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Mr. Casey

You have plenty of reading but you might want to glance at a brief lecture I recently gave at Oxford. The tone is perhaps a little too detached. Many thanks for your call.

I have been asked to provide some reflections on the use of force in Southeast Asia. I could be very succinct and say that there is only one country in Southeast Asia that can effectively project force in the area--Vietnam--and then sit down. But I am afraid the sponsors of this conference would not be too happy with such a performance after providing an expensive plane ticket.

What I propose to do, therefore, is to take 15 minutes or so and survey the Southeast Asian scene since the communist takeover of Indochina in 1975. I will make some general statements about the use of force, or really more about war and violence in the area and their sources in the recent past. I will then make some judgments about what looks likely for the rest of the decade.

First, and certainly most obvious, is that war and hostilities remain an omnipresent feature of Southeast Asia. The fall of Saigon clearly did not resolve the Indochina problem. We have seen a border war between two communist countries-- Vietnam and Cambodia--transformed into a full-scale Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia. This in turn led to brief but fierce multidivisional hostilities between Vietnam and China and a guerrilla war on the Thai-Cambodian border, which still continues after two years.

Violence is also internal--all the countries of Southeast Asia with the exception of Singapore confront some form of insurgent hostilities. Even the Indochinese states have their insurgencies, the most protracted being in Laos. In none of the Southeast Asian states does insurgency pose any real threat to the established order at this time. In two states--Burma and the Philippines--important minorities seek some significant degree of autonomy or, in the case of some Burmese insurgents, independence from the central government. I will have more to say about this subject later.

The final type of hostilities over the past seven years may be considered a remnant of European decolonialization or a bit of Asian imperialism, depending on one's perspective. I refer to the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. The war there has devolved after six years into a low-level guerrilla war which has almost petered out. It excites a certain amount of concern in the U.S. Congress and in Australia, but that interest has little impact on what has been the absorption of Portuguese Timor into Indonesia. In actuality, Timor's location is such that one wonders why the Indonesians did not do it sooner and why their effort has taken so long.

The second broad statement I would make is that nationalism remains an integral element of the sources of violence in Southeast Asia. Nationalism perhaps does not have the fervor of anticolonialist days, but it remains an important motivating agent. Ethnic, religious, and ideological rivalries often intensify nationalist passion and help to shape threat perspectives. It is not easy to sort these factors out. What, after all, is the source of hostilities in Indochina? One could quite correctly characterize the conflict as a struggle for control of the communist party of Cambodia, in other words another case of Sino-Soviet rivalry. However, much of the direct cause of recent fighting is fierce Cambodian nationalism, more specifically the rather bizarre military behavior--given its relative weakness vis-a-vis Vietnam--of the Pol Pot government in 1977 and 1978 in handling its border dispute with Hanoi. And similarly, what is the source of Vietnamese-Chinese rivalry? It is far more complicated than ideological differences. One of my most vivid recollections of three years of dealing with Vietnamese officials, including the Foreign Minister, has been their invariable transformation when they discuss the Chinese and their iniquities. Their voices change and a mystical fervor takes possession of them. Clearly the hostility between Chinese

and Vietnamese is profound and wrapped inextricably in historical, ethnic, and nationalist causes.

In less dramatic form, these types of animosities are at the root of the insurgencies in Burma, the Philippines, and Malaysia. These insurgencies are deep-seated and are thus difficult to resolve, even with the most sensitive and progressive of governments. The differing ASEAN perceptions of Vietnamese and Chinese threats to the region--principally between Thailand on the one hand and Indonesia on the other--lie perhaps as much in Indonesia's phobia of its influential Chinese minority as in its distance from Vietnam.

As a third general statement, I would say that while the impact of the powers in Southeast Asian violence has declined with the American defeat in Vietnam, the great power element remains a major factor in force considerations. The Vietnamese could not continue their military activities throughout Indochina nor the Khmer Rouge guerrillas their war against Vietnam without Soviet and Chinese material support. It was the alliance with the Soviets that permitted the Vietenamese to invade Cambodia with some confidence in the protection of [redacted] rear. And it was direct Chinese intervention in Vietnam which helped preserve the existence of the Khmer Rouge. The threat of direct Chinese

intervention serves as a major deterrent to any Vietnamese interest in crossing into Thailand to destroy the Khmer Rouge. Similarly, Thailand's willingness to offer refuge to the Cambodian guerrillas and to help build an anti-Vietnamese Cambodian coalition is intimately related to its being able to count on U.S. and Chinese sympathy and support. In a lesser vein, the battles against domestic insurgencies in most of the noncommunist countries are largely fought with U.S. arms.

Direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation has been absent despite Cambodia. The United States has been very circumspect about involving itself again with force in Southeast Asia. Witness its caution on the Cambodian issue in even any display of force in Thailand. It has limited itself to support of ASEAN positions, including economic warfare against Vietnam. The only direct U.S. force involvement is confined to its long-standing bases in the Philippines. The one new super-power involvement has been the development of Soviet facilities at Cam Ranh Bay. So far that use has been limited to intelligence, surveillence, R&R, and minor repairs of vessels. How far the Soviets want to go is uncertain. How far the highly nationalistic Vietnamese will let them go is also uncertain. All this is quite naturally a matter of concern to the U.S., particularly the Navy. It may also have

a significant long-term political impact in the area, but its political benefits for the Soviets in the area to date have been negative. However, as long as Sino-Vietnamese hostility does not abate, not much can be done about the Soviet military presence.

My fourth generalization is that internal insurgencies have failed, and with possibly one exception their prospects are poor. The American obsession of the sixties has not come to pass. Some of these insurgencies go back to the early years after World War II, and in every country the insurgents have barely hung on, even in Burma. Despite Burma's inglorious record on economic development, the Burmese army still keeps the country unified. It has to engage in constant battle, but the insurgents remain in the boondocks. All the noncommunist Southeast Asian countries have succeeded in their efforts largely on their own, although they have had foreign, usually U.S., economic and military aid. Indeed, in the case of Thailand, government efforts to deal with a problem [redacted] improved when the U.S. got out of the counter-insurgency business in Thailand. It is somewhat incredible to recall that in the early seventies the U.S. had 13 branch USIS posts throughout Thailand trying to help Thai farmers resist communist ideological encroachments. The U.S. does many things well; one it generally doesn't do well is to build successful political structures abroad.

Related to the failure of the insurgencies, but not to be overstressed, is the decline in Chinese interest and involvement in them--a downplaying of the wars of national liberation. The West and the U.S. clearly overreacted to this Chinese ideological initiative--embodied most vividly in a Lin Piao speech--giving it too great a global perspective. But the appeal and effectiveness of wars of national liberation has diminished for two other reasons. First have been the obvious failures of Vietnamese and Chinese communism--China during the Cultural Revolution and Vietnam since the boat people--and the impact these failures have had on potentially dissident forces in Southeast Asian countries. The second has been China's own playing down of the concept, given its desire to improve its relations with the countries of Southeast Asia. Chinese policy is, of course, a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute and the Chinese break with Vietnam. A good example of the impact of Sino-Vietnamese rivalry has been the blow dealt the Chinese-dominated communist party of Thailand with the Lao eviction of the Thai communists from their sanctuaries in Laos. The struggle between the Chinese and Vietnamese has also helped decimate political fervor among the insurgent leadership.

The one country where insurgent prospects at the present seem more favorable is the Philippines. The Philippine government clearly remains dominant, but it has taken significant casualties in Mindanao against Moslem insurgents in a rebellion in part fueled by a new type of external agent. The New People's Army has also made gains over the past few years. Experienced observers disagree on the potential of the NPA. The situation is a matter of concern, but clearly far from critical. NPA gains can still be easily reversed.

There is one aspect of Southeast Asia that relates to internal insurgencies and helps assure their continuation, and that is what might be called the porousness of borders. All the mainland Southeast Asian countries have long borders marked by difficult terrain. They are very hard for governments to police. While this makes external invasion unlikely, it also simplifies the life of insurgents. They can more easily get the small volume of supplies they need and they can readily find refuge. I have witnessed this most graphically in three years of effort trying to diminish the opium trade in the Golden Triangle by eliminating the bandit gangs that dominate portions of the Thai-Burmese border.

My fifth generalization is that the growth of ASEAN has diminished the impact of regional quarrels and rivalries. I am not one who believes that ASEAN is the millennium arrived in Southeast Asia. ASEAN still has a distance to travel in developing a sustained regional consensus and cohesion. But it has come a long way, and while much of its recent vigor is a result of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, there has been a real growth in regional consciousness and an awareness among the ASEAN states that together they have an influence that transcends most (but not all) bilateral relations. This ASEAN consciousness, while not ending quarrels such as that between Malaysia and the Philippines, clearly is important in damping them down and reducing the possibility that they will lead to conflict. Similarly, steps toward military cooperation on some sort of regional basis have been taken which, while outside the ASEAN framework, have been abetted by the growth of ASEAN. This conflict-reducing function of ASEAN is at least one reason that it may be desirable to have Vietnam within ASEAN one day. That day is distant. Ideological and other considerations override any such consideration and may legitimately do so for a lengthy period. But clearly there are important long-term benefits from such a development if there are changes within Vietnam.

My sixth and final general observation is that despite the widespread use of violence and the frequent resort to arms, there has not been in the countries of the area, with the exception of Vietnam, a significant diversion of resource to the military and away from economic development. Defense financing ranges from one or two percent of GNP to at most five percent. Even Thailand, which since 1979 found itself in a totally new security situation with the presence of 100 thousand Vietnamese troops on its border, did not embark on any major new defense efforts. Whatever the reason, in those Southeast Asian states dominated by the military, the accumulation of arms has not become an end in itself. All this at least indicates a healthy realism within ASEAN.

Those are some of the conclusions I draw from looking at the record of the past decade.

What can we say about force and its likely employment in the decade of the eighties? Let me preface my comments by saying that caution is very much in order. Most people were wrong in their predictions about the course of events in Southeast Asia following the fall of Saigon. I remember my own quarrel with the U.S. intelligence community in late 1978 when, after the signing of the Vietnamese-Soviet mutual defense agreement, their

prediction was simply for more intensive border hostilities between Vietnam and Cambodia. It is of course easy to project the present into the future.

Nevertheless, while insurgencies will unquestionably continue, I think the prospects of significant and protracted hostilities among or between Southeast Asian states are low. For that to occur, we must see major political change within the states or much greater U.S. or Soviet involvement in the area. More fundamentally, with the exception of Vietnam, none of the states can much project power beyond its borders, and that cannot change much in this decade. Only Singapore--a Chinese island in a Malay sea--is vulnerable to attack by an ASEAN partner. In the case of Vietnam, whatever its ultimate intent in the region, it clearly has far more on its platter right now than it desires. Its economy will remain under great stress for a long time; the society has lost much of its elan, and its overextension in Laos and Cambodia bids to continue. It abhors its international isolation. To undertake any serious military effort beyond Cambodia would be an undertaking both difficult logistically and utterly dependent upon Soviet backing, which in itself is highly questionable. It would also be extremely unpredictable in its regional consequences. The cautious Vietnamese military behavior

on the Thai border over the past three years shows that Vietnam at least now has no interest in such adventures, whether it has them at all.

Secondly, the major source of conflict in the area will be between the communist states, and its likely location is in the communist states. Without political change either in Hanoi or Peking, or the unlikely submission of one to the other, their hostility will continue at a high intensity. China has not changed its policy of bleeding Vietnam in the expectation that this will eventually produce political change in Hanoi. It will continue its support to the Khmer Rouge guerrilla effort. The Vietnamese cannot eliminate the Khmer Rouge unless they choose to go into Thailand, something they have resisted so far.

The second area of possible Chinese pressure on Vietnam is Laos. Laos is an economic basket case and a burden to Vietnam. Laotian forces are vulnerable and could well have difficulty dealing with existing Lao insurgents without the help of Vietnamese forces in Laos. The Chinese have been training some Lao and Hmong insurgents but information about all this is very sketchy at best. It is not easy to develop an effective Lao or Hmong resistance. Whatever Chinese efforts are to date, the results so far have not been impressive.

Let me add a small parenthesis: the notion of Vietnam facing protracted guerrilla war on two fronts with insurgents who get external support and have external sanctuaries has a certain poetic justice.

The Cambodian problem must be approached with a caveat to our first prediction. Cambodia is the one area that we cannot rule out major escalation--a sustained Vietnamese incursion over the Thai border or renewed Chinese-Vietnamese hostilities. None of these developments appear likely to me now. The Vietnamese dominate Cambodia and there is little chance of the Khmer Rouge or the newly formed anti-Vietnamese Cambodian coalition changing the fundamental situation on the ground. Nevertheless, despite all the constraints to a sustained Vietnamese incursion into Thailand, we cannot rule out Vietnamese exasperation with incessant harassment.

Nor do Sino-Vietnamese hostilities seem likely, without some further acts to change the present scene by the Vietnamese. The Chinese keep tied down a considerable Vietnamese military effort in Northern Vietnam, but they have shown no interest in undertaking any second lesson. They have reduced forces along the border. The costs of any attack would be enormous. Peking will likely stick to the Khmer Rouge as their desired instrument of change in Indochina.

Nor is there much basis to expect increased Soviet-U.S. confrontation in the area. The U.S. has shown no intent in turning ASEAN into an anti-Soviet military bastion. The Soviets' principal interest is to maintain a level of Chinese-Vietnamese hostilities. Hostilities between them in the area would, in the absence of major political change in the area, have to result from conflict elsewhere. The uncertainties of additional military competition as distinct from the use of force relate to greater Soviet military use of Vietnam and deepened American concern with a Persian Gulf conflict leading toward renewed use of some former facilities in Thailand.

I believe a direct Chinese military threat to Southeast Asia has always been a vast exaggeration. Chinese ability to project force southward is very limited, and they have never shown any such intention to do so. Their skirmish with Vietnam was not for expansionist purposes and was not a glorious one. This does not mean that in the distant future after considerable force modernization that situation may not change. Certainly such a prospect, rightly or wrongly, worries such states as Indonesia, which would welcome a strong Vietnamese buffer between them and China.

Another potential source of conflict arises from disputed claims to areas with mineral and other resources. The Spratly Islands are a good example, and there are other disputed areas. While these conflicts are taken deadly seriously by the countries concerned, the potential for conflict can be overdrawn. Many have pointed to this problem for years but little has occurred. The parties themselves are cautious in pursuing their claims, recognizing the implication of the disputes. Moreover, serious military action would require sizable improvement in their power projection capabilities. The areas of greatest concern are those where Vietnam is involved, particularly with China. In the cases of disputed territory within ASEAN the mechanism appears to be in place or on the way to limit the likelihood of such disputes degenerating into hostilities.

There is one perhaps wild card, and that is Islam. I refer to the possibility of fundamentalist Muslem activity leading to political change in Malaysia, and less likely in Indonesia, which could generate threats to the integrity of Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand. I do not feel particularly confident in discussing this subject. But from what I have seen, the prospects for such a development are limited. In both states strong secular-leaning governments are in charge and determined

to pursue moderate racial and religious policies. A faltering economy could conceivably change this picture, but it would be very rash to predict any such development.

That is the picture as I see it. Violence remains endemic in Southeast Asia but, unlike the past three decades, it does not bid to be very important.