



TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

# 30 YEARS ON

## A Reflection on Southeast Asia's Fight Against Communism During the Cold War Years

Daljit Singh and Lye Liang Fook

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# FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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# **30 Years On: A Reflection on Southeast Asia's Fight Against Communism During the Cold War Years**

By Daljit Singh and Lye Liang Fook

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The year 2021 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the Cambodian Peace Agreements which ended the Cambodian conflict and the Cold War in Southeast Asia.
- Communism was a perennial concern in Singapore and Malaya (later Malaysia) from 1948 into the 1980s—a concern which younger generations may not appreciate. The threat came largely from the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) supported by China, and from Vietnam.
- The CPM waged a guerrilla war in Malaya. They were defeated by 1960 but tried to revive the insurgency in the 1970s. In Singapore they attempted to attain political power through a united front with the People's Action Party during the 1950s.
- The victory of the communists in the Vietnam War in 1975 alarmed non-communist Southeast Asia. The concern was aggravated by Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978.
- ASEAN states strongly opposed Vietnam's action on the grounds that the invasion and occupation of a sovereign country violated a fundamental principle of international law. Successive UN General Assembly resolutions supported the ASEAN position with significant majorities.
- Thailand was pivotal to the security of the rest of non-communist Southeast Asia. Had it succumbed to Vietnam's pressures and



reached an accommodation with Hanoi, the security of the rest of Southeast Asia would have been endangered. Thailand stood firm. Had it not done so, the people of Southeast Asia would be living in a different world today.

# **30 Years On: A Reflection on Southeast Asia's Fight Against Communism During the Cold War Years**

By Daljit Singh and Lye Liang Fook<sup>1</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Communism was seen as a serious threat and a perennial concern in Malaya (Malaysia from 1963), Singapore, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia in the post-World War II period until the 1980s. Many people today, especially the younger generation, may not be aware of this. The communist parties of the Soviet Union and China had set up or abetted the setting up of communist parties in the developing world to foment communist takeover of these countries through political mobilization and violent revolution.

The years 1989 to 1991 saw the end of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, starting with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In Southeast Asia, 1989 saw the signing of the peace agreements between the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and the governments of Malaysia and Thailand. The Cold War in Southeast Asia formally ended with the signing of the Paris peace accords in 1991 to settle the Cambodian conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> Daljit Singh, the paper's lead writer, is Visiting Senior Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. Lye Liang Fook was Senior Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. The authors would like to thank Associate Professor Ang Cheng Guan of S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies for sharing some of his materials on Vietnam. The authors also thank Mr Joel Chong, Research Associate at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, for providing inputs to Table 1 on p. 15.

It is therefore appropriate at this juncture, thirty years after the end of the communist threat in Southeast Asia, to reflect on the security anxieties that communism then caused in Singapore and non-communist Southeast Asia.

The paper is divided into five parts. The first deals with the security threat posed by the CPM; the second with fears of a “nutcracker” strategy involving Indonesia and Vietnam, the two prongs of the nutcracker; the third on the impact on Southeast Asia of the capture of South Vietnam by communist forces in 1975; the fourth on the dangers posed to the region by Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and ASEAN’s and Singapore’s responses to it; and the last a concluding section on the close relations that Singapore enjoys today with Vietnam, Cambodia and China.

## **THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF MALAYA**

The CPM insurgency in Malaya, which began in 1948, brought much insecurity for over a decade, marked by bombings, assassinations, ambushes, train derailments, fire-fights in the jungle, curfews and numerous security checks. The insurgency was defeated by British and Malayan military, police and intelligence forces and the Emergency (the euphemism by which the British called the insurgency) was declared over in 1960.<sup>2</sup>

While the main battleground of the war with the CPM was peninsula Malaya, Singapore was not spared. Although violent incidents were fewer, there was intense Communist United Front (CUF) activity with

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<sup>2</sup> According to Leon Comber, who was with the Malayan Special Branch during the Emergency, the total number of civilians killed and missing was 3,283, and “missing” in this context must mean they had perished—far exceeding the combined total of police and army killed (1,865). The number of civilians wounded (1,385), too, was more than the number of army wounded (959) and only slightly fewer than the number of police wounded (1,601). See Leon Comber, *Malaya’s Secret Police 1945–1960: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 6–7.

penetration of trade unions, student bodies, farmers associations and other mass organizations by communist agents. The CUF fomented demonstrations, strikes and riots with loss of lives and economic damage.

It took the People's Action Party (PAP) leaders some time to understand how the CUF operated. As former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew recounted in his memoirs:

I was ignorant, gullible and stupid. I did not know just how efficient the communists were, how their tentacles reached out and controlled every single organization that was bubbling up against the government.... It took me two years from 1954 to 1956 to fathom their methods, to get glimpses of their intrigues and deviousness and to understand the dynamics of the Communist United Front.<sup>3</sup>

The PAP was in an uneasy united front with the pro-communists who hoped to use the PAP's legitimacy and respectability to advance the communist agenda while the moderate leadership of the PAP needed the CUF to get the vote of the Chinese masses to win elections to advance their own agenda for Singapore.

The struggle between the two culminated in the break-up of the PAP in 1961, with the left wing leaving to form the Barisan Sosialis. The fear that the pro-communists might win elections to become the ruling group in Singapore prompted Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman to agree to a merger with Singapore as part of a broader federation which would include the British Borneo territories so that the racial balance in the peninsula would not be upset by the inclusion of only Singapore.

Meanwhile in Malaya, the remnants of the defeated and demoralized CPM guerrilla army had retreated into the CPM base areas in south Thailand. Chin Peng, the leader of the CPM, left for Beijing via Hanoi. In both capitals he explained to their communist leaders why he was

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<sup>3</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998), pp. 173, 174–75.

abandoning the military part of the struggle. The Vietnamese and Chinese communist parties encouraged him to resume the armed struggle because, they argued, the regional circumstances had become favourable for armed struggle. China promised to give financial support for a new insurgency war.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, the CPM decided to rebuild its military strength in south Thailand. In the late 1960s it started infiltrating guerrillas and agents into the northern states of peninsula Malaysia. Among the notable incidents of this new insurgency were the bombing of the National Monument in Kuala Lumpur in 1975; the assassinations of the Malaysian Inspector-General of Police and the Chief Police Officer of Perak state in 1974 and 1975, respectively, by a CPM-Marxist Leninist mobile assassination squad.<sup>5</sup> The same faction of the CPM also unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate the Chief of the Armed Forces Staff of Malaysia and the Commissioner of Police of Singapore. There was also a revival of communist underground activity in Singapore and some incidents. These developments were particularly troubling because they coincided with the 1975 takeover of South Vietnam by communist forces.

However, the CPM could not sustain the new insurgency because of splits within the party; the efficiency of the security agencies of Malaysia and Singapore; the unwillingness of the masses to support the communist cause; and from the early 1980s, China's waning enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause in Southeast Asia.

Before this happened, China had supported the CPM in its struggle to overthrow the governments of Malaya (Malaysia) and Singapore. In the 1960s and 1970s, CPM leaders travelled to China for discussions with the Communist Party of China (CPC) which were organized by the CPC International Liaison Department (ILD) which provided the CPM with an office, for some time within the precincts of the ILD. After the arrival of Chin Peng in Peking in mid-1961, bilateral meetings were held every few

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<sup>4</sup> Chin Peng, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003). pp. 418–46.

<sup>5</sup> See Aloysius Chin, *The Communist Party of Malaya: The Inside Story* (Kuala Lumpur: Vinpress Sdn Bhd, 1994), pp. 112 and 125; Chin Peng, *My Side of History*.

months from 1961 to 1965 between the CPM and the CPC to review the development of the CPM's armed struggle and some of these meetings were led, on the CPC side, by Deng Xiaoping, then Secretary-General of the CPC.<sup>6</sup> In 1969, the CPC helped the CPM to set up a radio station in Hunan, China, called the Radio Suara Revolusi Malaysia (Voice of the Malayan Revolution) to broadcast CPM propaganda to the peoples of "Malaya", meaning peninsular Malaysia and Singapore.

It was only after the intensification of the Sino-Soviet Cold War in Southeast Asia in the 1980s that China gave up its support for revolutionary parties in order to win the friendship of Southeast Asian states in its competition for influence with the Vietnam-Soviet Union axis.

## **WORRIES ABOUT A "NUTCRACKER" STRATEGY**

To the leaders of Singapore and Malaysia, the respite from the end of the first CPM insurgency in 1960 was short-lived. Even as the irregular war of Indonesia's confrontation against Malaysia and Singapore was going on in the early 1960s, communist forces were gaining strength in Indonesia and Vietnam.

The pro-Peking Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) emerged as a potent force during the later years of the rule of President Sukarno who himself was veering closer to China. The PKI had been allowed to operate legally and openly and had amassed much support, especially in Java, through its organizational and propaganda skills. With the Indonesian economy in dire straits, the country looked vulnerable to a communist takeover. The PKI also had close links with communist North Vietnam.

In South Vietnam (and in Laos), there was a step-up of communist insurgency in the early 1960s after Hanoi decided in 1960 to take over South Vietnam by force. To North Vietnam it was an issue of national independence and reunification which they felt the big powers had unjustly denied them at the Geneva Conference of 1954 after their

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<sup>6</sup> Aloysius Chin, *The Communist Party of Malaya*.

victory over the French forces. By late 1964 the military situation in South Vietnam was desperate. District capitals and villages were falling to the communists and for the first time Hanoi introduced its regular army units into the South.

The domino theory was much in vogue in the 1950s and 1960s. Though criticized later by liberal and leftist scholars, it was based on good grounds in view of the regional realities in the early 1960s. In January 1965, China and Indonesia concluded a pact which both later called the “Jakarta–Phnom Penh–Hanoi–Peking–Pyongyang Axis”. Sukarno, in a candid moment, said the “Axis” strategy for defeating the United States and its allies was for China (and North Vietnam) to strike a blow at the United States in Vietnam from the north while Indonesia struck Malaysia and Singapore from the south (as it was doing in its confrontation against the two countries).<sup>7</sup> Tun Dr Ismail, the Malaysian Home Minister at the time, publicly expressed the concern that “if the nutcracker with one prong stretching southward from Hanoi and the other northward from Jakarta [succeeded], it would have been difficult for Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore to preserve their independence.”<sup>8</sup>

However, the nutcracker did not materialize. In the northern part of Southeast Asia, communist gains in South Vietnam led the United States to intervene massively with its ground forces in March 1965. The American involvement did not stop the Vietnamese communists from capturing South Vietnam ten years later, but it bought ten years for non-communist Southeast Asian states to build their economic and security resilience against communist subversion.<sup>9</sup> Also, in those ten

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Arnold C. Brackman, “Why We Escalated”, *New York Times*, 6 February 1971.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Singapore’s founding father Lee Kuan Yew said in his memoirs: “America’s action enabled non-communist Southeast Asia to put their own houses in order. By 1975 they were in a better shape to stand up to the communists. Had there been no US intervention, the will of these countries to resist them would have melted and Southeast Asia would most likely have gone communist.” Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First* (Singapore: Times Media, 2000), p. 521.

years the bitter Sino-Soviet conflict came out into the open and became an important factor in shaping the security dynamics of the region after the end of the Vietnam War. The destruction of the southern prong of the nutcracker was triggered by an abortive coup on 30 September 1965 by left-wing elements in the Indonesian military. The Indonesian Army under the leadership of General Soeharto, by now emboldened by the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, resisted the plotters, leading to the emergence of an anti-communist regime in Jakarta that crushed the PKI, ended Confrontation against Malaysia and Singapore, and paved the way for the establishment of ASEAN in 1967.

## **COMMUNIST VICTORY IN VIETNAM**

As the Vietnam War dragged on in the 1960s and early 1970s, it became clear to non-communist Southeast Asia that the final outcome might be a victory for the communist forces. Still, the fall of South Vietnam to the North Vietnamese Army in April 1975, preceded by the fall of Cambodia and followed by that of Laos, came as a shock because of its speed and completeness. It truly alarmed Southeast Asia. This was because Vietnam, supported by China and the Soviet Union, had formidable military power which completely outclassed the military strength of its non-communist neighbours. With the withdrawal of the Americans, there was no counterweight to it in Southeast Asia. The path seemed open for Vietnam, the Soviet Union and China, either cooperatively or competitively to undermine non-communist Southeast Asia either by supporting the ongoing insurgency in Thailand by the Communist Party of Thailand and the revival of the CPM insurgency in peninsula Malaysia—or by applying pressure on Thailand in other ways to reach accommodation with the communist powers. The nightmare of the domino theory became a real possibility.

The situation was not helped by what was seen as threatening behaviour of Vietnam to ASEAN countries. The Vietnamese government and party media suggested that the next task for Hanoi after liberating South Vietnam would be to fight for the “genuine independence” of Southeast Asian states, which in the then prevailing circumstances was taken to mean the setting up of communist governments. Vietnam also



described itself as the “vanguard” of socialism in Southeast Asia. It is difficult today to convey the sense of alarm all this generated among thinking people in Singapore. The following excerpt from the book by Cheong Yip Seng,<sup>10</sup> the former Group Editor of the Straits Times Group, may help to convey the sentiments then:

When Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese, he [Mr Lee Kuan Yew] and his family took stock: was there a future for Singapore? He later spoke about it, but the best account is from his daughter, reported in the *Straits Times* in 2009. Lee Wei Ling wrote: “In 1975, the year South Vietnam fell, I was a medical student training in paediatrics.... there was serious talk of emigration among my paediatrician mentors.

My parents called a family meeting in their bedroom after Saigon fell. My father, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, then Singapore’s prime minister, told us: ‘Mama and I will stay here till the bitter end. Hsien Loong is already in the SAF, and will do his duty. But the three of you need not feel obliged to stay.’”

The three Lee children chose to stay. Many Singaporeans left, mostly for Australia.

## **THE INVASION OF CAMBODIA**

The situation worsened after Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia in 1978. Prior to this, Cambodia had been renamed Democratic Kampuchea in 1975 by the Khmer Rouge who had gained control of the country with the help of Vietnamese forces. Reunified Vietnam’s relations with the Khmer Rouge quickly soured and Hanoi saw them as a pro-China movement that China was using against Vietnamese interests in Indo-China. There were frequent border clashes which Vietnam blamed on the Khmer Rouge. Vietnam decided to invade Cambodia on Christmas

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<sup>10</sup> Cheong Yip Seng, *OB Markers: My Straits Times Story* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2012), p. 206.

Day 1978 to put a stop to the trouble. They occupied the country, ousted the Khmer Rouge government from power, and installed a pro-Vietnam government in a relatively short period.

Non-communist Southeast Asia, especially Thailand, was rattled by this development. It greatly accentuated the sense of threat from Vietnam. Thailand had not yet recovered fully from the shock of the fall of South Vietnam when this happened. In the words of Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's Minister of Defence at the time, "suddenly, Thailand found the Vietnamese army on her border.... It could not be comforting to the Thais to discover the battle-hardened, heavily armed Vietnamese Army within easy reach of Bangkok. More so, as the Americans had resolved never to get involved in fighting on the Asian mainland."<sup>11</sup> For the ASEAN member states, this new trial also came at a time when they were trying to cope with a flood of refugees—the "boat people"—arriving on their shores from Vietnam. The "boat people" situation was so bad that some in Southeast Asia suspected that Vietnam was turning a blind eye to the exodus or deliberately driving out unwanted citizens to destabilize Southeast Asia.

A special ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting in Bangkok on 12 January 1979 issued a joint statement that "deplored the armed intervention against the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Kampuchea". The day before, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, speaking at the UN Security Council, charged Vietnam with committing "flagrant aggression" against his country in the form of a "Rommel-type blitzkrieg".<sup>12</sup>

In February 1979, China launched an attack on Vietnam across the Sino-Vietnamese border. It was a limited attack, bitterly fought by both sides. But China had delivered its message. Also, using bases in Thailand and working with the Thai military and intelligence services, it channelled

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Ang Cheng Guan, *Singapore, ASEAN and the Cambodian Conflict 1978–1991* (Singapore, NUS Press, 2013), p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> "Sihanouk Appeals to U.N. Security Council To Get Vietnam Out of Cambodia", *New York Times*, 12 January 1979.

arms to the Khmer Rouge to enable them to sustain an insurgency against the Vietnamese occupation forces in Cambodia.

To rally Southeast Asian states to its side in its conflict with Vietnam and the Soviet Union, China also made the major decision to greatly scale down support for the pro-Chinese communist parties waging insurgency warfare against the non-communist governments in the region and later to end it altogether. For example, the CPM radio station in China “Voice of the Malayan Revolution” was closed down in 1981. In this way, China made itself more acceptable as a counterweight to the Vietnam-Soviet Union axis even if lingering suspicions about its ultimate aims remained. So, in the absence of the United States, China emerged as the balancer against the Vietnam-Soviet Union axis in Southeast Asia.

This was a relief for Thailand and also in other ASEAN states. The five-member ASEAN backed Thailand’s alignment with China in part because of concern that if it did not do so, Thailand would be drawn deeper into China’s arms, in the process splitting ASEAN or forcing it to take sides in the Sino-Soviet/Vietnam conflict. In fact, ASEAN spokespersons were careful to emphasize that opposition to Vietnam’s military occupation did not mean that ASEAN backed China’s domination of Indo-China. The concern about China was especially felt by Indonesia and Malaysia. Both thought that a strong Vietnam could be a bulwark in the future against the expansion of China’s power and influence into Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> Still, despite these differences within ASEAN, all five countries took an united official stand on the Cambodian issue at ASEAN meetings and international forums.

Singapore at the time was deeply concerned about the threat that the situation in Cambodia posed to Thailand. Thailand, because of its geography, was regarded as the pivotal state to the security of the rest of Southeast Asia. There were fears that Thailand might buckle under

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<sup>13</sup> Malaysia’s Home Affairs Minister Ghazali Shafie said in a speech in November 1979 that Chinese strategy was to make the Vietnamese and Soviets to “bend and bleed” until they could not take the strain anymore. When that happened, “China would be free to pursue her own ‘hegemonism’ in Asia”. See Ang Cheng Guan, *Singapore, ASEAN and the Cambodian Conflict 1978–1991*.

pressure and reach an accommodation with Hanoi which would help Vietnam to get away with a fait accompli in Cambodia and also endanger the security of other countries in Southeast Asia. It was therefore a great relief to non-communist Southeast Asia that, under the premiership of General Prem Tinsulanonda, Thailand chose to resolutely resist Vietnamese pressures.

The importance of this critical point in the region's history was reflected in the condolence message that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong sent on 31 May 2019 when General Prem passed away. In praising General Prem's capabilities as a leader, Mr Lee said that the former leader's premiership coincided with ASEAN members—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand—coming together to oppose “Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and the Cambodian government that replaced the Khmer Rouge”. General Prem, he added, was resolute in not accepting the fait accompli and worked with ASEAN partners to oppose the Vietnamese occupation in international forums.

The central issue for Singapore on Cambodia was stated by former Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng (who was Singapore's Foreign Minister from 1988 to 1994) in his S. Rajaratnam Lecture at Shangri-La Hotel on 23 November 2011:

The issue for us was that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia was a clear case of violation of international borders and an act of external aggression which would have established an undesirable precedent of international relations if left unopposed.... We had to respond. Anything less would have undermined our credibility and posed serious implications for our own security.... The invasion of a smaller country by a larger neighbour, the deposition of a legitimate government by external force and the imposition of a proxy by a foreign power became a direct challenge to the fundamentals of our foreign policy.

In 1979 ASEAN states adopted a similar posture. For example, the Indonesian Permanent Representative at the UN stated:

The Government of Indonesia recognizes the regime of Democratic Kampuchea as the legal Government of that country.

In this connexion, the Government of Indonesia together with other members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), has made it clear that it deplores the armed foreign intervention in Kampuchea which brought with it the administration now called the People's Republic of Kampuchea. It is clear—very clear—that this government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea, was not established by the people of Kampuchea themselves but emerged in Cambodia on the tail of a foreign intervention and a foreign invasion.<sup>14</sup>

In the same debate in 1979 the Malaysian Permanent Representative said, if foreign military intervention were allowed, “then no country could feel secure from the law of the jungle that dictated might to be right in all circumstances”.<sup>15</sup>

Singapore and ASEAN were aware that the Khmer Rouge were a genocidal regime which had murdered hundreds of thousands or more Cambodians. For this reason, they were of the view that the Khmer Rouge should not have a dominant role in any new government established in Phnom Penh as part of a peace settlement of the Cambodian conflict. In 1989, the annual ASEAN-sponsored United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on “The Situation in Kampuchea” introduced language condemning the Khmer Rouge. Neither Singapore and ASEAN, nor much of the international community, could accept Vietnam's justification for its invasion and occupation—that it had acted to rescue the Cambodian people from a brutal regime. That would have established the dangerous precedent that internal developments can justify external invasion of a country.

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<sup>14</sup> Indonesian Permanent Representative Abdullah Kamil, speaking during the debate on the report of the UN Credential Committee at the fourth meeting of the 34th Session of the UN General Assembly. Provisional Verbal Record of the Fourth Meeting of the 34th session of the General Assembly, 21 September 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Ang Cheng Guan, *Singapore, ASEAN and the Cambodian Conflict 1978–1991*, p. 29.

Many states, and especially Western states, had to hold their noses while voting in support of ASEAN resolutions in view of the notoriety of the Khmer Rouge. For instance, Tim Fraser, the Permanent Representative of New Zealand, expressed this dilemma when he said:

My government certainly holds no brief for the policies of the Government of Democratic Kampuchea. Since it came to power in an internal revolution, it has established a record for gross and consistent violation of human rights that is unequalled in human history. But we consider that the record of that Government, deplorable though it has been, can provide no justification for the General Assembly's acceptance of the credentials of a puppet regime installed through external intervention in violation of the central principle of the United Nations Charter.<sup>16</sup>

ASEAN waged a decade-long struggle on the diplomatic front in various international bodies, including the UN, to delegitimize the Vietnamese action in Cambodia. The first ASEAN-sponsored resolution at the UN, calling for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea was passed by the UNGA on 14 November 1979. Thereafter ASEAN sponsored similar annual resolutions until 1989. By calling for an international conference on Kampuchea, ASEAN sought to keep the issue internationalized, since there were friends of Vietnam who preferred a regional (ASEAN and Vietnam) solution. In 1979, when the first resolution was passed, ninety-one countries supported it. By 1989, the last of such a resolution, the number of countries that supported the resolution had reached 124. Over the same period, the number of countries which voted "No" declined from twenty-one to seventeen, the number who abstained declined from twenty-nine to twelve, and the number of non-voting countries also declined from

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

eleven to six (see Table 1). All the permanent five members of the Security Council except the Soviet Union consistently voted for the annual ASEAN resolution.

Together with Thailand's firm stand, ASEAN's intense diplomatic campaign prevented the domino theory from materializing.

## CONCLUSION

According to the nineteenth-century British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, states have permanent interests, not permanent friends. Friends change as circumstances affecting national interests change. This accounts for the ups and downs of relations between states as illustrated in the history of US-China relations since the end of World War II and Sino-Vietnamese, Sino-ASEAN and Vietnam-ASEAN relations during and after the Cold War.

It is a different world and a different region today from the one during the Cold War. While history can serve as a reference, it has not prevented countries in the region from developing a forward-looking and substantive relationship. Today, Singapore enjoys excellent relations with Vietnam and Cambodia anchored in robust economic ties, exchange of high-level visits and cooperation in many other areas.

Vietnam and Singapore have moved beyond their first Vietnam-Singapore Industrial Park in 1996 in the south of Vietnam to seven such industrial parks across the country. Since joining ASEAN in 1995, Vietnam has been actively contributing to ASEAN integration efforts. Singapore is one of the largest foreign investors in both Vietnam and Cambodia, and is a key human resource development partner to both. In 2018, Singapore upgraded the Singapore Training Centres in Phnom Penh and Hanoi to Singapore Cooperation Centres to reflect the expanded range of technical assistance offered.

China and Singapore are working on three government-to-government signature projects that reflect the evolving needs of the two countries. Cooperation between the two have further broadened into new areas such as finance, connectivity, legal and judicial cooperation, and collaboration in smart cities. Today's China bears little resemblance to the China of the Cold War that supported communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia.

**Table 1: UNGA Resolutions on “The Situation in Kampuchea”**

Date	Resolution				Total Voting		
	No.	Yes	No	Abstained	Non-Voting	Membership	
14 November 1979	22	91	21	29	11	152	
22 October 1980	35/6	97	23	22	12	154	
21 October 1981	36/5	100	25	19	12	156	
28 October 1982	37/6	105	23	20	9	157	
27 October 1983	38/3	105	23	19	11	158	
30 October 1984	39/5	110	22	18	9	159	
5 November 1985	40/7	114	21	16	8	159	
21 October 1986	41/6	115	21	13	10	159	
14 October 1987	42/3	117	21	16	5	159	
3 November 1988	43/19	122	19	13	5	159	
16 November 1989	44/22	124	17	12	6	159	

*Source:* United Nations, various years.



Likewise, the notion of a “Vietnamese threat” to Southeast Asia is almost unthinkable, even laughable.

Countries in the region today are working together to deal with many challenges that include the threat of terrorism, climate change, ageing populations and disruptions brought about by technological advances. In the process, different national interests can give rise to hiccups or rough patches in relations from time to time. But what is important is how these differences are managed and prevented from affecting collaboration in areas they agree on.

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