FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

respectively, war with the Soviet Union remains the Navy's "most demanding and important contingency"—though it is also the "least likely." They argue that in today's world of limited conflicts ("violent peace") more emphasis should be given to the use of (less expensive, less vulnerable) non-carrier surface ships to gather intelligence, demonstrate support for allies, and provide a U.S. military presence in trouble spots such as the eastern Mediterranean.

Indeed, the authors recount that of the roughly 200 "crises" to which U.S. naval forces have responded since World War II, only 55 percent resulted in deployment of aircraft carriers. Thus, proponents of the 600-ship fleet should remember that "ships which may be supporting players in global war may well be the lead players in peacetime."

A Forgotten Region

"Southeast Asia and U.S. Global Strategy: Continuing Interests and Shifting Priorities" by Richard K. Betts, in *Orbis* (Summer 1985), 3508 Market St., Ste. 350, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.

Barely 10 years have passed since Saigon fell to the Communists, but hardly anybody in political Washington talks about Southeast Asia anymore. In the White House, observes Betts, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, only sub-Sahara Africa gets less attention.

Ironically, the neglect coincides with the mushrooming of U.S. economic interests in the region. American trade with the members of the Western-oriented Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand—doubled between 1977 and 1982 (to $21 billion). And the Soviet Union has vastly expanded its military presence in the region since Hanoi granted its ally access to the former U.S. air and naval bases at Danang and Cam Ranh Bay.

Why the U.S. inattention? America's "painful hangover" from the Vietnam War and the authoritarian character of several of the ASEAN governments are contributing factors, Betts explains. Yet the chief reason that U.S. policymakers ignore Southeast Asia is that ASEAN faces no significant external threats from Communist powers.

The Soviets may deploy more warships and reconnaissance planes in the region these days, but Southeast Asia is "no greater a priority for Moscow than for Washington." (Indeed, Vietnam may provide the USSR with convenient bases, but at high rent: A 1983 State Department report estimated that the Soviets spend $3–$4 million per day to shore up Hanoi.) More important is China's swing into the anti-Soviet (and anti-Vietnamese) camp during the early 1970s. Fearing a reprise of the 1979 frontier war with China, Vietnam now keeps most of its one million-man army near its northern border. Some 100,000 troops occupy Kampuchea (Cambodia), where they are busy dealing with Chinese-backed local guerrillas. Any Vietnamese invasion of Thailand, which borders on Kampuchea, might well invite what Beijing calls a "second lesson" for Hanoi.

Internal insurgencies do pose varying threats to Thailand, Malaysia, and

the Philippines. In Betts's view, however, only the Philippines is truly endangered. And, if worse came to worst, the United States could adjust to the loss of Clark Field and the Subic Bay naval base in the Philippines by shifting its forces to new outposts. One likely home for new U.S. bases: Australia. Japan could also contribute to ASEAN's security by boosting its foreign aid. Canberra and Tokyo might not go along with such notions, Betts concedes, but that would only mean that they "do not see more reason to bolster the Western position in Asia than Washington does."

What Matters Most?

"The Real National Interest" by Alan Tonelson, in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1985), 11 Dupont Circle N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Prussia's Frederick the Great once declared that he who tries to defend everything ultimately defends nothing. Tonelson, associate editor of *Foreign Policy*, offers the White House and Congress the same advice.

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, says Tonelson, the United States has continued to operate under the delusion that it can defend unlimited strategic interests with relatively limited means. Such a "universalist" policy is fine for "an omnipotent country," he writes. "But today even President Reagan and his top aides regularly concede the need to recognize limits on American power."

Because Washington's universalist outlook fails to define vital U.S. interests overseas, the nation has no specific criteria for determining whether intervention is warranted in many foreign conflicts. The 1979 revolution in Iran and the fanaticism of Shi'ite Muslims in the Middle East, for instance, demonstrate that noncommunist "indigenous" movements can threaten American interests no less than Soviet-backed communist uprisings. And leftist rulers in Angola and Mozambique, although backed by the Soviet bloc, have shown themselves eager for U.S. economic aid and not unwilling to cooperate in U.S. diplomatic ventures.

Tonelson maintains that America must clarify its national interests and distinguish between high- and low-priority military commitments. Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, and the Persian Gulf—because of their strategic or economic value to the United States—all merit "significant" U.S. military resources, in Tonelson's opinion, to offset any Soviet pressures. Yet he sees little reason to stretch those resources to cover the Philippines, sub-Sahara Africa, the South Pacific—or New Zealand. Israel and Egypt qualify as borderline cases. Future U.S. support should be contingent on their willingness to grant Washington access to military facilities.

Latin America, Tonelson concludes, is a special case. Instead of propping up unpopular (though "friendly") regimes to stave off communism south of the border, America would be better off using military force directly to protect its interests (e.g., the Panama Canal, U.S. investments) if they are threatened. As yet, Nicaragua poses no significant threat. El Salvador has been mishandled: Rather than flood the country with military aid to demonstrate America's resolve to defend democracy in Central America, says Tonelson, Washington should let the regime of José Napoleón Duarte "prove its worthiness to the American taxpayer."