

## The Extra Mile for Regional Peace and Security

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**B**y forging the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone, the countries in the region can rightfully say that they have made a giant leap forward for humankind and the planet Earth.

The step falls in place with the argument made by Austrian peace activist Bertha von Suttner: "If you want peace, then prepare for peace." The statement was addressed to no less than philanthropist and dynamite- and smokeless gunpowder-inventor, Alfred Nobel, whose name bears the famous peace awards granted to leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi and Rigoberta Menchu. Bertha's piece of wisdom countered Nobel's position that the way to peace is through war, a stand prevalent in the fire of patriotism that ignited most of Europe and divided even the flanks of the socialists and communists during World War II.

Fortunately, the maturation we went through during the Cold War has made us the wiser to realize that our security does not lie in nuclear arms buildup. Nuclear armamentation will lopsidedly rob the social services and programs for environmental protection and economic development of much needed support. That, in turn, would be too costly for the political fortunes of Southeast Asian leaders whose legitimacy, more than ever, rests on sustaining economic growth and alleviating poverty.

However, while Southeast Asia has said no to nuclear armamentation of member-states, it did not put its foot down on the passage of foreign vessels bearing nuclear weapons. Since carrying these weapons is neither confirmed nor denied, foreign ships are granted the right

of innocent passage. Thus, while Southeast Asia may not be a direct party to the crime of nuclear proliferation, it continues, nonetheless, to be an accessory.

Moreover, Southeast Asian states are leading contenders in the dangerous race for conventional arms buildup and nuclear energy production among developing countries.

■ *Thailand and Malaysia ranked eighth and ninth, respectively, as the principal clients in 1994 of arms vendors, according to the US Congressional Research Service Report, "Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1987-1994." In 1994, Malaysian orders from French manufacturers included Exocet missiles and large caliber artillery. Meanwhile, the Philippines negotiated with Belgians for the purchase of 20 mirage-5 fighter planes, valued at US\$150 million.*

On the supply side, Indonesia ranked eleventh in the list of countries with the biggest orders for weapons from developing countries in the same year. It is apparent that Indonesia sees the development of its arms industry as integral to its industrialization.

Nuclear spills experienced in the US, Japan and the former USSR have led to a halt in the development of nuclear power in the US, Sweden and France. But in fast developing Asia, its offer of efficient and broad continuous energy supply is attractive.

■ *By year 2000, Vietnam wants to join the club and is currently scouting for potential funders. Indonesia plans to develop 12 sites over the next 25 years on Java and Bali islands, one of which has been criticized because the planned site sits near a volcano. Those familiar with the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP) controversy recognizes a similar question raised against the BNPP. Notwithstanding, the Ramos administration seems bent on revitalizing the mothballed plant.*

That some Southeast Asian states want to go nuclear can be gleaned from a provision in the Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treaty (NWFZT) recognizing the right of the State Parties to use nuclear energy, in accordance with international standards.

As it is, Southeast Asia is already surrounded by nuclear plants — in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea. Should

a major accident occur in any of these plants, we will not escape contamination.

As in arms acquisition, nuclear plants are status symbols. They transmit the message that a country had made it on its own. They give a false sense of security and progress. But while nuclear power may be energy efficient, studies have shown that they are too expensive to run correctly.

Lastly, it is ironic that while Southeast Asia has turned down the nuclear weapons option, it has yet to stand solidly against the proliferation of anti-personnel landmines. So far, only four countries in the region — Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines — have called for a comprehensive ban on the manufacture, export and use of these deadly little gadgets. Only Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines have signed the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, including the Landmines Protocol. In the case of the Philippines, the Senate has yet to ratify the Convention. Without ratification, the Philippines cannot participate fully in the ongoing UN review of the Convention, where amendments to put in place an immediate total ban on the manufacture and use of such landmines are being lobbied.

■ *Landmines buried in fields and forests of war-torn countries like Cambodia continue to maim and kill innocent civilians — estimated at 2,000 every month. Meanwhile, two to five million landmines are planted each year, according to UN estimates.*

Outside of the review process in the United Nations and in the same manner that the Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty was forged, Southeast Asia, through the ASEAN, can adopt its own comprehensive ban on the production and use of these indiscriminate killer weapons. Southeast Asian militaries (and rebel groups) will do well to take this initiative for both pragmatic (military) and idealistic (humanitarian) reasons since, according to the findings of an international group of military experts, landmines do not affect actual battle outcomes and are largely ineffective in preventing enemy infiltration. On the other hand, the cost to forces in terms of casualties, limitation of tactical flexibility and loss of sympathy of the affected community is higher than generally acknowledged.

IF taking these additional steps against the proliferation of conventional weapons and nuclear plants and the transit and dumping of any nuclear

material on Southeast Asian territories, sound too quixotic, remember that it can be done.

Costa Rica did away with its army as far back as 1948. Yet it survived the Cold War despite being within nuclear arms-length of US-Cuban hostilities and the shooting range of the numerous internal conflicts that dotted the Latin American landscape. Costa Rica is also recognized for having led the forging of the Esquipulas Agreements that set in motion the peace processes in Central America. For traveling this extra mile in untested terrain, former Costa Rican president Oscar Arias — who keeps a statue of Don Quixote in his office — won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Cannot our Southeast Asian leaders dare to walk that extra mile? Not so much for the Nobel, of course, but if only to attain durable peace and security in the region through creative and farsighted measures. ♦

**READERS TAKE NOTE:** The year's delay in KASARINLAN has spurred some worried subscribers to inquire if this 10-year old journal has closed shop. Well, it has not. The Third World Studies staff, still underpersonnelled but soon to enjoy complete staffing with the hiring of two new research associates, is working on four issues at the same time and, hopefully, its publication arm would be on track soon.

The delay has its problems, certainly. As we write this on 10 June 1996, we are aware that we are producing a journal issue dated 2nd Quarter of 1995. Yet you would find that Jojie Tigno's piece on migrant workers was read in a 1996 conference. The signing of the Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treaty discussed in this column took place in December 1995. Other sources/events mentioned in other pieces may post-date this volume. This could cause serious confusion in the future so let this be the warning.

Starting next issue, KASARINLAN will be introducing a peer review system in the selection of articles to be published. If you have not noticed, we have also given the journal a new look. Let these add-ons be a good omen of better things to come.

**REFERENCES** Hagen, Ronald E. "Nuclear Energy Thrives in Asia," *Asia Pacific Issues, Analysis from the East-West Center*, No. 26, November 1995; *La lettre de l'Observatoire of Arms Transfers*, No. 3 (September) 1995, and No. 1 (March) 1996.