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Two Stages in American Promotion of Asian Regionalism: United States-Southeast Asia-Japan Relations, 1945-1970*

Vincent Kelly Pollard**

Shortly after Tokyo's attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States began wartime planning for Japan's *postwar* international relations. In February 1942, "lower-ranking and middle-echelon foreign service officers and academic specialists.....began writing and circulating papers detailing various scenarios."¹ But which scenario did Washington follow after Japan's defeat in 1945? Paramount was "the long-term goal," Thomas J. McCormick tells us, "of developing an East Asian regional economy." This, in turn, "would be integrated into a unitary, global market under the protection and aegis of American power."² McCormick utilizes an analytic framework that he elsewhere explicitly characterizes as "world-system."³ The world-system framework usefully sensitizes researchers to the potential of extraregional influence and control, but it is marred by a tendency to discount independent countervailing foreign policy initiatives by the leaders of former colonies.⁴ Also, McCormick cites few sources, preferring, instead, to give an overview.

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¹ Akira Iriye, "Continuities in U.S.-Japanese Relations, 1941-49," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia*, ed., Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press/Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1977), 381.

² Thomas J. McCormick, "Creating the New Co-Prosperity Sphere: The United States, Japan and Asia, 1945-1954," *Bulletin of Asian Studies* 4 (1994): 16.

³ Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War*, The American Moment series (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 1-16.

⁴ I discuss the relative heuristic value of world-system and other paradigms for discovering foreign policy making processes in Vincent Kelly Pollard, "Unfinished Business: Decolonizing the Foreign Policy of the Philippines" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 1996 [EDC]), Chapter 2.

McCormick's article transcends the ten-year time frame of its title, bracketing "Stage Three (1950-1954) and beyond" as a "twenty-year quest" Thus, beginning in 1950, this twenty-year quest extended at least until 1970. "Targeted regionalism in Asia," is the third dimension of the "twenty-year quest." And in order to include Southeast Asia in "its new co-prosperity sphere," America's "long-term strategy," argues McCormick, "was to effect the political stabilization of the region, and from the beginning there was an awareness that the effort might require 'military pacification' in order to be successful."⁵ "Regionalism," suggestively derived from the Latin word *regio*, means "an area under one ruler." In this sense, McCormick correctly directs our attention to regionalism in Asia.

However, examining public and declassified evidence of US promotion of "regionalism" during 1950-1970 has led me to a different understanding of how Washington supported its foreign policy goals in the "institutional context" of "targeted regionalism." As described by McCormick, that context was "a series of American-initiated treaties," such as the Manila Pact (four years after President Elpidio Quirino's international conference at Baguio, Philippines, in 1950) and the three-power ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-United States) agreement.⁶

As early as 1954, well into McCormick's "Stage Three," a change was in the works. In contrast to the statements and other actions of top US policy makers during the 1950s, only with severe conceptual stretching can one claim that their counterparts in the 1960s were still pursuing "targeted regionalism" in order to provide markets for Japan. By 1970, advocates of the old-style "targeted regionalism" with its explicitly military dimension had lost ground to proponents of a more indigenous "regionalism." And even before then, Asian political leaders had organized

5 McCormick, "Creating the New Co-Prosperity Sphere: The United States, Japan and Asia, 1945-1954," 18, 26.

6 McCormick, *ibid.*, 20; cf. *ibid.*, 20-21.

conferences in support of non-military, Asian-only international organizations.

The US National Security Council's 5 April 1954 "Special Committee Report on Southeast Asia--Part II," concluding section, paragraph (3), advocates "a Far Eastern regional arrangement subscribed and underwritten by the major European powers with interests in the Pacific." "Full accomplishment of such an arrangement," subparagraph (a) of the document continues, "can only be developed in the long term and should therefore be preceded by the development, through indigenous sources, of regional economic and cultural agreements between the several Southeast Asian countries and later with Japan." The Special Committee recommended implementation by the Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency, and Foreign Operations Administration. "Upon the basis of such agreement," subparagraph (b) elaborates, "the U.S. should actively but unobtrusively seek their expansion into mutual defense agreements and should for this purpose be prepared to underwrite such agreements with military and economic aid and should [rest unavailable]."⁷ Thus followed the 8 September 1954 Manila Pact and the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1955 with its emphasis on military affairs. By and large, however, the United States *failed* to foster the "expansion" of "regional economic and cultural agreements" into "mutual defense agreements." At the same time, a Euro-Pacific majority in SEATO (United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand) quickly circumscribed its political and military usefulness among Southeast Asian governments which needed to define and project credible nationalist foreign policies.

⁷ United States, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), Book 9, Doc. 71, sec. V.B.3(b); pagination is not continuous in this source. Cf. *The Pentagon Papers*, New York Times edition (Toronto, New York and London: Bantam Books, Inc., 1971), Doc. 4, p. 37.

The April 1954 "Special Committee Report," thus, appears to support McCormick's interpretation. And it does so--but only up to a point. In particular, it should caution the reader against assuming an explicit link between US-promoted "regionalism" and the earlier SEATO-type military alliance. Without evidence, it is dangerous to assume that US policy did not undergo transformation or that the wishes of some policy makers in 1954 were the intentions of US policy makers ten years later. Further, it would be America-centric to assert that conservative anticommunist governmental leaders of Southeast Asian countries were incapable of pursuing their own individual or collective agendas. I state this baldly not because McCormick makes the assertion but because there seems to be little room in his perspective for action independent of the metropolitan center.

In fact, US policy continued to evolve. By the early and mid-1960s, US officials in the Congress, Departments of State and Defense, and White House had begun promoting a nonmilitary, indigenous intergovernmental "Southeast Asian regionalism." American and other social scientists employed by or under contract with the Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Council on Foreign Relations, Institute for Defense Analyses, Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group, Research Analysis Corporation, and Asia Foundation collaborated in this effort.

The press in the United States and Southeast Asia played a supporting role in this cast of characters. Domestically and internationally, *The New York Times*, *Manila Bulletin*, *Manila Times*, *Manila Chronicle*, *Straits Times* (Singapore), *Bangkok Post*, and *Straits Times and Echo of Malaya* (Penang) also portrayed "regional" cooperation in consistently positive terms during the early and middle 1960s. From this dense body of evidence, I have extensively discussed representative

examples of promotionalist journalism in the American and English-language Southeast Asian press in a series of foreign policy studies elsewhere.⁸

An archetype of indigenous regionalism was the Association of South-East Asia (ASA). Organized by the former Federation of Malaya, the Republic of the Philippines and Thailand, ASA made its public debut on 31 July 1961. Although led by conservative, anticommunist governments, ASA was "unique" in that "non-Asian states" were excluded from "formal membership in the group."⁹ ASA was superseded by the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) on 8 August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.¹⁰ (A sixth member, Brunei Darussalam, joined ASEAN in 1984.) In contrast, a nuanced pro-ASEAN *Japan Times* editorial passingly referred to SEATO on 10 August 1967, noting that "the value of its activities have been questioned."¹¹ With variable emphasis and purpose, governmental spokespersons for the five Southeast Asian member-governments in ASA and ASEAN joined with US officials in the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations in playing up cognitive links between intergovernmental "regional" cooperation, "containment" of the People's Republic of China

8 Cf. Vincent Kelly Pollard, "The Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), 1961-1967: Regionalism, Ideology and Declaratory Foreign Policy" (M.A. thesis, The University of Chicago, 1968 [Microfilm T-17304], 7-10, 15-18, 20, 23-27, 31, 34-37, 41-45, 47-52, 54, 60-64, 68, 70-72; and *idem*, "Joining ASEAN: Presidential Politics in the Philippines," in *Proceedings of the Tenth International Symposium on Asian Studies, 1988*, ed. Asian Research Service (Hong Kong: International Center for Asian Studies, 1989), 3: 833-853. Cf. Bernard K. Gordon, "The American Interest in Asian Regionalism," *Paper* [Southeast Asian Development Advisory Group, The Asia Society], no. 47 (13-14 December 1968).

9 Pollard, "The Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), 1961-1967: Regionalism, Ideology and Declaratory Foreign Policy," 73.

10 Pollard, *ibid.*, 69-72; and *idem*, "ASA and ASEAN, 1961-1967: Southeast Asian Regionalism," *Asian Survey* 10 (1970): 250-255.

11 *Japan Times* Editor, "Southeast Asian Cooperation," *Japan Times*, 10 August 1967, 12; cf. Editor, "East Asian Political Arena," *Japan Times*, 24 May 1967, 12.

12 Vincent Pollard, "Meeting Whose Need?" *Far Eastern Economic Review* 73, no. 38 (18 September 1971): 25-26; and *idem*, "South East Asian Regionalism: Containment, Counterinsurgency, and the Nixon Doctrine," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 1, no. 4 (1971): 47, 52, n. 16. Cf. Edgar Ansel Mowrer, "New Asian Agreement Will Help Stop Reds," in "Extension of Remarks of Hon. Walter H. Judd," *Congressional Record*, 87th Cong., 1st Sess., vol. 107, no. 28 (22 August 1961), A6578-A6579.

and domestic counterinsurgency; for the US, even “disengagement” from Vietnam was occasionally linked to “regionalism.”¹² Although the declaratory foreign policy of ASA and ASEAN dovetailed with US objectives, nonetheless, no syntopicality of viewpoints emerged.¹³

Forms and functions of post-World War II US-sponsored “regionalism” thus varied. The US-sponsored SEATO was but one model. US promotion of ASA- and ASEAN-type regionalism was another. By the mid-1960s, links between “the restoration of Japan’s political stability and economic power”¹⁴ and US policy toward the formerly favored militarized regionalism seemed more tenuous than they had been in 1950, 1954 or even 1961. Further, ASA and ASEAN provided more leeway or advantage vis-à-vis the United States for otherwise conservative anticommunist political leaders in Southeast Asia. For example, prior to the preliminary sessions of the Second ASA Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in April 1962, Tunku Abdul Rahman had issued a statement indicating “that it was the intention of the ASA countries....to show the world that the peoples of Asia could think and plan for themselves.”¹⁵ US policy makers certainly derived satisfaction from the rise of ASA and its successor, ASEAN.¹⁶ On the other hand, the national incentives which each of the five Southeast Asian member-governments found in the new ASEAN-type regionalism¹⁷ left the United States with less leverage in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Singapore and Bangkok by the late 1960s and, to that extent, less ability to push their economies into Tokyo’s “new Co-Prosperity Sphere.”

13 Vincent Kelly Pollard, “The Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), 1961-1967: Regionalism, Ideology and Declaratory Foreign Policy,” 69-74.

14 McCormick, *ibid.*, 5.

15 *Straits Echo and Times of Malaya* (Penang), 4 April 1962, 1.

16 Vincent K. Pollard, “ASA and ASEAN, 1961-1967: Southeast Asian Regionalism,” 244-255.

17 Yamakage Susumu, “ASEAN no kessi to chiiki kyoryoku” [“The Formation of ASEAN National Incentives to Regional Cooperation”], *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu* 19 (1981): 222-236; Pollard, “Joining ASEAN: Presidential Politics in the Philippines,” 833-853.

On 9 August 1967, a US Department of State spokesperson was quoted in *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* as saying, "We expect Japan to give positive advice and cooperation to ASEAN."¹⁸ However, Tokyo had been pursuing other "regional" initiatives. Referring to ASEAN later that month, Foreign Vice Minister Ushiba Nobuhiko squelched a rumor that Japan would be joining the new "regional" organization. "The Foreign Ministry, as summarized by the *Japan Times*, "has seen no need for Japan to join it because all the five members are already closely tied up with Japan through the Japanese-sponsored Southeast Asian ministerial conferences on economic development"¹⁹ (or SEAMES). There simply was no direct, explicit military link. A shift was already underway toward East and Southeast Asian international organizations whose members did not include former Euro-American colonial powers and whose collective concern was a notion of security broader than military affairs.²⁰

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18 Kyodo, "Nippon No Kyoryoku Wo Kitai" ["A Source Within the Department of State Expects Japan to Cooperate with ASEAN"], *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 9 August 1967, 2.

19 Japan Times Staff, "Japan Won't Join ASEAN As Rumored," *Japan Times*, 22 August 1967, 4.

20 McCormick also contends that US involvement in the Vietnam War was subordinate to the goal of building up Japan economically. His claim may be defensible if one specifies which policy makers had this objective and when they had it. Regardless of how far McCormick extends "Stage Three," his claim becomes increasingly difficult to document for the middle and late 1960s. If anything, vigorous pursuit of the Vietnam War resulted in a lower priority for implementation of US policies toward Japan. A participant's cartographic caricature of a minuscule Japan and a loomingly large South Vietnam at the March 1965 US Ambassadors conference at Baguio, Philippines, hints that the war had marginalized Japan in US strategic thinking. Cf. James C. Thomson, Jr., "A Baguio Conference View of the Far East," sketch map, "Far East, 1961-1966. Baguio Conference. Baguio II-3/265. General & Follow-up. 2/65-5/65" folder. Personal Papers, Box 18. John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

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