strait could be affected. A new military group seeking to establish its authority could become very assertive on the question of controlling traffic in the passage, as this would help to mobilise national sentiments against the unaccommodating users, although at the risk of losing some external aid and foreign investment. If the present ruling elite becomes very deeply divided its lack of coherence would prevent the implementation of a consistent policy, but there would probably be an accumulation of resentments against the major users of the Strait which could be given strong expression at a later stage, perhaps after factional rivalries had given way to a firm consensus in reaction to some event indicative of highly reprehensible attitudes in the administrations of the user states. Even if it does not experience serious internal conflict, however, the current Indonesian leadership may develop a strongly emotional commitment to the objective of asserting control over the Strait, or it may calculate that a resolute attitude and some use of limited force will enable it to

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secure recognition of its rights - and Malaysia's - from the interested outside states.

MALAYSIA'S INTERESTS AND POLICY

23. Malaysia shares Indonesia's political, strategic, economic and environmental interests relating to the Malacca Strait, but with some differing perspectives. There is an awareness of having the status of a much smaller power, and of an internal security problem with external ramifications that are viewed as obligating a careful search for accommodation with Peking.

24. The Malaysian administration desires to have effective control, with Indonesia, over its twelve mile territorial sea. This is firstly a matter of sovereignty, but it requires cooperation by the major users of the passage, on whose trade and investment the Malaysian economy is heavily dependent. The attitudes of the Malaysian leaders appear to be more flexible and less influenced by anti-colonial sentiments than those of the Indonesian ruling group, but there are no indications that their goodwill on the question of the Strait is being cultivated by Japan and the United States, the most important interested parties. The Malaysian government is a collective executive operating within a basically democratic framework; its members are highly Westernized, have broad experience in the management of relations with foreign states, and are less seriously divided by personal and other rivalries than their Indonesian counterparts. For security reasons, however, the Malaysian administration has a more vital interest in the proposed Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality, and, therefore, in the development of controls over the Strait that will deny its use to foreign warships.¹⁰

25. The Malaysian administration's strategic perspective is dominated by the external aspects of the potentially very serious internal security problem posed by the underground Malayan Communist

Party, whose approximately 2000 guerillas have bases along the Thai border. In recent years this organization has been weakened by the defections of groups which formed a Communist Party of Malaya (Marxist-Leninist) and a Communist Party of Malaya (Revolutionary Faction) but it remains much larger than these rival associations and receives propaganda support from China, especially from a clandestine radio transmitter, the Voice of Malayan Revolution. There is believed to be considerable sympathy for the Party among the large Chinese community in Malaysia, partly for communal reasons, as members of this community resent the racial discrimination which results from the pro-Malaysian administration's educational, employment, and commercial policies.

26. In order to cope with the presently localised terrorism and guerilla activity of the Malayan Communist Party the Malaysian administration seeks to maintain a cordial official relationship with Peking, and publicises the Chinese Communist government's declarations of respect for the principles of peaceful co-existence in its dealings with Malaysia. This is intended to reduce the Malayan Communist Party's appeal to the communal sentiments of the Chinese population. In addition, the Malaysian administration seeks to deal with the security problem at a deeper level by maintaining a high rate of economic growth, with considerable emphasis on welfare and the improvement of agriculture. This, together with the rather discriminatory measures against the Chinese community, in effect prevents the Malayan Communist Party from attracting support within the Malay population.

27. To maintain a high rate of economic growth, Malaysia stresses the development of trade with and the attraction of investment from Japan, the USA, and other private enterprise countries. Hence there is a reluctance to become very assertive over the question of controlling the use of the Malacca Strait, as strains in the relationships with the USA and Japan could seriously affect the performance of the economy. Nevertheless

control of the Strait, with Indonesia and Singapore, is considered highly desirable not only for reasons of sovereignty but also to assist establishment of the proposed Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality, which is regarded as a device to restrict Chinese penetration of Southeast Asia. The establishment of such a zone, it is evidently hoped, will impose some restraint on Chinese activities in support of Communist guerilla forces in Malaysia and Thailand, and on the development of a Chinese naval presence in the Southern part of the South China Sea.¹¹ From the Malaysian point of view, it is imperative to establish such a zone as soon as possible, before external military aid to the local and the Thai Communists can help them to expand their operations, and before the Chinese develop a significant number of bases on the islands which they claim in the South China Sea.

28. Jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait, if used to bar its use to foreign warships, could prepare the way for the development of controls over the contiguous offshore economic zones of the ASEAN countries, and, thus, for their neutralisation. The Malaysian administration, together with the Indonesian government, may be encouraged to work in this direction as they see larger states, including the USA, taking unilateral measures to assert control over two hundred mile offshore economic zones.

29. Malaysian policy in relation to the Strait, it must be emphasised, has to be coordinated with Indonesia's and to a considerable extent has to respect that country's larger role in Southeast Asia. Relations between the two administrations are very cordial, as fairly high levels of mutual understanding and goodwill are made possible by shared commitments to Islam, linguistic affinities, and common antipathies to China which are both ideological and communal. The Indonesian administration, however, is unwilling to place as much emphasis as Malaysia does on the development of friendly relations at the official level with China, and evidently would not welcome Chinese involvement in the

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scheme for neutralising Southeast Asia, which may be envisaged by Malaysia.

30. Malaysia's armed forces are very small, and are probably inadequate for control functions in and over the Strait; more than equal participation in that task by the Indonesian armed forces would probably be necessary. The Malaysian navy has some 24 patrol craft, each less than 100 tons, one anti-submarine frigate, and six coastal minesweepers. The airforce has only 36 combat aircraft, and most of these are obsolete. The army, an infantry force of about 56,000, has little armour, artillery, or transport.¹² The capabilities of all these forces, especially the ground units, may be placed under severe strain during the next few years if there is growing Communist guerilla activity in the northern part of the country, with support from revolutionary organizations in Thailand's southern provinces.

31. Malaysian policy in relation to the Malacca Strait, while supported by smaller resources than Indonesia's, and while probably more susceptible to bargaining pressures by the major outside users of the passage, may nevertheless be more consistent and stable, and may well be more skilfully implemented. The Malaysian administration enjoys a much higher degree of legitimacy than its Indonesian counterpart, principally because its dominant figures are leaders of a well established political party, the United Malays National Organization, which draws broad and stable support from the Malay community, and which has long been functioning at a higher level of institutional development than the Indonesian Sekber Golkar, which has many of the weaknesses of parties sponsored by military regimes. The leaders of the Malay party have a much greater capacity to resolve issues of policy and succession without strain, and to develop and maintain a coherent policy orientation on any external issue. The Malaysian administration, moreover, has a more highly developed bureaucracy through which its policies can be implemented, and is thus probably

better equipped to handle the technical and administrative problems of regulating traffic in the Strait, although lacking the naval and air capabilities necessary for effective restriction of the Strait's use by foreign warships.

SINGAPORE'S INVOLVEMENT

32. Singapore is the smallest of the three coastal states, but its port facilities handle a very high proportion of the traffic through the Malacca Strait, and, until the post-1973 increase in Indonesia's oil revenues, its exports were somewhat larger than those of that country, and of Malaysia. Because its economy is heavily dependent on foreign trade, the Singapore administration is very reluctant to take any steps that would discourage international use of the Malacca Strait. For vital economic and security reasons, however, Singapore is obliged to maintain a high level of cooperation with its immediate neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia.

33. Singapore's extremely small size would prevent it from playing a major role in the enforcement of traffic controls in the Malacca Strait. As it is the main financial and industrial centre in Southeast Asia, and the fourth largest port in the world, however, it would be a very appropriate administrative base for a tripartite authority for the regulation of traffic in the Strait. A very high proportion of the approximately 40,000 vessels which call at Singapore each year move through the Strait, and a large number of these do business with the agencies of some 200 hundred shipping lines on the island. The Port Authority has extensive communications facilities which could be expanded to support the work of a Malacca Strait control centre.

34. Singapore has a highly responsible democratic administration with an international perspective somewhat different from those of Malaysia and Indonesia. The ruling Peoples Action Party

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is a vigorous democratic socialist organization which strives, with considerable success, to maintain a high rate of economic growth, with emphasis on the private sector, while promoting very active social welfare programs. Because of an awareness of very heavy dependence on foreign trade, the Singapore administration is even more sensitive than its Malaysian counterpart to any issues that would affect the attitudes of major trading partners. The more friendly of these trading partners, moreover, are seen not only as states with whom vital commercial links must be maintained but also as powers whose involvement in Southeast Asian affairs can help Singapore's interests. There is a desire to develop ties with such states in order to be able to offset any undue pressures on Singapore by Malaysia and/or Indonesia. In addition, there is a desire to see the USA continue its involvement in Southeast Asia so that opportunities for the expansion of Chinese Communist influence will be restricted. For the same reason there is also a wish to see the USSR develop a more active role in Southeast Asia. Hence there is little inclination to support proposals for restrictions on the use of the Strait by foreign warships. Yet Singapore as a member of ASEAN has been obliged to endorse the objective of establishing a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality in Southeast Asia.¹³

35. Singapore has a minor voice in ASEAN, and is obliged to shape its policy in relation to the organization on the basis of some interests that pose conflicting requirements. The development of increasing cooperation within ASEAN could help the growth of complementarity between Singapore's small economy and those of the other members, while providing Singapore with a more secure environment. Yet if ASEAN becomes a more cohesive and more closely knit regional body Singapore's closer relationships with the larger members will be quite unequal, and there will be no affinities with other members which could be utilised to gain increased bargaining strength on issues within the organization which are likely to be settled with only limited consideration of Singapore's

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interests. Equitable treatment of Singapore's concerns will thus be a difficult although necessary objective for any outside state that becomes involved in the politics of this area, whether relating simply to tripartite cooperation between the coastal states on the Malacca Strait question, or to the larger question of collaboration within ASEAN with which the Malacca Strait problem may become linked.

US POLICIES AND INTERESTS

36. The most important, although not the largest, user of the Malacca Strait with which the coastal states must deal is the USA. Despite its losses of status and influence in Southeast Asia, the USA still plays a significant role in the politics of this region, and, to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, it remains the principal external counter to the activities of the USSR and China in the area. For the three coastal states, moreover, the USA is a very significant trading partner, and a major external source of aid and private investment.

37. The United States has a major strategic interest in the Malacca Strait and in two of the passages through the Indonesian archipelago, in so far as these three waterways offer routes for the swiftest possible movement of naval vessels between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Deployments in the Indian Ocean have become highly important in US naval strategy, and any rapid increases in these deployments would have to be made principally through the movement of ships from the Western Pacific. Deployments from the Fleet in the Mediterranean would be limited to smaller vessels, as the larger US craft cannot move through the Suez Canal, and presumably would be hard to justify, in most of the foreseeable scenarios, as the strategic priorities served by the forces in the Mediterranean are very high.

38. The US strategic interest in the Malacca Strait is based

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principally on the view, shared by its major users, that it is an international strait, through which foreign ships are entitled to unimpeded transit. Because of its congestion and relative shallowness, however, this strait is less significant as a waterway than the two deep passages through the Indonesian archipelago, Lombok and Ombai-Wetar. Yet since these two passages do not have the status of international straits, and will clearly be within Indonesian waters if the widely endorsed twelve mile territorial sea principle is accepted, US use of them for the movement of naval vessels between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean will require Indonesian official approval.¹⁴

39. The USA's economic interests in the Malacca Strait are secondary, that is in comparison with the intensive use of Atlantic and Pacific sea routes in US commerce with Japan and Western Europe, but any serious restrictions on the use of the Strait that would affect Japan's commerce would assume great importance for the USA's East Asian policy. The management of US policy in relation to the Strait would then be very difficult, as Japan would look to the United States for support, while the USA would have to contend with Chinese support for the efforts of the coastal states to assert their jurisdiction.

40. In the longer term the US strategic perspective is likely to be complicated by Chinese assertions of sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea, and of controls over a large Chinese economic zone in this sea, and also by the growth of a Chinese naval presence, based on some of the islands which Peking now controls in this sea, or which it intends to occupy. The USA's responses are likely to depend principally on the degree of priority which it continues to accord to the development of its detente with China, as a strategic design aimed against the USSR. If tacit acceptance of Chinese demands for virtual hegemony in Southeast Asia is part of this design, and if there is some confidence that China can, to a large degree, exclude the USSR

from this area, that USA may be willing to accept a situation in which ASEAN attempts to set up a zone of neutrality and Chinese efforts to keep the superpowers out of Southeast Asia result in denials of the use of the Malacca Strait to the naval vessels of outside powers.

41. A special US concern is the transit of nuclear powered missile submarines between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Under existing sea law submarines passing through territorial seas are obliged to surface, and thus recognition of the twelve mile territorial sea principle would make this obligatory for US submarines moving through the Malacca Strait, unless special arrangements were made with Indonesia and Malaysia. The Malacca Strait may well be too shallow and too congested for submerged passage, but submerged passage is quite feasible through the deep and little used Lombok and Ombai-Wetar passages, subject to Indonesian approval. Submerged passage makes tracking more difficult for Soviet surveillance systems.¹⁵

42. A further special US concern is the possible use of the ocean floor, within or near the Malacca Strait and the major passages through the Indonesian archipelago, for acoustic devices to assist in tracking Soviet and Chinese submarines. The importance of this interest is difficult to assess, and understandably it is not likely to be the subject of any public comment. On this matter US policy evidently calls for understandings with the Indonesian and Malaysian administrations.

43. The negotiating stand of the USA at the Law of the Sea Convention indicates a readiness to accept the principle of a twelve mile territorial sea, but with an understanding that there shall be unimpeded transit through recognised international straits.¹⁶ This position appears to be adjustable, with reference to the concerns of coastal states regarding the regulation of traffic, pollution controls, and the movement of naval vessels.

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The US administration may well be able to prevent its policy relating to the Malacca Strait from being subjected to pressures by domestic interest groups of the kind that have been responsible for perpetuating the inequities in its policy regarding the Panama Canal.

SOVIET INTERESTS AND POLICY

44. The USSR's interests in the Malacca Strait are almost entirely strategic, and relate principally to the USA and China. Relatively little Soviet trade passes through the waterway, and if its use by international shipping were obstructed the economic consequences would be on balance favourable to the USSR: Japanese interest in oil and gas supplies from the Soviet Far East would be increased, and overland freight routes through the USSR would assume more significance for West European and Japanese exporters.

45. The Soviet Union uses the Malacca Strait for the movement of its naval vessels between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The other passages through the Indonesian Archipelago are evidently not used for this purpose, as the USSR does not challenge the Indonesian administration's stand that these are within territorial waters. The Soviet Union is endeavouring to improve its relations with Indonesia, which have been strained since the attempted Communist coup in Jakarta during 1965, which led to the suppression of the Indonesian Communist Party.

46. For the USSR, the principal strategic consideration relating to the Malacca Strait appears to be its use for the support of the expanding Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean from bases in the Soviet Far East, and possibly later in Vietnam. This naval presence is directed mainly against US use of the Indian Ocean for the deployment of missile submarines, but is also an important factor in the Soviet strategic stance against China. The USSR's Indian Ocean naval presence is in part maintained by

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vessels and supplies moving from the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal, but this has become somewhat difficult because of the loss of facilities at Egyptian ports, and the extreme vulnerability of the Suez Canal must make reliance on its use unwise in the Soviet strategic perspective. Soviet supply routes through the Atlantic and around South Africa, although long and very much exposed to NATO surveillance, are more significant links with the Indian Ocean, but are evidently less important than the less vulnerable and shorter routes to that Ocean from Soviet Far Eastern ports through the South China Sea.¹⁷

47. A major secondary strategic consideration of the USSR is that the use of the Malacca Strait as an international waterway facilitates the maintenance of a Soviet naval presence in the South China Sea. Closure of the Strait to the naval vessels of powers outside Southeast Asia would make it difficult for the Soviet Union to project its military power into this area, and would make the competing projection of Chinese power into this part of East Asia more effective. For the USSR, a naval presence in the South China Sea evidently has much significance for the containment of China, and for the development of Soviet influence in Southeast Asia, and especially in Vietnam. The USSR, moreover, can anticipate that any strengthening of its presence in the area will be tacitly welcomed by Southeast Asian states that are apprehensive about the consequences of growing Chinese naval strength in the South China Sea.

48. The Soviet Union's use of the Malacca Strait, like that of the USA, is affected by the waterway's congestion and shallowness. Submerged passage by Soviet submarines is hazardous, but the present state of Moscow's relations with Jakarta probably does not make it feasible for the USSR to

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seek use of the much deeper and little used passages through the Indonesian archipelago. Soviet statements on the Malacca Strait have mostly avoided reference to the problems of traffic regulation and pollution control in the waterway, and have insisted that this passage is an international strait, emphasising that it should be open to free passage by all ships. The principle of a twelve mile territorial sea, however, is endorsed by the USSR, and Soviet pronouncements also accept the claims of coastal states to a 200 mile economic zone in which they have sovereign rights over living and mineral resources in the sea - but with the understanding that if a coastal state uses only a part of its fish reserves these should be open to exploitation by fishermen of other countries.¹⁸

49. The Soviet position that Malacca is an international strait accords with the Japanese view, as well as with that of the USA, but there is evidently no coordination with Tokyo or Washington in diplomacy towards the three coastal states. Soviet relations with these states are not as warm as those of the USA and Japan, and by comparison with those two states the USSR has much less to bargain with in its dealings with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The Soviet Union, moreover, draws much greater hostility from China than either Japan or the USA on account of its stand that the Malacca Strait is an international waterway.¹⁹ For the present the USSR does not appear to be pressing its interests in the use of the strait, but it benefits from the positions adopted by Japan and the USA, as these dissuade the coastal states from attempting to assert their rights.

50. The Soviet Union probably anticipates that by steadily improving its relations with the coastal states it will be able to persuade them to accept the use of the Malacca Strait by its naval vessels. This may be envisaged as part of an arrangement permitting general use of the waterway by

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foreign warships, including those of the USA and Japan, or as an understanding related to the scheme for neutralising South-east Asia, with the USSR playing the role of an external guarantor. For the present, however, the USSR is not associating itself with the proposal for a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality in the ASEAN area; it is still seeking to promote the establishment of an Asian Collective Security Pact, directed against China, and is endeavouring to enlist the support of the ASEAN members.²⁰ The setting up of this pact appears to be the principal concern of the Soviet Union's East Asian policy, and this objective evidently makes it all the more important for the USSR to be able to move its naval vessels unhindered through the Malacca Strait, especially so as to maintain a presence in the South China Sea that will obstruct the growth of Chinese power in the area, and limit possibilities for the political use of such power.

51. The interest of the coastal states in asserting their jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait, together with China's support for their claims, must give the USSR a strong incentive to secure the use of naval and also air bases from the Vietnamese. With such bases the USSR could expect to receive increased consideration of its strategic interests by Malaysia and Indonesia, and would be able to support Vietnamese claims to some of the islands in the South China Sea, and to an off-shore economic zone covering part of the continental shelf claimed by the Chinese. Soviet participation in any scheme for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia would then almost certainly have to be accepted by the ASEAN members, but more importantly Soviet efforts to mobilise support for the proposed Asian Collective Security Pact would probably become more effective.

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52. Soviet policy is probably influenced by calculations that, in the longer term, if measures to limit the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia are inadequate, Maoist revolutionary organizations may well gain power in Thailand and Burma, causing a realignment of Vietnamese policy, together with accommodative shifts by Malaysia and Indonesia that would be followed by measures to prevent use of the Malacca Strait by the naval vessels of powers outside Southeast Asia. In considering this possibility the USSR evidently must reckon with the danger that the USA's East Asian policy may show an increasing tendency to favour China's interests in Southeast Asia, in order to make fuller use of the Chinese regime as an adversary of the Soviet Union, even at the cost of a further weakening of the USA's own role in Southeast Asia.

JAPANESE INTERESTS AND POLICIES

53. Japan has a very strong economic interest in free use of the Malacca Strait. This is a consequence of heavy dependence on oil imports from the Middle East, and on the movement of cargoes to and from Western Europe through the Indian Ocean. The economic importance of the waterway is indeed so great for Japan that it assumes strategic significance. There is no projection of Japanese power into this area, however, as Tokyo's East Asian policy is severely restricted to the advancement of economic interests, and Japan's armed forces are too small to support any role other than limited, short term, national defence.

54. The coastal states and the other ASEAN members are heavily dependent on trade with Japan, and on Japanese economic aid and investment. These dependencies are increasing more rapidly than those of the ASEAN states with other major industrialised powers, including the USA, because of strong expansionist thrusts in the Japanese economy. Japan, however,

does not appear to have undertaken any vigorous diplomacy with a view to reaching an understanding with the coastal states on their jurisdiction in the Malacca Strait and on commercial use of this waterway by states outside Southeast Asia. Some Japanese initiatives for the development of cooperation with the coast states achieved limited successes in the 1960's, but during the present decade those states appear to have increased their opposition to the Japanese stand that Malacca is an international strait. Waters in the Strait to the South of Singapore were surveyed by Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, but the results were not approved by the coastal states after the report of the survey had been published in Japan at the beginning of May 1971. In the 1960's a Japanese Malacca Strait Council, formed by representatives of prominent Japanese shipping companies, installed navigation aids in the Strait, and handed these over to Indonesia and Malaysia for maintenance, but since 1971 the coastal states have been unwilling to accept further navigation aids, and have evidenced opposition to dredging proposals by Japan, because of a reluctance to contribute to the persistence of understandings that the waterway is an international strait.²¹

55. The Japanese government evidently appreciates that it is in its interests to reduce the danger of ship collisions in the Strait, especially for the prevention of oil spills, which are tending to become more frequent and which are making the need for traffic regulation in the Strait more apparent. As the congestion in the Strait grows, the coastal states will be able to argue more forcefully that their jurisdiction should be recognised and that they should control the movement of vessels through the waterway, but their claims may not be met without a crisis in which a firming of their attitudes will induce Tokyo to moderate its position concerning the international status of the Malacca Strait. There are significant currents of anti-Japanese nationalism in Indonesia

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deriving from resentments at the business practices of local Japanese firms, and spontaneous violent demonstrations of this nationalism could be precipitated by apparent Japanese intransigence over the question of controlling ship traffic in the Malacca Strait.²²

56. Japan is in a better position than any other major user to assist the coastal states in regulating traffic through the Malacca Strait, and by doing this could earn their gratitude. Developing a consensus in favour of recognising the jurisdiction of the coastal states and helping them to make this effective, however, could be quite difficult for the Japanese administration, as the leadership of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is factionalised, and this administration's decision making style is one of incremental consensus formation that can easily lose impetus on a foreign affairs issue unless external happenings present challenges that demand responses. While the claims of the coast states remain unaccepted, it must be repeated, their dissatisfactions are likely to grow, and will probably be directed especially against Japan. Yet meanwhile Japan's dependence on external supplies of fuels and raw materials will become even greater, and the proportion of these imports coming through the Malacca Strait will remain quite high.²³

57. The question of the Malacca Strait's use by foreign warships, although bound up with the problem of jurisdiction, does not evoke any public manifestations of official Japanese interest. The Japanese administration however appears to view sympathetically the USA's efforts to retain free use of the Strait for the movement of naval vessels between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, and undoubtedly would not welcome a neutralisation of this area that in effect opened the way for the development of a stronger Chinese presence while restricting access to most of the ASEAN region for

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the USA. Yet in the broad context of Ocean Law Japan has a vital interest in the rights of coastal states to exclude foreign warships from straits under their jurisdiction: from the Japanese point of view this right must be asserted in order to bar Soviet naval vessels from the Tsugaru Strait, between Honshu and Hokkaido.

58. The strategic and economic interests which Japan shares with the USA would seem to call for a joint approach to the problem of settling jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait before the attitudes of the coastal states are hardened by the apparent indifference of the major users to the strong claim that this passage is within territorial waters. Japan and the USA could do much to help Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore in their efforts to establish controls over ship traffic in the Strait, and would undoubtedly find that their interests would be given special consideration by the coastal states. The joint policy which seems to be required would probably need US leadership, but the results which could be anticipated would be of much greater significance for Japan than for the USA. Japan could look forward to broader and more trustful collaboration with the ASEAN members, which would link them much more closely with her own economy and which could give thrust to the development of this association as a regional organization along lines compatible with Japan's interests. The USA, meanwhile, could anticipate a major improvement of its status in the eyes of the coastal states, and could expect greater cooperation from them in support of its regional policies.

CHINESE CONCERNS AND AIMS

59. After Japan, China is the next important East Asian user of the Malacca Strait - but the contrast is extreme, as Chinese trade is very small by comparison with Japan's. The

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Strait is used by ships taking cargoes between China and the European Economic Community countries, and also between China and the Middle East and Africa. While the Chinese interest in commercial use of the Strait is substantial, however, Peking strongly supports the position of the coastal states that the passage is within their territorial waters, and is not an "international strait". Chinese endorsements of this claim are usually expressed with vehement denunciations of the USSR as a power that is seeking global hegemony and that is violating the rights of developing countries. These denunciations reflect the intense preoccupation with perceived Soviet hostility that obtrudes in all Chinese foreign policy declarations, but also indicate that Peking sees an important strategic advantage to be gained if the coastal states assert their jurisdiction and close the strait to foreign warships, including those of the USSR. China, while asserting control over the islands in the South China Sea, and using some of them as bases for an expanding naval presence, could expect to be a party to a neutralisation arrangement for Southeast Asia which would exclude the armed forces of the superpowers from the area.²⁴

60. For the present China appears to make no use of the Malacca Strait for the movement of naval vessels between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Some use of the passage for that purpose seems likely in the near future, however, as Peking seeks to develop some forms of military cooperation with friendly East African states, including Tanzania, and with Egypt. With this in mind the Chinese authorities probably hope that the support which they are giving to the claims of the coastal states regarding the Malacca Strait will persuade them to accept China as a power with territory in Southeast Asia (Hainan and the islands of the South China Sea), and, thus, as a state whose naval vessels should be entitled to use the Malacca Strait.

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61. China's immediate strategic concerns are, clearly, to hinder the growth of a Soviet naval presence in the South China Sea, and to obstruct Soviet efforts to recruit support in Southeast Asia for the proposed Asian Collective Security Pact.²⁵ The first objective will be aided if the coastal states take a strong stand against the use of the Strait by powers outside the region, but for the time being China does not have sufficient influence on the coastal states to persuade them to act with resolution, and to accept the risks of serious strain in their relations with Japan and the USA. Nevertheless the Chinese support for the claim of the coastal states does give Peking an advantage over the USSR, and probably encourages the ASEAN members to continue working for the neutralisation of their area, although it is becoming increasingly clear that such an arrangement will have to be based on the acceptance of China as a power in Southeast Asia.

62. China does not have to fear that any ASEAN members will support the Soviet sponsored Southeast Asian Collective Security Pact in the immediate future. All the ASEAN states would be most reluctant to antagonise both the USA and China by taking such a step, and would indeed have difficulty in viewing the Soviet proposal as a credible expression of intended commitments that would promise real increases in security vis a vis China. Peking however does have ground for apprehension that the Vietnamese Communist leadership may be drawn into close military cooperation with the USSR, and that its ties with the Soviet Union will be strengthened by large scale Soviet economic assistance.²⁶ This is a danger which the Chinese may hope to reduce at a later stage by working energetically to persuade the coastal states to close the Malacca Strait to the naval vessels of outside powers.

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63. The Chinese may assume that the closure of the Malacca Strait to the warships of states outside Southeast Asia will not seriously affect the US naval deterrent, aimed against the USSR, in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean; they may expect that the United States will be able to use some of the passages through the Indonesian Archipelago, by arrangement with the Suharto government, and that accordingly the strategic benefits which they gain indirectly from the US naval presence will not be affected. A neutralisation scheme in Southeast Asia however would presumably exclude US naval power from the area, unless the United States assumed the role of an external guarantor. That could be acceptable to Indonesia, and possibly also to Malaysia, but the Chinese might not accept this if they were confident that the growth of a Soviet presence could be prevented with the cooperation of the ASEAN members and the use of countervailing pressures against the Vietnamese.

64. In the longer term, the Chinese appear to see their strategic interests being advanced by the armed struggles of revolutionary movements which they are inspiring in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Affinitive Marxist-Leninist regimes in these states are evidently expected to add significantly to the strength of China's position in relation to the superpowers, and to non-Communist neighbours, and, in this context of regional liberation, the question of control over the Malacca Strait will be basically resolved, from the Chinese point of view, through the processes of violent social change in the coastal states.

THE MALACCA STRAIT AND THE EAST ASIAN STRATEGIC BALANCE

65. The principal states that have interests in the use of the Malacca Strait relate to one another, mainly on the basis of larger national concerns, in a regional strategic

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balance. The current significance of the Strait must be seen in the context of that balance, and with reference to its various possibilities for change.

66. On the question of jurisdiction over the Strait there is a complex and rather unstable balance between the coastal states, supported by Chinese diplomacy that is mostly uncoordinated with theirs, and the superpowers, together with Japan. The bargaining strengths of the latter three are very great, and thus impose much caution on the coastal states, but the growing congestion and environmental problems of the Strait give them incentives to assert their rights over the waterway, and, thus, may incline them to resort to unofficial pressures for this purpose.

67. The regional strategic balance, which forms the broader context of the Malacca Strait issue, is a more dangerously unstable complex of cooperative, adversary, and diverging relationships. The USA and Japan collaborate for the protection and advancement of common strategic and security interests, but tend to neglect some common problems and issues, including the rights of the coastal states concerning the Malacca Strait, and operate as economic rivals despite their wide ranging interdependencies. Opposing the USA and Japan in the security area are the two antagonistic Communist powers, and the relationships are quite asymmetrical, because the USSR and China each exhibit a strong will to spread revolutionary change and strengthen their influence in East Asia, while the USA seeks to combine a status quo policy and a partial alignment with China, acting from a position that is militarily and politically weak, and Japan remains committed to a regional policy that is largely restricted to economic issues, avoiding political and military questions. The small non-Communist states, most of which are in Southeast Asia, lack the cohesion that would be necessary to manage their relations with the larger powers on a collective basis, and most of them are

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strongly inclined to seek accommodations with China, especially by reducing or avoiding military cooperation with the USA, because of their fears that Chinese inspired political violence on their territories will spread.²⁷

68. The USA and Japan accordingly give advantages to China, in effect, by failing to recognise the jurisdiction of the coastal states over the Malacca Strait. These advantages at present are not very substantial, but they could become much more so if there were upsurges of anti-Japanese or anti-US nationalism in Malaysia and Indonesia, and if there were some shifts to the left in the domestic power balances of those two countries. The Malacca Strait issue therefore must be seen as a factor that could contribute to some unfavourable changes in the regional balance, over the longer term.

69. What seems more probable, however, is that unrelated changes in the regional balance will alter the context of the Malacca Strait issue, beyond the short term, to China's advantage. The Chinese inspired and supported Communist insurgencies in Thailand and Burma are likely to expand, and the campaign of violence mounted by the pro-Chinese Malaysian Communists is also likely to spread. Meanwhile the growing Chinese naval presence in the South China Sea, which may be used in covert support of some of those revolutionary activities, may well have an increasing influence on the policies of the Thai and Malaysian administrations, and, later, on that of the Indonesian administration.²⁸ Such changes would increase Japanese and US concern with the security of the Malacca Strait, but, with the growth of revolutionary activities in Malaysia, insurgent weapons systems on the West Coast could threaten naval vessels in the waterway.

70. The changes in the regional balance that would result from expanding revolutionary activity in Southeast Asia would

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be gradual. Very rapid and more drastic changes however would result if a major war developed between the USSR and China. The danger of such a conflict is serious, because improvements which are occurring in China's defensive capacity are giving the USSR a strong incentive to resort to a preemptive strategy.²⁹ In the event of such a war the use of the Malacca Strait could become extremely important for Soviet naval strategy. Resolute measures would probably be taken to ensure unimpeded transit through the waterway for Soviet naval vessels, especially if the USSR had difficulty in using the Suez Canal for the movement of its warships from the Mediterranean into the Indian Ocean.

71. The type of change in the regional balance that is desired by the coastal states and their ASEAN associates, as has been seen, is the neutralisation of their area. Their concepts of neutralisation, and their perspectives and policies, differ considerably, thus making it rather unlikely that they will be able to work in concert for the establishment of their proposed Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. Even if they were to become firmly united on this, however, the growing Chinese naval presence, based on islands in the South China Sea, would make it very difficult for them to press for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia on terms that would restrict further penetration of China's power into the area. This penetration indeed confronts all the ASEAN members with a very strong case for encouraging both superpowers to continue their presences in the ASEAN region and, therefore, for allowing them continued use of the Malacca Strait for the movement of naval vessels into the South China Sea.

72. The alternative futures which can be envisaged for the regional strategic balance must of course take into account possible changes in the orientations and behaviour of the states involved in East Asian affairs. Such possibilities appear to be most significant in the cases of China and the

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USA, because of intra-elite conflicts in Peking and the ambivalence of the USA regarding detente with China and residual containment in East Asia.

73. China has a very uncertain future because the intra-elite conflicts which the Maoist system has been experiencing since the late 1950's are continuing, with adverse effects on the regime's institutions and on its political culture, and are being aggravated by succession struggles.³¹ The management of Chinese policy towards Southeast Asia may become indecisive, and this, especially if accompanied by news of disorders in the Peking regime, would open the way for a much more active Soviet role in the area. The Vietnamese leaders and the ASEAN members would see lower risks and more advantages in responding to Soviet offers of trade, aid, and cultural exchange, and would view the Soviet naval presence in the South China Sea more favourably. Malaysia, and Indonesia to a lesser extent, would presumably be willing to reconcile Soviet interests in the use of the Malacca Strait with the requirements for effective jurisdiction over the waterway. At the same time, Japan, while probably tending to increase cooperation with the USSR after observing the disunity in China, could be expected to associate itself with Soviet moves to reach understandings with the coastal states regarding the use of the Malacca Strait.

74. If the Chinese regime comes very much under the control of militant elements its encouragement and support of revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia may be increased. Peking's view of the Malacca Strait will then be dominated by anticipation of the area's transformation through insurgencies in Malaysia and Indonesia. Firm assertions of control over the Strait by the future revolutionary governments in those states would probably be encouraged.

75. A shift in the Chinese domestic power balance that brought into control relatively pragmatic elements like those in the ascendant under Hua Kuo-feng, however, would probably be followed by restraint in expressions of hostility to the USSR, more cooperation with the USA, and increased interest in the development of co-existence relationships with the ASEAN countries. Fairly constructive support for the efforts of the coastal states to set up controls over the Strait and to establish a neutral zone in the area might then be forthcoming, although with continuing encouragement of and some aid for revolutionary struggles in Malaysia and Indonesia. The elements in the Chinese leadership who are opposed to the militants or Macists appear to reject their unqualified confidence in the capacities of affinitive Asian Communist movements for campaigns of political violence, and their evidently low evaluations of the "progressive" dispositions of non-Communist administrations in Southeast Asia.

76. The course of Soviet involvement in East Asia seems much more predictable. The Soviet political system has a high degree of stability; the orientation of its East Asian policy is firm, and realistic in terms of the rather deradicalised Soviet version of Marxism-Leninism; and the USSR has a considerable basis for confidence that the projection of its superior military power and the use of its resources for economic diplomacy will give it major advantages over China and also over the USA in the competition for influence in East Asia.³² In the Southern part of the region Soviet strategy will almost certainly continue to aim at countering the growth of a Chinese presence, and thus can be expected to insist on free use of the Malacca Strait, and to oppose any neutralisation arrangement that would entail ASEAN acceptance of a Chinese naval presence in the South China Sea while excluding the armed forces of other powers from the area. The Soviet interest in utilising bases in Vietnam will undoubtedly become more active, and a growing Soviet presence supported from such bases would of

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course give a more forceful aspect to Soviet demands regarding the use of the Malacca Strait.

77. Japan's policy is likely to exhibit a high degree of continuity, avoiding regional security and political issues but concentrating on economic interests, in line with the established consensus that pervades the leadership of the dominant Liberal Democratic Party. Pragmatic adaptation to whatever changes occur in the regional pattern of relations is to be expected.³³ This may mean considerable accommodation with an expanding Soviet presence, or a stronger Chinese presence, or with assertions of jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait by the coastal states. But there could also be cooperation with US initiatives if Washington seeks to come to terms with the demands of those states before they feel obliged to resort to pressures against the major users of the waterway.

78. The USA's policy is likely to shift, in response to internal pressures and external problems and opportunities, between emphasis on partial alignment and partial accommodation with China, and stress on developing an effective new role as a partner of the non-Communist East Asian states. To the extent that the first line of activity is given priority, Malaysia and Indonesia will probably tend to be more assertive in their claims to control of the Malacca Strait, with Chinese encouragement, and also more ready to accommodate Chinese interests in working for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia. If the USA appears to give more importance to its ties with Japan and the ASEAN countries - which seems less likely - the coastal states will probably be restrained in their demands regarding controls over traffic in the Strait, and could be very receptive to a constructive US approach based on substantial recognition of their interests.

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79. All these possibilities regarding the future of the regional strategic setting of the Malacca Strait have to be presented in terms which suggest limited and mostly reactive roles for the coastal states. This is what must be conveyed in view of the underdevelopment and dependencies of those states, and the pragmatic, constructive, and cautious attitudes of their administrations. The Indonesian regime, however, may be destabilised by conflicts between its military leaders, and the outcome could be a leftist army-dominated system, inclined to alignment with the USSR, and thus prepared to work out special arrangements for Soviet use of the Malacca Strait and the passages through its archipelago. US and Japanese insensitivities to Indonesian economic interests, and also to Jakarta's claims regarding the Strait, could contribute to a combination of motivations that might cause radical Indonesian military figures to seize power from leaders whom they consider too subservient to the neocolonialist interests of the USA and Japan. The Malaysian political system, as has been seen, is more likely to remain stable, but it may have to contend with expanding guerilla activity by the Malayan Communist movement. Under such pressure the Malaysian administration would be anxious to secure Western aid for the preservation of its security, but, if not given confidence by US responses, could seek to deal with its insurgency problem by working towards an overall settlement with China that would to a considerable extent accommodate Peking's interests, and that might well mean taking a firm stand against the use of the Malacca Strait by the naval vessels of outside powers.

80. Altogether, the regional strategic setting and the immediate context of the Malacca Strait exhibit trends and possibilities that are unfavourable for the major users of the Malacca Strait, and for the adjacent countries. Yet the principal interested parties, although having very substantial resources to support constructive diplomacy relating to the

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question of control of the Strait, are relatively inactive. This type of situation tends to recur in the external relations of major democratic states whose foreign policies are affected by unmanageable cross pressures and by tendencies to wait upon events, and it is a situation in which the movement of those parties and their friends towards productive interaction would seem to require energetic involvement by another state, outside the region, with a capacity for mediatory and catalytic intervention, and, more importantly, for leadership.

CANADA AND THE MALACCA STRAIT

81. Canada's present involvement in the politics of Southeast Asia is small, principally because her economic ties with this area are of minor dimensions. Canada's forward security interests would be significantly affected by any major changes in the immediate and larger regional strategic contexts of the Malacca Strait issue, however, and the present diplomatic inaction in those contexts represents an opportunity and a challenge for Ottawa.

82. Southeast Asia is an area of minor importance in Canada's foreign trade, ranking after the Middle East and Africa, and also after South Asia. Canadian exports to this area in 1973 totalled only \$107 million, and were growing slowly by comparison with those of Japan, the USA, and Western Europe. Substantial Canadian economic assistance is being given to Indonesia and Malaysia, however, and these two countries, especially the first, are attracting considerable private investment from Canada.³⁴

83. If ship movements through the Malacca Strait were disrupted Canada's economic interests in Southeast Asia would probably be affected to some degree, and there would also be some negative consequences for Canada on account of the disorganization of Japan's foreign trade, as Canada's exports

to Japan, which totalled \$1800 million in 1973, are roughly equal in volume to those going to continental Western Europe. The most important effects of a disruption of the traffic in the Malacca Strait, however, from the Canadian point of view, would be strategic.

84. Any serious hindrance to the movement of US naval vessels between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean will tend to reduce the effectiveness of the US deterrent to the pre-emptive strategy which is reflected in Soviet military doctrine and in the structuring of the Soviet armed forces. Canada is vitally dependent on this deterrent, and accordingly it is very much in her interests to ensure that the Malacca Strait issue is resolved in a way that protects the USA's strategic needs, especially by reconciling them as far as possible with the aspirations of the coastal states.

85. There is a related, but broader, Canadian strategic interest in the security, modernization, and political development of the ASEAN states. This interest is based on the importance of those states themselves, and on their potential for integrative activity that could lead to a form of economic union and to collective management of the area's security questions. In this context the Malacca Strait issue can be seen as a problem, hindering the growth of Malaysian and Indonesian ties with major friendly outside states, but it can also be seen as an opportunity, because the coastal states need support from constructively oriented nations that can influence the major users of the waterway.

86. Among the ASEAN members Canada appears to have the status of a distant friendly state with an active humanitarian concern for the problems of third world countries, and some capacity for influencing US policy, on economic and security

issues. The indicators of this status are sufficiently persuasive to justify confidence that Canada would earn much goodwill and would receive much cooperation by giving vigorous support to the claims of the coastal states regarding control of the Malacca Strait, and assisting the establishment of a system for the regulation of ship traffic in the waterway. This line of diplomatic activity could be linked with various forms of support for the development of ASEAN as a regional organization, and, then, as an economic and political community that will be increasingly capable of managing the affairs of its area, especially regarding the use of strategic waterways in Southeast Asia by outside powers.³⁵

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35. In March 1975 Canada offered developmental aid to ASEAN. This was accepted, and discussions were held later in the year to identify a suitable regional project.

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13. ABSTRACT The Malacca Strait has strategic significance with reference to the movement of cargo ships and naval vessels between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Strait will be within the territorial waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore if a twelve mile territorial sea limit becomes part of the internationally accepted body of Ocean Law. Efforts by the coastal states to assert jurisdiction will affect Japanese commerce with Western Europe and the Middle East, and the transit of US and Soviet naval vessels from the Pacific into the Indian Ocean. The interests of the coastal states relate to an ASEAN plan for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia. The implementation of this plan however is affected by a Chinese naval presence in the South China Sea, and by Chinese claims to the islands in this Sea. Not all the ASEAN members are disposed to accept China as a state having territory within the area to be neutralised. Such a situation however could be difficult to avoid if the Chinese presence were strengthened after the exclusion of US and Soviet naval forces from much of Southeast Asia as a consequence of assertions of jurisdiction over the Malacca Strait by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, whose claims are supported by Peking.		

KEY WORDS

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