

CHAPTER II

AUSTRALIA AND THE ASEAN REGION:  
POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES

1. Introduction

2.1 After seventeen years of existence, ASEAN is now of substantial significance for its members, for the Southeast Asian region and internationally. The Department of Foreign Affairs stated that,

'In recent years the pace of cooperation amongst the ASEAN countries has accelerated. This cooperation and sense of purpose derives from increasing confidence in ASEAN's own potential for political and economic influence.'<sup>1</sup>

2.2 ASEAN, another witness observed, 'has turned out to be a very important pillar of stability and security in the region'.<sup>2</sup> The growing sense of purpose and confidence in ASEAN now extends beyond the ranks of the governments which established it. It was argued that,

'The "idea" of Southeast Asian solidarity ... has caught the imagination of officials and professionals alike ... They believe that Southeast Asia can now be looked up to on the world scene; whereas previously the region was felt to be a disparate and almost anarchic collection of countries, individually weak - hence vulnerable to outside pressures and riven by internal strife. ASEAN nowadays is ... a symbol of self-confidence ... [and] ... a factor to be reckoned with by outside powers.'<sup>3</sup>

2.3 ASEAN continues to be a grouping of states notable for their political diversity. The members' internal political systems differ substantially, and so do some of their major

emphases in external relations. Two states, the Philippines and Thailand, are linked to the United States by security treaties. Malaysia and Singapore are associated with Australia, the UK and New Zealand in the Five Power Defence Arrangements. Nevertheless, Malaysia and Singapore, together with Indonesia, are members of the Non-Aligned Movement. (Brunei's foreign policy orientation is still in a formative stage). The members do not share identical orientations towards the major powers whose interests impinge on the region. ASEAN has, nonetheless, continued to assert influence in regional and international affairs on issues where an effective joint consensus can be maintained.

2.4 This Chapter will examine ASEAN's current approaches towards cooperation on political and security issues and consider the present and longer term implications of ASEAN cooperation in these areas for Australia. The Chapter considers the influence of the major powers in the ASEAN region (section 2); intra-ASEAN political and security issues (section 3); ASEAN and Australian interests in and policies towards conflicts in Indochina (sections 4 and 5); Australian defence interests and the ASEAN region (section 6); immigration and refugees (section 7); and multilateral and bilateral relationships between Australia and ASEAN (section 8).

## **PART A Recent Developments in ASEAN Co-operation**

### **2. The ASEAN region and the major powers**

2.5 Chapter One noted that changes in the pattern of involvement in the region by the major powers were an important stimulus towards the formation of ASEAN. The roles of the major powers continue to be of crucial importance to the ASEAN region, as a number of submissions and witnesses indicated.

2.6 In the period since 1975, when ASEAN has become of major significance, the role of the United States in the Southeast Asian region has changed considerably. In the early to mid 1970s, the United States withdrew its forces from mainland Southeast Asia. It retained long-established and highly important bases at Subic Bay and Clark Field in the Philippines. These bases give the US a substantial and preponderant military presence in the region: (US military strength in the Philippines currently comprises a tactical fighter wing, a tactical air transport wing, a naval air patrol squadron and over 14 000 personnel).<sup>4</sup> While SEATO was phased out as an organisation in 1977, the Manila Treaty of 1954 remains in force. The Manila Treaty continues to be significant because it is the only security Treaty which associates the United States with Thailand. The Philippines is also a signatory but the US has separate treaties with the Philippines.<sup>5</sup>

2.7 The United States has a substantial economic involvement in the ASEAN region: investment exceeds \$US10 billion and trade exceeds \$US23 billion annually.<sup>6</sup> The US continues to be the major supplier of military equipment to the ASEAN states and has increased substantially its sales to the ASEAN members since 1975. Between 1975 and 1980, US military aid to ASEAN countries, mainly concessional military sales credits for purchases of American weapons, equipment and ammunition amounted to \$US820m., nearly two and a half times the total for the period 1970-1975. For the fiscal year beginning in October 1984, the Reagan Administration is seeking just over \$US246m. in security assistance for ASEAN countries; \$105.4m. for Thailand, \$87m. for the Philippines, \$42.7m. for Indonesia, \$11m. for Malaysia and small amounts for Singapore and Brunei (which do not require such concessional assistance).<sup>7</sup>

2.8 The United States has major strategic interests in the ASEAN region. The United States continues to emphasise the need to maintain a stronger strategic posture in the region than does the Soviet Union. It is concerned at the possibility of any permanently increased Soviet presence and heightened capability for the projection of Soviet power from Vietnam. The United States is also very sensitive to the development of any military conflict in Indochina which could threaten the security of Thailand.<sup>8</sup>

2.9 While the United States is now pursuing a less overt security role in the region than it did in the period of military involvement in Indochina up to the early 1970s, its role continues to be most important. The strategic significance of its bases in the Philippines has been enhanced by Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and the limited Soviet presence in Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> The significance of the regional presence of the United States for the ASEAN members has also been enhanced since 1978. Dr Mediansky told the Committee that,

'... the Kampuchea conflict has re-established and firmed up the regional over-the-horizon United States military presence and has generally contributed to United States interests and support for the ASEAN states on terms that are very attractive to the latter.'<sup>10</sup>

2.10 The Soviet presence in the region is substantially less than that of the United States, but has increased since 1978 and has attracted considerable attention. In assessing Soviet interests in the region, the Department of Defence stated that,

'The Soviet Union's conclusion of an alliance with Vietnam in 1978 represented an important breakthrough in an area of the world where its assets were otherwise limited. The use of Vietnamese facilities has enabled the USSR to project Soviet power more easily into and beyond the region and to put pressure on China in an area remote from the Soviet homeland. The Soviet Union

also hopes that its military presence will cause ASEAN countries to take greater notice of Soviet interests'.<sup>11</sup>

The Soviet presence in Indochina is estimated to include approximately 7000 military and civilian advisers in Vietnam. The Soviet Navy routinely deploys 20-26 warships (including 4-6 submarines) at Cam Ranh Bay. Two BEAR D long range reconnaissance aircraft and two BEAR F long range ASW aircraft have been permanently based at the Cam Ranh Bay airfield. In late 1983, an upgrading of the Soviet air presence took place with the arrival of nine BADGER aircraft, including several of the strike variant. This deployment has been seen as significant because the BADGERS have the capacity to carry anti-ship cruise missiles. The Soviet access to facilities in Vietnam is primarily of value for power projection in peace or in times of tension; the utility of the Soviet presence would be limited in a war involving the superpowers, because of its vulnerability to American attack.<sup>12</sup>

2.11 While the Soviet access to facilities in Indochina has increased its presence in Southeast Asia overall, Soviet influence in the ASEAN region remains limited. In evidence to the Committee, Dr Mediansky commented:

'The Soviet Union is often described as an incomplete superpower. The description is particularly apposite when applied to its role in South East Asia. Soviet political, economic and military interests outside Indo-China remain limited. Soviet political influence in the ASEAN states remains low for a number of reasons, not least because of Moscow's support for the Vietnamese military presence in Kampuchea and its associated political lodgment in Vietnam. At the same time Soviet ideological influence in the non-Indo-China communist movements is almost totally eclipsed by China. The attempt to exploit the ASEAN states' reservations about China remain largely unsuccessful. Indeed, the ASEAN states are now in a

closer accord with Moscow's adversaries - that is, China and the United States - than at any other time in the past.'<sup>13</sup>

2.12 The ASEAN states have been unwilling to accept a major Soviet role in the region. While the Soviet Union has tried to improve economic relations with the ASEAN members, its trade remains low and prospects for expansion are limited. The range and quality of Soviet exports, its terms of trade and the lack of concessional transfer programs make the Soviet Union an unattractive alternative to ASEAN's comprehensive economic links with the West. While the Soviet's military presence has expanded considerably, it has added little to Soviet regional influence; it may, in fact, have been counter-productive, because of the increased climate of suspicion of Soviet intentions in the ASEAN region.<sup>14</sup>

2.13 Soviet influence in Vietnam, by contrast, is far more extensive. Dr Mediansky stated:

'Since 1978 an extensive Soviet presence has been injected into the economic, military and administrative life of Vietnam. Hanoi's isolation and its severely depressed economic circumstances have made it heavily dependent on Soviet and East European assistance. This in turn has curtailed Vietnam's limited options to diversify its economic relations beyond the Soviet bloc. Similarly, Vietnam's security is now extensively dependent on the Soviet Union. The Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation has undoubtedly enhanced Hanoi's deterrent posture. The extensive post-1978 military aid has substantially improved the capability of the Vietnamese forces but it has also made them far more dependent on the continued flow of Soviet assistance.'<sup>15</sup>

However, while the Soviet Union's role has increased in Vietnam and Indochina, the level of Moscow's political influence remains circumscribed by Vietnam's desire to maintain a special relationship with Laos and Cambodia and by its limited concession of military facilities to the Soviets.<sup>16</sup>

2.14 China's policy towards ASEAN has changed substantially since 1967. Initially hostile to the Association, China has come to see it as providing a valuable stabilising influence in the region.<sup>17</sup> The conflict over Cambodia has seen Chinese associations with ASEAN increase. The Department of Foreign Affairs in its submission stated that,

'China has been a key supporter of the ASEAN strategy and of the resistance coalition. This is consistent with long-standing Chinese objectives in the Indo-China region, including its support for the Khmer Rouge and opposition to the spread of Vietnamese influence by force. It argues strongly that Vietnam's presence in Cambodia must be opposed on principle. China has benefitted in its relationship with the ASEAN countries by its similarities of views on Cambodia; ASEAN similarly perceives benefits for its relations with China in the current situation.'<sup>18</sup>

2.15 Reservations about China's long-term capability and intentions in the region continue among ASEAN members, most notably in Indonesia and Malaysia. One major contributing factor to these reservations is China's policy of continuing to offer some expression of support to the Communist parties in ASEAN countries. Levels of support have been reduced in recent years, partly because of the weakness of most of the parties themselves, but China has been unwilling to eschew support altogether.<sup>19</sup> Another contributing factor has recently been concern among ASEAN members that China's economic modernisation program, conducted with Western assistance, may increase its long-term capacity for influence in the region. Malaysia's Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir, during his visit to Australia in August 1984, stated that '... a China that is very well developed with the highest technology and expertise with an army that is well equipped may very well tempt the leaders of China to venture southwards.'<sup>20</sup>

2.16 China's lack of diplomatic relations with Indonesia and Singapore is an anomaly which seems unlikely to change rapidly. In the case of Singapore, lack of formal diplomatic relations has not prevented the development of political contacts and extensive economic relations between the states. In the case of Indonesia, Professor Yahuda suggested that, while China's leaders find Indonesia's reluctance to resume relations 'puzzling', the situation is unlikely to change quickly.<sup>21</sup>

2.17 In discussing Chinese foreign relations generally, Professor Yahuda also noted that continuation of recent trends depends to a considerable extent on internal political arrangements, which can change. He commented,

'... although I would be surprised if the Chinese could turn away from elements of the open door they have at the moment I think that we would be wrong to expect over the next five years or so the policy to follow along current lines. If there was a change ... within China then it would affect to a certain extent relations with the rest of South East Asia; it would affect the way it deals with Hong Kong and the way it deals with Taiwan. It would have a whole variety of ripple effects'.<sup>22</sup>

Prime Minister Mahathir during his visit to Australia also emphasised the uncertainties in direction of Chinese foreign policy if its leadership was to change substantially.<sup>23</sup>

2.18 Japan's role in the ASEAN region continues to be dominated by its extensive economic relationships with the ASEAN states (see Chapter III, paras. 3.58-3.59). The extent of Japan's economic involvement has often been viewed with some ambivalence by ASEAN states. Reservations also exist about the possibility of a greater Japanese commitment to expand its defence role and capacities. The Department of Foreign Affairs submission observed that this has been the focus of some concern in the



Philippines, although it stated that, 'The Philippines appears, however, to accept a limited role for Japan e.g. in safeguarding its sea lines within 1000 miles from Tokyo'.<sup>24</sup>

2.19 In the context of extensive ongoing major power interest and involvement in the region, ASEAN's concept of a 'Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality' (ZOPFAN) for the region, remains a long-term goal. ASEAN's endorsement of the ZOPFAN concept, which was reaffirmed by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Joint Communiqué of 10 July 1984, is aimed at creating a situation where the major powers, especially the USSR and China, may be persuaded to decrease their regional influence. The immediate viability of the concept, however, is limited by the absence of a consensus on exactly how it might be implemented.<sup>25</sup> In the absence of such a consensus, the ASEAN states have preferred to maintain existing associations with extra-regional Western powers. Malaysia and Singapore continue involvement in the Five Power Defence Arrangements, Thailand maintains a security link with the United States through the Manila Treaty and the Philippines is extensively involved with the US defence structure. There has been no pressure from within ASEAN for these external associations to be curtailed.<sup>26</sup>

2.20 In mid-September 1984, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen announced after a meeting of senior ASEAN officials that ASEAN had agreed 'in principle' to the concept of a nuclear weapons free zone for Southeast Asia. Such a zone, the Foreign Minister stated, would be one of the steps towards the realisation of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality in the region. At the time of the announcement, however, it was clear that the proposed zone was very much a long-term goal since Soviet and US agreement would be required if it were to be feasible.<sup>27</sup>

2.21 At present, the balance of major power interests in the ASEAN region is relatively stable. While the Soviet Union has increased its military presence in Vietnam and Indochina this has not so far brought commensurate political influence for it in the ASEAN region. In military and strategic terms, the United States continues to be the predominant influence. Indeed it is arguable that the political status of the US in the ASEAN region is considerably more favourable than it was in the era of mass military involvement in Southeast Asia. However, the ASEAN members are acutely aware of the potential for change in major power policies and relationships, and of the possible implications for the region. They continue to be concerned that changes in the present power balance through greater direct involvement of the Soviet Union and changes in the direction of Chinese foreign policy could affect adversely the security of the region.

### 3. Intra-ASEAN political and security issues

2.22 As Chapter One observed, ASEAN was established in a regional climate of internal instability and inter-state rivalries and conflicts. The ASEAN members continue to place heavy emphasis on both the maintenance of internal political stability and on containing and defusing potential conflicts within their own region, thus enhancing the climate for economic growth and minimising the dangers of major power involvement and intervention. The emphasis placed on defence and security issues by the ASEAN members has increased somewhat in the period since the invasion of Cambodia, but the individual ASEAN members continue to eschew the notion of any security or military arrangement on a formal ASEAN basis.

a) Internal stability and the ASEAN states

2.23 The internal stability of the individual ASEAN member states is clearly of significance both for the Association itself and for Australian interests in the region. The Committee did not seek to examine comprehensively the patterns of political development and change occurring in the ASEAN states, but it did give some consideration to the implications of possible internal changes in the ASEAN region for ASEAN as a regional group and for Australia.

2.24 One major point which was emphasised in several submissions to the Committee is that since the mid-1960s, the ASEAN region had been substantially more stable politically than then seemed likely. One witness (Dr Catley), saw the progress of economic growth in the ASEAN region as a major contributing factor to this stability, even though the growth has not been distributed evenly either within or between all ASEAN member states. Dr Catley also noted that there is no guarantee that the impressive aggregate growth rates of the last decade will be maintained. He continued:

'Nonetheless, this economic growth record has generally given an economic basis for the political stability that few observers anticipated in the early 1970s. Contrary to widespread expectations of political problems following the communist victories in Indo-China in 1975 the ASEAN regimes have strengthened their political authority in part because of economic successes, in part by repression and in no small part because of the political and economic failures of the communist regimes of Indo-China and the large refugee exodus which provided such publicity to those failures'.<sup>28</sup>

Dr Catley noted that the pattern of stability has been uneven. The governments in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, he suggested, seem firmly established. Thailand's stability, he

argued, has been enhanced since the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia because of the adverse effects of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict on the Communist Party of Thailand. The Philippines has been the major exception to this pattern.<sup>29</sup>

2.25 Prospects for continued stability in the ASEAN member states depend on a variety of complex factors. The economic growth which has provided valuable additional surplus resources for the ASEAN states has also involved social changes as structural adjustment occurs to sectors of the economies and the workforce. Rapid economic development, as one witness (Dr Girling) noted, can erode traditional values and enhance the influence of middle classes vis a vis established socio-economic groups such as bureaucracies and the military. The expansion of manufacturing and service industries located in the cities leads to the growth of urban workforces which may also be a focus for change. Capital-intensive development of agriculture in the countryside may increase output, but also lead to greater social stratification and wider gaps between traditional cultivators and affluent farmers benefiting from modern technology and irrigation.

2.26 These three elements - a more assertive middle class, a more concentrated urban workforce and a more divided peasantry - may come to push against the boundaries of the political systems in the ASEAN states. Tensions may result if demands for participation are not accommodated effectively. Other long term sources of political tension also persist in ASEAN societies; notably social and religious cleavages, regional secessionist aspirations and communist insurgency.<sup>30</sup>

2.27 Prognoses for the internal stability of the ASEAN states offered to the Committee were generally favourable.<sup>31</sup> However, while basic continuity in major governing institutions seems likely, the ASEAN member states nonetheless will face challenges to the capabilities of their political processes.

Brunei has obtained full independence (and membership of ASEAN) with extensive financial resources but without as yet a structure of representative government. In Indonesia, much depends on the Army's ability to maintain acceptance of its 'dual function' in military and political affairs in a diverse society. Malaysia faces the challenge of pursuing its policies of economic redistribution while maintaining acceptable political and economic participation for all major ethnic communities. Singapore confronts the challenge of successful transition to a new generation of political leadership especially within the Peoples Action Party. Thailand needs to continue to maintain a balance of interests between representative institutions and political parties and the military.<sup>32</sup>

2.28 In the case of the Philippines, a number of witnesses directed attention to the internal problems being experienced and to the possible implications of a change of regime. In the Philippines, it was observed:

' Muslim insurgency in the south coexists with communist rebellion in the northern islands and widespread popular urban opposition following the killing of Aquino. No country should hitch its diplomacy too closely to the Marcos family'.<sup>33</sup>

Another submission commented that in the Philippines:

' in conditions of extreme social inequality, popular demands are being blocked: frustration is predictable and a social explosion is possible'.<sup>34</sup>

2.29 A major component in the problems confronting the Philippines is its recent economic performance (see Ch.III, B1(b)). The Department of Foreign Affairs commented that:

'The long-term outlook for the Philippines economy may justify it continuing to be regarded as one of the potentially high growth developing countries of

Asia. However, in the short and medium term, its performance will be severely affected by the legacies of inefficient industrialisation policies, a large external debt and recent political developments. Even with political stability a return to the satisfactory growth performance of the 1970's may be some years away'.<sup>35</sup>

2.30 The Committee received varying estimations of the possible character of a post-Marcos regime and of the regional implications of political change in the Philippines in the post-Marcos era. Foreign Affairs commented that:

'Various observers have suggested a wide span of possibilities about the post-Marcos situation, ranging from a military takeover to a popular uprising. At this stage, however, the most likely prospect is that the Government which succeeds that of President Marcos will come from the existing political and business establishment in Manila'.<sup>36</sup>

Other witnesses agreed that a post-Marcos regime might well be based on established political and business forces, perhaps under the leadership of a respected "technocrat" figure.<sup>37</sup>

2.31 Another alternative considered possible was a military regime. It was suggested that when President Marcos departed the scene, no successor would be able to assume his highly-personalised mode of control. In an atmosphere of economic and social disorder, the military might step in. Because of the involvement of the military in internal security, such a government might well have a polarising influence.<sup>38</sup>

2.32 The regional implications of a change of regime in the Philippines were seen as centering around the question of the future of the US bases and the implications for ASEAN of a substantive change of the character and foreign policy of the Philippines' government. The importance of the US bases in the Philippines to its force deployment capacities in the region was

stressed. An American withdrawal would clearly involve a significant alteration to the regional balance of power and would not be welcomed by other ASEAN members.<sup>39</sup>

2.33 A further significant question is how ASEAN would view the assumption of power by a radical regime in Manila. It was suggested to the Committee that if a change of regime occurs in Manila, ASEAN might play an important role in giving the new regime legitimacy, both regionally and internationally. A regime based on the present political and business establishment in Manila would presumably continue to find valuable the Philippines' membership of ASEAN.<sup>40</sup> The attitude of a radical regime to ASEAN and the possible reactions of other ASEAN members to such a regime are more difficult to estimate.

2.34 Given the range of possible political outcomes in the Philippines, detailed speculation about the implications of these outcomes for Australia is difficult. One submission emphasised that one of the key characteristics of ASEAN so far has been the high degree of compatibility of its members' regimes. The submission went on to argue:

'Given the potential for domestic upheaval within the ASEAN countries, there is the possibility that one or more of the countries might undergo a dramatic change in regime which would remove the assumption stated above, that the current regimes of the ASEAN countries share defence and security objectives broadly similar to those of Australia. Such a development could shatter ASEAN unity or, depending on how widespread the upheaval, could render ASEAN as a whole more fundamentally incompatible with Australia on these matters. This would test Australian diplomacy most severely.'<sup>41</sup>

b) ASEAN and intra-regional cooperation

2.35 ASEAN has continued to maintain its distinctive character as a Third World regional grouping which is decentralised in organisational style but nonetheless able to maintain strong coordinated joint policy positions on areas of agreed common interest. One example of such coordination, the ASEAN dispute with Australia's International Civil Aviation Policy, is addressed in Section 8 of this Chapter. ASEAN as an organisation revolves around a series of regular meetings with a complex structure of committees, supplemented by numerous informal contacts. In the absence of any further heads of government meetings since 1977, the annual Foreign Ministers meetings continue to maintain ASEAN's international profile, particularly because of their associated meetings with the foreign ministers of ASEAN's dialogue partners.

2.36 Much discussion has taken place within ASEAN on the adequacy of present organisational arrangements. The report of the ASEAN Task Force is understood to have argued that existing arrangements do not adequately facilitate the development of cooperation, especially on economic issues. The economic committees, with a decentralised structure and a lack of full-time technical staff, rely on discussions and consultations which are often inadequately followed through. The Task Force is reported to have considered several proposals for organisational reform, including the establishment of an ASEAN council of ministers to incorporate the separate meetings of foreign and economics ministers and other ministerial meetings, and the creation of a committee of permanent representatives at ambassadorial level based in Jakarta to provide continuity and a more defined sense of direction. The latter proposal would boost the role of the ASEAN Secretariat. These proposals are currently under consideration by ASEAN.<sup>42</sup>



2.37 ASEAN's decentralised organisational style has been accompanied by a continuing ability of the members to adopt joint policy positions. In the economic sphere this has been most apparent in dialogue with major trading partners. In the political sphere, ASEAN has not attempted to coordinate all aspects of its members' foreign relations interests, but has concentrated on issues perceived as being of particular mutual concern, especially the Cambodia issue and the problem of refugee departures from Indochina (see below). Once a joint position has been adopted, ASEAN has been able to effectively maintain unity; this continues to be one of the most important characteristics of ASEAN.<sup>43</sup>

2.38 ASEAN also continues to serve a valuable role in containing potential tensions and divisions among its diverse members. The relevance of this role may be seen in the entry of Brunei as ASEAN's sixth member when it obtained full independence in January 1984. Brunei in the past has experienced tension with its neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia. Membership of ASEAN on an equal basis should ensure that these problems, should they recur, can be contained effectively.<sup>44</sup>

2.39 The value of what can be termed the 'ASEAN collective spirit' to the Association was emphasised by several witnesses. Dr Khien Theeravit (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok) suggested that the 'ASEAN collective spirit' has worked more effectively than might have been expected.

'Many cooperation schemes would have been impossible without such an ASEAN spirit. Many potential conflictual issues have subsided mainly because of the emergence of the ASEAN spirit. Such a spirit is still fragile, however, and one cannot rule out the possibility of an occurrence of an ASEAN shock. But I believe that the ASEAN spirit has become an important force that guides the international behaviour of ASEAN member countries and this guiding force has a positive impact on regional stability ...'<sup>45</sup>

Associate Professor Chan Heng Chee (National University of Singapore) also emphasised the importance of the 'ASEAN spirit'.

'If you look for the substance that holds ASEAN together you should go back to the inauguration of ASEAN. ASEAN was established as an economic and cultural grouping ... It is really a political organisation and to declare it as an economic organisation at that time was the best that could be achieved when these countries came out of their hostile relations. The substance of ASEAN is the very fact that at the moment these very conflicting relationships have been held at bay and each of these countries in ASEAN realise that. That is an incredible value to the organisation itself ... Differences ... have been overcome by the organisation so that Singapore can enjoy a better relationship within the framework of ASEAN with Malaysia and Indonesia, Malaysia with Indonesia after Confrontation, and Malaysia with the Philippines over the Sabah dispute. Without ASEAN, these conflicts and issues may in fact erupt far more seriously. Even now there are territorial disputes between these ASEAN states. Yet these issues are not really highlighted and that is because, I think, of the "ASEAN spirit". I believe that the governments of ASEAN see this as a very valuable substance, the very focus of the relationship.'<sup>46</sup>

#### c) ASEAN and defence co-operation

2.40 The ASEAN members also seek the promotion of security through national defence policies and some bilateral military co-operation. The ASEAN members have a total of approximately one million men under arms, but have a limited capacity for power projection and external defence. Since the mid-1970s, most of the ASEAN countries have allocated increased resources to improving their defence capabilities and defence infrastructure. Economic restrictions, however, may limit the growth of resources available for the development of individual defence capabilities and capacities in the 1980s.<sup>47</sup>

2.41 ASEAN member states have recently advanced their conventional military capabilities. They have increased manpower strengths and acquired new naval ships, mainly patrol craft, and modern fighter aircraft for air defence. The expansion programs have involved efforts to standardise equipment and weapons; for example, by the acquisition by all member countries (except Brunei) of the same type of fighter and attack aircraft. The major problems for ASEAN states' defence programs during the 1980s are likely to include increasing costs, absorption of new technology, maintenance of equipment, and the technical training of their armed forces.<sup>48</sup>

2.42 Bilateral border co-operation agreements are the only formal arrangements for security co-operation within ASEAN. Some of these arrangements predated the establishment of ASEAN, and since 1967 they have provided a framework for coordination against communist insurgents, and piracy and smuggling. They have also provided the basis for other forms of co-operation such as intelligence liaison.<sup>49</sup>

2.43 Since 1975, there has been greater emphasis on the holding of bilateral military exercises. They have involved Indonesia with each of the ASEAN states, and Thailand with Malaysia, and with Singapore. Malaysia, however, has been reluctant to provide Singapore with exercise facilities on Malaysian territory. Exercises have been conducted by both naval and air force units. Intelligence liaison among ASEAN members has developed substantially since 1967 and frequent meetings and seminars are held.<sup>50</sup>

2.44 Co-operation between ASEAN members' military forces is limited by a variety of factors, including the absence of a common language and limited training capabilities. However, a wide range of activities has developed. Bilateral training between the ASEAN countries has included attendance by senior Indonesian, Thai and Philippines officers at the Malaysian Staff

College and the training of Malaysian officer cadets in Indonesia. Defence industrial co-operation has been limited. The best prospect for future industrial co-operation seems likely to be in aircraft maintenance and repair. Singapore, in particular, has been developing its capacities in this area.<sup>51</sup>

2.45 While this limited bilateral military co-operation by ASEAN members is likely to continue, 'its members are determined to preserve the non-military character of the organisation'.<sup>52</sup>

#### d) Conclusions

2.46 ASEAN as a regional grouping has contributed substantially to the security and stability of the Southeast Asian region. It has effectively reduced the likelihood of inter-state discord or conflict amongst its members by establishing a framework for the peaceful resolution of disputes. It has built trust and confidence among the leaderships and governments of its members and has produced a climate of stability which has itself enhanced prospects for economic growth. The continuation and further development of these achievements are in Australia's interests.

2.47 ASEAN members have pursued military and security cooperation on a bilateral basis and the scale of cooperation has increased since 1975. The members, however, are determined to preserve ASEAN's non-military character.

2.48 The Committee considers that an important aspect of ASEAN's ability to maintain effective cooperation has been the fundamental compatibility of its member regimes. It is at present difficult to predict a substantial change in the character of any of the existing regimes. The extensive economic

and political problems facing the Philippines are likely to make it the focus of considerable attention for some time. The reaction of ASEAN to any new government in one of its members would be a most important factor in the way that government was viewed regionally and internationally.

#### 4. ASEAN and the Indochina conflicts

2.49 Indochina has continued to be the principal focus for ASEAN's political and security concerns. ASEAN has a variety of concerns in relation to Indochina, including the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia, the continuation of refugee outflows from the Indochina states (discussed in detail below in Section 7) and the potential for maritime border disputes and violations of territory. Of these concerns, the ongoing conflict over Cambodia is currently attracting the greatest attention from ASEAN.

2.50 ASEAN's policy approach towards Cambodia since 1979 has been to deny international legitimacy to the Vietnamese-allied Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in Phnom Penh and to dissuade Western and Third World governments from moving to derecognise the displaced Democratic Kampuchea regime, which, from June 1982, became the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). ASEAN has pursued its Cambodia policy in two major ways. Firstly, ASEAN has played a leading diplomatic role in denying legitimacy to the PRK. In four votes in the UN from 1979, ASEAN led the argument that the Democratic Kampuchea regime should retain its UN seat. In 1983, Vietnam and its allies did not seek to put the credentials issue to a vote.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, ASEAN has demanded a total withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and self-determination for the Cambodian people. ASEAN has expressed this policy goal in a series of joint statements since January 1979, and this stance has also gained extensive UN backing.<sup>54</sup> An important element in ASEAN's mobilisation of international support for a Cambodian settlement was the

UN-sponsored International Conference on Kampuchea (July 1981) which adopted a series of detailed proposals for a settlement.<sup>55</sup>

2.51 The promotion of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea has also been an important aspect of ASEAN's strategy to maintain support for the displaced Democratic Kampuchea regime. The coalition agreement signed in Kuala Lumpur on 22 June 1982 involved the restructuring of the leadership of the government of Democratic Kampuchea to offset international repugnance towards the Pol Pot regime. The coalition did not, however, involve the integration or amalgamation of the component political movements and armed forces: the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and Prince Sihanouk and the forces loyal to him.<sup>56</sup> Under the agreement, Prince Sihanouk assumed the position of President, Son Sann, leader of the KPNLF, became Prime Minister and Khieu Samphan gave up the position of President to become Vice-President in charge of foreign affairs. The agreement made clear the loose character of the coalition; each of the participating movements was to retain its own organisation and political identity and each retained the right to receive international aid specifically granted it. In supporting the Coalition, ASEAN has envisaged that not only will the participation of the non-communist resistance movements help the CGDK retain its international acceptance (at the UN and elsewhere) but that the non-communist movements will themselves be able to attract increased assistance and strength vis a vis the Khmer Rouge.<sup>57</sup>

2.52 The ASEAN members restated their position on Cambodia at their annual Foreign Ministers meeting on 9-10 July 1984. The Joint Communique from this meeting expressed the Foreign Ministers' '... deep concern at the continued illegal occupation of Kampuchea by Vietnamese military forces which posed a serious threat to the peace and stability of Southeast Asia'. The Foreign Ministers also

- . reiterated their call for a comprehensive political settlement in Kampuchea. 'The essential elements for such a political settlement are the total withdrawal of foreign forces, the exercise of self-determination and national reconciliation in Kampuchea';
- . expressed concern at '... the recurrent acts of Vietnamese aggression along the Thai-Kampuchean border ...';
- . '... fully endorsed Thailand's actions in the exercise of her legitimate right to self-defence ...';
- . called for the stationing of a United Nations Observer team on the Thai side of the border with Cambodia;
- . stated that Vietnam's announced partial withdrawals of forces from Cambodia were in fact annual troop rotations '... meant to deceive the international community, the Kampuchean people and Vietnam's own citizens';
- . stated that they '... shared the serious apprehension of the people of Kampuchea that there are now at least half a million Vietnamese settlers in Kampuchea';
- . reaffirmed support for the CGDK and 'noted that the Kampuchean people are increasingly rallying to the patriotic resistance forces ...';
- . '... expressed their full support for President Samdech Norodom Sihanouk's call for a national reconciliation among all Kampuchean factions as a

positive approach towards realising the objectives of self-determination, independence, sovereignty and unity of the Kampuchean people';

- . stated that the latest Vietnamese proposal '... offered nothing positive towards the comprehensive political settlement of the Kampuchean problem ...';
- . expressed their gratitude to the members of the UN for their continued support of the CGDK.<sup>58</sup>

2.53 The Committee received several submissions from individuals and institutions in ASEAN member countries which emphasised the significance of the Cambodia issue in ASEAN political and security perceptions. The submission from the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Kuala Lumpur) stated:

'Asean's policies cannot be fully understood if it is not realised that we are not only trying to resolve the Kampuchean Question as expeditiously as possible but also to establish the basic ground rules for the peace game in Southeast Asia. The Asean states believe that all countries in the region must accept, in the words of Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister, "that one state shall not intervene in the internal affairs of another and shall resort to the pacific settlement of disputes. There must be mutual respect of the territorial integrity and independence of all the countries of the region." Clear violations of these basic ground rules cannot be taken with equanimity or they will never be established.'<sup>59</sup>

2.54 Dr Khien Theeravit in his submission, stated that,

'... the Vietnamese interest and ambition in Kampuchea (and Laos) are not legitimate ... it has blatantly violated the international principle of a sovereign country. Its version of a "special relationship" among Indochinese states means nothing less than the imposition of the Vietnamese will on smaller neighbours by military means. The Vietnamese objectives in Laos and Kampuchea are clear, and yet there are naive people who believe



in the Vietnamese sincerity in getting rid of the so-called "Pol Pot genocidal" regime. Was there any Pol Pot in Laos when Vietnam sent its troops into that country and where it still maintains 40,000-50,000 Vietnamese troops? Was there any "Chinese threat" before Vietnam embarked on the expansionist road? The so-called "Chinese threat" is a clever diplomatic ploy to sow discord among ASEAN member countries'.<sup>60</sup>

2.55 The Vietnamese leadership, Dr Khien argued, believes in the maximum application of power to realise its policy objectives. Political, economic and military pressure is necessary to induce Vietnam to reconsider its objectives and strategy.<sup>61</sup>

2.56 The Committee heard several views on the possible evolution of the Cambodia conflict and of ASEAN's approach to it in the context of differing emphasis in approach to issues of regional security among ASEAN's members. No clear consensus emerged and several witnesses suggested that an early resolution to the conflict was unlikely.

2.57 The Committee considered the issue of the approaches by individual ASEAN members to the Cambodia conflict and to the major powers involved. During the Committee's inquiry the visit of General Murdani to Vietnam in February 1984, and reports of the seminar held jointly between Vietnam and the Indonesian Centre for Strategic and International Studies, focussed attention particularly on Indonesian approaches to Vietnam and Indochina. Professor Miller saw differences in emphasis among ASEAN members as a reflection of long-term differences in approach to the major powers.

'It has been evident for quite a long time ... that the Thais are more inclined towards China than the Indonesians, and the Indonesians are rather more inclined towards the Soviet Union - they have been for a long time - than towards China. The Indonesia-China antipathy is the longest-standing and the most important of these antipathies, I think ... (A)s far as I am aware there is no sign

of that attitude changing. On the other hand, the Thais, partly because ... of their different internal complexion and their different approach to the Chinese in their midst, and partly because of their nearness to China and Indo-China, have shown much more readiness to accept Chinese positions and protestations.'<sup>62</sup>

2.58 Referring to the discussions between Indonesia and Vietnam in early 1984, Professor Yahuda argued that they partly reflected tensions between Indonesia's desire to play a major role in the Southeast Asian region and its capacity to do so. The willingness of Indonesian leaders to hold discussions with Vietnam also reflected some Indonesian reservations about Thai policy. He saw the Indonesian initiative as '... an attempt not so much to back away from the ASEAN position, but, in a sense, to put a bit of pressure on the Thais and to try to change some elements of the ASEAN position on Indo-China'.<sup>63</sup>

2.59 The existence of differing perspectives on regional security issues among the ASEAN members is a significant aspect of the Association which is likely to continue. Such differing perspectives, however, have not so far prevented ASEAN from maintaining effective cohesion on the Cambodia issue. Active discussion will no doubt continue within the Association on policy towards regional security. ASEAN, however, does not at present seem likely to substantially change its position on the Cambodia issue in the absence of major changes in the position of the principal contending parties. Significant obstacles continue to confront movement towards detente or a settlement of the issue.

2.60 Several witnesses discussed these obstacles. They include ASEAN's unwillingness to accept the Vietnamese presence as a fait accompli; Thai fears about the security threat posed by a continuing Vietnamese presence in Cambodia; Vietnam's refusal to contemplate major force withdrawals as long as the Khmer Rouge remain a substantial military force with a potential

to regain influence and control in Cambodia; continuing hostility between China and Vietnam; and a continuing and possibly growing Soviet presence in Indochina.<sup>64</sup> The obstacles are formidable, but the continuing debate within the region on possible bases for discussion and the serious tensions arising from the ongoing conflict point to the importance of efforts to explore avenues for possible movement and reconsideration of positions.

## PART B Political and Security Issues in Australia-ASEAN Relations

### 5. Australia, ASEAN and conflicts in Indochina

#### a) Australian policies towards Indochina: 1975-1982

2.61 The tensions arising from instability and conflict in Indochina since 1975 have been of major significance for both ASEAN and Australia. It has been noted above (Chapter One) that for a brief period from early 1976 to mid-1978 a process of detente seemed to be underway between ASEAN and Vietnam. In this period, the Australian Government also saw some prospects for expansion of Vietnam's international contacts as it emerged from the Second Indochina War. The Government emphasised the desirability of trying to prevent the isolation of the Indochina states through diplomatic contacts and a modest aid program. The then Foreign Minister, Mr Peacock, stated in March 1977 that,

'We believe ... that nothing will be gained by either Australia or the region ostracising, ignoring or setting out to alienate these Governments. In the case of Vietnam in particular, it will be dangerous if it is placed in a position where it feels it can only maintain cordial relations with other communist states.<sup>65</sup>

2.62 The increased scale of refugee departures from Indochina (especially Vietnam) from early 1978, and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December were followed by a change in Australian policy. Australia criticised strongly the Vietnamese invasion and supported ASEAN criticism in the UN. In January 1979, Australia's \$6million aid program to Vietnam was terminated. The Australian Government supported the ASEAN position of demanding a total Vietnamese withdrawal and maintained diplomatic recognition of the ousted Democratic Kampuchea regime, both bilaterally and by supporting DK's credentials at the UN.<sup>66</sup> However, continued recognition of the DK regime became a matter of considerable domestic controversy in Australia. On 14 October 1980 the Government announced that recognition would be withdrawn and this was put into effect on 14 February 1981.<sup>67</sup> Withdrawal of recognition brought some strong criticism from ASEAN leaders (notably Singapore's Foreign Minister Rajaratnam) and reservations were reported to have been expressed by the US and China.<sup>68</sup>

2.63 The Australian Government reacted cautiously to the inauguration of the CGDK in June 1982. The Government indicated that it welcomed the participation by Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk, but resisted ASEAN suggestions that recognition should be extended to the CGDK.<sup>69</sup> In September 1982, however, the Australian Government provided some material support to the non-Communist resistance parties by specifically directing some aid to camps on or near the Thai-Cambodia border occupied by KPNLF and Sihanouk forces.<sup>70</sup>

#### b) Australian policies since March 1983

2.64 Since March 1983, the Australian Government has directed further attention to the ongoing problems posed by the conflict over Cambodia. Foreign Minister Hayden, in a policy statement on 7 December 1983, said that '... the problem of

Cambodia, in all its many dimensions, is the greatest unresolved source of tension in South East Asia.' In the course of setting out the Government's position, he stated that,

'... what must be pursued is a comprehensive Cambodian solution based on the acceptance by Vietnam of an appropriate accommodation with its neighbours; phased withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia matched by an effective arrangement to prevent Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge forces going back into Cambodia; an Act of self-determination for Cambodia; the creation of conditions for the peaceful return of displaced Cambodians to Cambodia; the acceptance by all parties that Cambodia is neutral, independent and non-aligned; and the restoration of normal relations on the part of Vietnam with China, ASEAN and the West.'<sup>71</sup>

2.65 In 1983 and 1984, the Government pursued its policies in relation to Indochina through a series of discussions with ASEAN, Vietnam and other major interested parties. Australia voted for the ASEAN resolution on Cambodia at the 1983 session of the UN General Assembly, but did not co-sponsor it, a move which produced criticism from some ASEAN leaders.<sup>72</sup>

2.66 In its submission to the Committee, the Department of Foreign Affairs elaborated on the Government's policies towards Indochina in the context of relations with ASEAN. It noted that, 'Using the UN machinery, ASEAN has maintained a highly successful international campaign against Vietnam's continued occupation of Cambodia which it, like Australia, condemns and does not accept.' The Department referred to ASEAN claims that the resistance Coalition '... is increasingly effective from diplomatic, political and military points of view' but stated that '... the evidence is equivocal'. The cohesion of the factions was questionable, and '... the political distinction between the Khmer Rouge and the non-Communist factions remains fundamental'.<sup>73</sup>

2.67 The Department referred to China's support for the ASEAN strategy and the resistance coalition, and stated,

'In these circumstances the ASEAN countries seem certain to continue their support for the resistance coalition, at least for the time being. We see risks that this may unintentionally contribute to military escalation and growing outside involvement in the region.'<sup>74</sup>

On the issue of Vietnam's relationship with the Soviet Union, the submission stated,

'ASEAN has been able to demonstrate political cohesion on Cambodia, opposing military expansion by Vietnam and the spread of Soviet influence in the region. We see Vietnam's relationship with the Soviet Union, with the dangers that carries for the region, as resulting in part from its continuing isolation (following its Cambodia invasion) from regional and western countries.'<sup>75</sup>

c) Australia, ASEAN and perceptions of the Southeast Asian region

2.68 Several areas of difference in emphasis in relation to Australian policies towards ASEAN and Indochina were evident in submissions to the Committee. One issue which emerged as important was that of the degree of priority which Australia should ascribe to ASEAN in formulating policies towards the Southeast Asian region overall.

2.69 Several submissions advanced the view that ASEAN policies should predominate in Australian perceptions of the Southeast Asian region. The Malaysian ISIS directed attention to ASEAN's high growth rates and substantial economic weight and went on to state:

'When analysts talk of Southeast Asia, it is just as well for them to remember that the Asean Six constitute four fifths of the region's population, five sixths of the region's area and a much larger proportion of the region's GNP. Asean is the centre. In economic terms certainly, Asean is Southeast Asia.'<sup>76</sup>

The submission added:

'Asia, it might be noted, is a big place. Perhaps there is need for a greater sense of discretion and discrimination in Canberra as to which part of Asia, and which part of Southeast Asia, Australia belongs.'<sup>77</sup>

Dr Khien wrote that,

'The move on the part of the Australian Labor Government to change its policy toward Southeast Asia has caused anxieties among ASEAN governments' leaders. They have valued highly Australian support; they could understand the Australian government's position with regard to the non-recognition of the 'Pol Pot Government' but they would never forgive Australia if this country were tilted toward Vietnam vis a vis ASEAN.'<sup>78</sup>

Associate Professor Chan Heng Chee, in testimony to the Committee said that

'... I find rather difficult to understand ... why some Australian academics, and perhaps policy-makers, refuse to accept that ASEAN is the centre-piece of the South East Asian policy [of Australia] because I think it is.'<sup>79</sup>

2.70 Other witnesses agreed that ASEAN should be accorded high priority, but suggested that Australian policy should also seek to give consideration to the Southeast Asian region as a whole. Australia, it was argued, has substantial interests in the security of the region from internal disruption and major power interference. The major powers pursue policies towards Southeast Asia in the context of their global interests; their policies will inevitably be dictated to a considerable extent by wider strategic concerns. Australia, as a middle power located in close proximity to the region, can be affected directly by internal instability and inter-state tensions in the region; this was indicated clearly by the Indochina refugee outflows. Australia therefore sees a need to monitor very carefully elements in the politics of the region which may in the long-run lead to instability and interference from outside.<sup>80</sup> Australia, Foreign Affairs noted, also has significant interests

to pursue in bilateral relations with Vietnam, including human rights cases and the orderly departure of Vietnamese migrants.<sup>81</sup>

2.71 Several witnesses elaborated on this issue. Dr Kiernan, for example, stated that '... South East Asia is a larger area than just the ASEAN countries.' He welcomed the concept of considering Southeast Asia as a region, and said that Australia should develop good relations with Southeast Asian states, especially those closest to Australia in the ASEAN group

'... but also with the others, and work as much as we can in a peaceful and constructive way to encourage co-operation between what is now ASEAN and the other parts of South East Asia'<sup>82</sup>

Professor Mackie argued that Australia should 'go along' with ASEAN 'to a very large degree ... ASEAN has turned out to be a very important pillar of stability and security in the region'.<sup>83</sup> He also said,

'I think we should define the region not just in terms of ASEAN but say it is the whole of Southeast Asia. It does include the Indo-China states and Burma ... What I am trying to argue against is the proposition that has been predominant up to now, that we really identify solely with ASEAN and nothing else.'<sup>84</sup>

2.72 The Committee endorses the view that Australia should pursue an ongoing interest in the security and the well-being of the region overall. Such an emphasis should be fully compatible with Australia's desire to maintain and deepen its relations with ASEAN. However, in pursuing such an interest in the security of the Southeast Asian region, Australia should be sensitive to the concerns which have been expressed by the ASEAN states that this Australian policy emphasis should not be accompanied by a lessening of emphasis on its existing ASEAN relationships. Australia needs to bear constantly in mind that given the long standing tensions in the region overall, and given



Australia's historically close associations with the ASEAN states, even a minor shift in emphasis by Australia can create uncertainties about Australian intentions unless the rationale of our regional policies is clearly explained.

d) Implications of recent Australian policies towards  
Indochina for Australia-ASEAN relations

2.73 Some differences of opinion were evident in submissions and testimony on Australia's recent policy attitudes and initiatives in relation to regional security issues. These differences revolved around several major issues: the possible value of Australian efforts to explore bases for dialogue over regional security issues, the role of the Khmer Rouge forces in the ongoing Cambodia conflict, and Australian attitudes and policies towards Vietnam (including the question of restoration of development aid).

2.74 Several submissions tended to be sceptical about the value of Australian policies in these areas and suggested that the policies had been a source of some concern to ASEAN (as the comments quoted above have indicated already). However, the Committee received other submissions and testimony which broadly supported the policy initiatives and did not see any substantial tensions or disruption as having arisen in relations with ASEAN.

2.75 The Malaysian ISIS stated that, 'It is over the Kampuchean Question that there is a clear difference of perspective and policy between Australia and Asean.' The submission noted that there are important areas of shared policy goals between Australia and ASEAN: ASEAN does not seek the return to power of Pol Pot or the Khmer Rouge; and 'we are all agreed that the post-political settlement government in Phnom Penh should be a coalition government of reconciliation'. The ISIS continued:

'Asean, like Australia, does not want a Southeast Asia divided into two confrontationist blocs. We all share a common belief that Vietnam must be drawn into a system of peaceful coexistence and positive cooperation ... We share the belief that Vietnam should withdraw its army of occupation and that the political resolution of the Kampuchea Question must include the right to self-determination by the people of Kampuchea.'

The ISIS went on to state:

'Australia's present policy tack does more than do no good in terms of contributing to a peaceful and viable political resolution of the Kampuchean Question. It does positive harm; and directly undermines the efforts of the Asean states towards this end. It contributes to the strengthening of the hand of the hardliners in Hanoi. It contributes to the Vietnamese strategy of divide and rule.

2.76 On the question of possible Australian restoration of aid to Vietnam, the ISIS submission suggested that such aid would be ineffective; it would be trivial compared to the level of Soviet aid.<sup>85</sup> Dr Buszynski (National University of Singapore), in his submission, noted that on the question of Vietnam's international isolation, ASEAN countries tend to reject the suggestion that,

'... Vietnam's attitude to the Soviet Union could be influenced by grants of aid. The tendency within ASEAN is to view the Vietnamese-Soviet alliance as a factor which is independent of external influence as long as the Vietnamese-Chinese dispute continues unabated.'

ASEAN, he suggested, regarded any potential restoration of development aid by Australia as 'premature and likely to sabotage ASEAN strategy.'<sup>86</sup>

2.77 Submissions from the ASEAN region differed in their estimation of whether relations with Australia had been significantly disrupted or disturbed by Australia's initiatives in 1983/84. The Malaysian ISIS, whose submission was entitled,

'Australia and ASEAN: Down the Road of Disengagement?' suggested that 'There are today perceptions in the Asean countries of a reduction in the level of Australian psychological engagement in the area, a reduction of Australian interest in the Asean countries.' It cited Australia's position on the Cambodia issue as one factor in what it saw as '... the turning away from Asean and a downgrading of the Australia-Asean relationship.'<sup>87</sup> Other witnesses and submissions from the region were more sanguine. In private discussion with the Committee, a prominent ASEAN-based academic indicated that differences of emphasis over Cambodia should be viewed in the context of a basically sound ASEAN-Australia relationship. It was also noted in testimony to the Committee that the submission from Indonesia's Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) did not mention the issue of Australia's policies towards Indochina in the context of discussing Australia-ASEAN relations; the submission did state that,

'... the overall relations that have developed between ASEAN and Australia in the past decade are encouraging. And given the chance for the promotion of better mutual understanding and greater mutual trust, they seem to promise an optimistic picture of possible closer co-operation in the future'.<sup>88</sup>

2.78 A number of witnesses generally endorsed the recent Australian initiatives as being worthwhile in aim and not detrimental to relations with ASEAN. Foreign Affairs stated that

'Australia supported ASEAN's Kampuchea Resolution at UNGA. Differences which arose over our decision not to cosponsor it are now behind us. Many interested countries have expressed support for our efforts to establish dialogue on the question of Cambodia, drawing on our ability to talk to all the parties concerned. The Chinese have publicly described our dialogue with Vietnam as "good" ...

'Our role in contributing to dialogue, rather than seeking to mediate or to elaborate precise points for a settlement, should enable us to avoid potential points of friction with either the ASEAN

countries, with whom good relations are for us of fundamental continuing importance, or with Vietnam, which has welcomed our efforts.'<sup>89</sup>

Professor Yahuda, when asked whether he thought Australia-ASEAN relations had been 'hindered, or damaged or even assisted' in the process of Australia's pursuit of its Indochina initiatives, replied,

'My personal view is that I think they have really been improved, and improved in the sense that Australia I think has been seen to have an effective independent voice. It is one that is ... relatively modest still, in the sense that the Australian Government does not say that it can do anything more than explore the feasibilities of a settlement in Indo-China and has tried to get the different parties concerned to spell out with greater clarity what their positions are ... It has ruffled a few feathers here and there, but I think that is to be expected, particularly in a situation like this. You cannot please everyone all the time, but in substance I think there is the appreciation of Australia playing an independent role rather than being associated just with the United States or really as a creature of ASEAN in diplomatic terms.'<sup>90</sup>

2.79 A number of other witnesses expressed a generally favourable view of the initiatives in the context of Australia-ASEAN relations.<sup>91</sup> It was also emphasised, however, that given the complexity of the range of intersecting and conflicting interests involved, expectations about Australia's role and possibilities for success should be modest.<sup>92</sup>

2.80 Differences of opinion were also expressed by witnesses about the ongoing role of the Khmer Rouge faction in the CGDK. Submissions and witnesses from the ASEAN region argued that ASEAN did not either seek or desire a return to power by the Khmer Rouge faction. ASEAN's goal, the Malaysian ISIS stated, was a coalition government of national reconciliation for Cambodia, not a return to power by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>93</sup> Other witnesses argued that the presence of the Khmer Rouge faction as

an armed force continued to be a cause for concern in the light of its past record. Foreign Affairs, in discussing the Coalition, stated that '... the political distinction between the Khmer Rouge and the non-Communist factions remains fundamental'.<sup>94</sup> Dr Vickery pointed to the dangers of a return to power of the Khmer Rouge if the Vietnamese were to withdraw immediately from Cambodia.<sup>95</sup> Dr Chandler noted that the continued role of the Khmer Rouge as a factor in the conflict provides Vietnam with its best excuse for remaining in Cambodia.<sup>96</sup> Dr Girling, in discussing Australian approaches to the Cambodia question, stated that '... the Australian government is right to stand by its own principles (opposing the barbarity of the Pol Pot forces and seeking to prevent any possibility of their returning to power).'<sup>97</sup>

2.81 Support was also expressed by some witnesses for attempts to widen Vietnam's range of international associations and contacts. Dr Mediansky commented that,

'... the currently close relations between [Vietnam and] the Soviet Union are due in no small part to the isolation which Vietnam finds itself in ... I think we can contribute towards limiting the Soviet presence in Vietnam by the role we are playing at the moment - opening up cautiously the dialogue with Hanoi.'<sup>98</sup>

Dr Chandler stated that,

'The reason why the Vietnamese are locked into the Russians is because no one else is opening up any doors. I am not saying that they will drop their Russian alliance because this is quite central to them. It sounds like a circular argument, but a way to bring Vietnam into the family of nations is to bring it into the family of nations, to have diplomatic relations with it and to have humanitarian and economic aid programs opening up. This way it could be seen as a country that is allied with the Soviet Union, but it would give it a lot more freedom of manoeuvre.'<sup>99</sup>

2.82 Dr Chandler endorsed the desirability of restoration of Australian aid to Vietnam, but argued that this would best be done by Australia acting as part of a consortium of states rather than individually.<sup>100</sup> Other witnesses were more sceptical about the relevance and feasibility of a restoration of aid. Dr Catley argued that the question of restoration of aid needed to be considered in the context both of Australia's relations with the US, and with ASEAN. Neither party would readily accept such a step. The relatively insignificant scale of the aid which would be given needed to be weighed against these strategic considerations.<sup>101</sup>

**e) Australia, ASEAN and policies towards regional security:  
constraints and prospects**

2.83 Submissions and testimony to the Committee drew attention to several constraints on the development and pursuit of Australian policies towards Indochina in the context of its relations with ASEAN.

2.84 The importance of maintenance of effective relations with ASEAN (emphasised by Foreign Affairs) in the context of initiatives towards Indochina was stressed. Dr Buszynski noted that, '... any Australian regional initiative over the Kampuchean issue would require at the minimum the tolerance of the ASEAN countries.'<sup>102</sup> Australia must also consider the policy interests of its major power ANZUS ally, the United States. The attitudes of the United States on regional security issues (such as the desirability of withholding development aid from Vietnam) constitute a further constraint on Australian policies.<sup>103</sup> The delicacy of the task of exploring avenues for discussion on regional security problems was emphasised. Professor Mackie stated that, '... we have to be very careful how we tread that tight rope between one side and the other ... We have to be very careful we do not sell out any ASEAN interests or Kampuchea's interests in doing so'.<sup>104</sup>

2.85 The importance of very extensive and careful consultation with ASEAN by Australia was stressed by Dr Angel. He noted that,

'If we consult prior to making a decision they do not seem to get upset. An example of this was the decision to de-recognise the Pol Pot regime, when the decision was first taken. It was taken after long consultation and with a long delay on Australia's part and it did not seem to lead to any explosion.'

He added that the ASEAN members '... must be reassured all the time that we are taking their views seriously, even if we subsequently reject the view ... (w)hen we do not consult we seem to run into trouble.' Dr Angel noted that consultation in itself clearly cannot solve all potential problems.

'But if we manifestly are seen to do it before we act I think we are less likely to have problems, and such criticism as we get is less likely to stir up difficulties.'<sup>105</sup>

2.86 The Committee concludes that Australia has sought to pursue policies towards the Cambodia conflict from the perspective of a concerned neighbouring state located close to the ASEAN region. Australia shares ASEAN's opposition to the violation of Cambodia's sovereignty and joins with ASEAN in calling for a Vietnamese withdrawal. Australia, like ASEAN, is concerned about the destabilising problems and burdens imposed by the mass movement of refugees from the Indochina states. Australia, like ASEAN, is also concerned about the degree of instability and heightened major power competition posed by the Cambodia conflict. Australia is also concerned at some further aspects of the conflict, particularly the ongoing role of the Khmer Rouge forces in the Coalition; the dangers of military escalation arising from the continuing fighting; and the long-term problems arising from Vietnam's international isolation and its dependence on the Soviet Union.

2.87 In the Committee's view, Australia has not sought to alter fundamentally its policies towards ASEAN. It has seen its efforts to explore bases for dialogue as being pursued in the context of a close relationship with ASEAN. As a state located close to the Southeast Asian region Australia is especially concerned at problems of insecurity and major power competition in the whole region.

2.88 The evidence heard by the Committee suggests that the Australian policy initiatives in relation to Indochina since 1983 gave rise to critical responses from some ASEAN governments about precisely what direction Australia was seeking to pursue in attempting to explore bases for dialogue over Cambodia. The reactions to Australia's initiatives underline the sensitivity for ASEAN of policy towards Indochina. The reactions also underline the fact that Australian attitudes towards regional security issues are regarded as important by the ASEAN states and that ASEAN expects consistent support from Australia on these issues.

2.89 That some uncertainty has arisen in ASEAN suggests to the Committee that Australia's regional policies have not been consistently propounded and explained as extensively as might be desirable. This makes consultation of prime importance. It is in both Australia's and ASEAN's interests to avoid major discord between them over policies towards regional security issues. This should not preclude Australia drawing attention to points of principle which it holds strongly (for example, Australia's concern at the continuing role in the Coalition of the Khmer Rouge forces). The evidence does suggest, however, that if Australia wishes to take a consistent interest in the security of the Southeast Asian region overall, it will need to emphasise very clearly that in seeking to explore ways of enhancing prospects for regional security the cautious development of policies towards Indochina will not be pursued at the expense of long-term relations with ASEAN.



## 6. Australian defence interests and the ASEAN region

### a) Long-term significance of the Southeast Asian region for Australian security

2.90 Southeast Asia has been considered by successive Australian governments to be of vital strategic importance. As the Department of Defence stated:

'Its proximity to us makes it the principal area from or through which any major conventional assault upon Australia would have to be mounted. The region is also astride, or adjacent to, major international sea and air lines of communication along which pass many of our strategic imports and much of our export trade. Commercial air routes from Australia to Europe, the Middle East, Japan, North East Asia, and South East Asia itself, pass through South East Asian air space. These lines of communication are important also for the United States, Japan, and the countries of ASEAN. The United States and the Soviet Union both use South East Asian waters for naval transfers between the Pacific and Indian Oceans.'<sup>106</sup>

2.91 Australia's major interests in the region primarily reflect concerns that internal instability and/or inter-state conflict within the region might have adverse security implications especially if major power involvement resulted.

2.92 As Chapter One observed, the pattern of Australian involvement in the region has changed substantially in the past ten years when a long period of extensive direct involvement by Australian forces was replaced by a greater emphasis on economic and political relationships, with a lower-profile ongoing defence presence (in Malaysia and Singapore). While primary emphasis on political/economic relationships continues, the Department of Foreign Affairs suggested that defence and strategic issues have recently increased in importance:

'... more recently changes in the geo-political environment have brought defence and strategic issues back into sharper focus. Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines have in recent years been steadily expanding and upgrading their defence forces, reflecting both a need to overcome their relative run-down in the 1960's and early 1970's and, especially in the case of Thailand, concern about developments in Indochina. In this context, ASEAN countries have looked to other countries such as Australia to assist them in achieving their goal of basic defence self-reliance. This goal is consistent with Australia's own national interests in the region.<sup>107</sup>

**b) Australian defence co-operation with ASEAN states**

2.93 Given ASEAN's consistent refusal to develop a formal, multilateral military pact, there is no scope for a defence relationship between Australia and ASEAN as a body. With the exception of contacts with Malaysia and Singapore under the Five Power Defence Arrangements (see next section), Australia's defence associations with ASEAN members are solely on a bilateral basis.

2.94 Defence relations between Australia and individual ASEAN members were expanded after Prime Minister Fraser's direction in February 1980 that defence relationships with regional countries be developed further. Bilateral defence relationships between Australia and the ASEAN states concentrate primarily on the defence co-operation program, but activities cover a broad range of co-operation embracing regular consultations, senior level visits, combined exercises and regular naval deployments for port visits and exercises.<sup>108</sup>

2.95 The defence co-operation program, from the viewpoint of the Australian Government, serves a number of useful functions. The activities of the program complement those in the political,