S. E. ASIA AND THE WORLD POWER STRUGGLE

There has been more debate in this Parliament on Foreign Affairs than for as long as I can remember. I think I have reflected this in these weekly reports.

There is an obvious reason for this. Australians are more concerned than they have been since the early days of World War II over their own security and over the future of South-East Asia. However when we look at these matters we don't always put them in their proper context. We look at what is happening in Indonesia or in South-East Asia as something which affects those areas alone and ourselves as living close to these areas. We should, I think, ask ourselves how these local conflicts and difficulties fit the world pattern. This is especially so since you will find many Europeans in these days saying that world tensions are less than they once were. Many Canadians said this to me when I was in Canada. To them South-East Asia is a long way off, and they are, in any case, heavily orientated towards Europe in their outlook.

It is worth having a look at this for a moment.

Since the end of World War II the struggle between East and West can be divided into three categories. The Russians tried plain force and bluff in Berlin on more than one occasion. They were shown quite emphatically that any attempt to use force in this area would lead to a whole-hearted Western retaliation, not only from Western Europeans but in particular from the United States. There were three major crises over Berlin, and the West stood up to the challenge on each occasion.

Then the Russians tried a different sort of threat over Cuba. This was plain nuclear blackmail. They were hoping to be able to get nuclear-powered missiles sited on Cuban territory before America knew anything about it. Fortunately for the free world American Intelligence was good enough and they learned of
this manoeuvre. The Russians very soon got their answer. They knew that if they persisted in this attempt the Americans would not hesitate to use all the armoury at their command. The American reaction was gauged specifically to allow plenty of time for thought and decision so that the Russians would not be panicked into any disastrous move. The result, as we all know, was the withdrawal of missiles from Cuba.

The free world has withstood these two different kinds of tests - the threat of plain force over something like Berlin which the West regards as of vital interest, and the threat of nuclear blackmail over Cuba.

There is a third kind of threat which the West has not yet learned how to answer in adequate terms - this is the threat of subversion. We have two examples of this in South-East Asia, one conducted by Communist North Vietnam against the South and the other conducted by President Sukarno against Malaysia. This kind of war is, of course, very cheap for the country conducting it - for North Vietnam and for Indonesia - but when you consider that military authorities say you need twenty well-trained soldiers to contain or control or destroy one terrorist you can see that it is not a cheap thing for the country trying to meet the threat. There are about 30,000 hard-core Viet Cong terrorists in South Vietnam, so on this ratio you would need 600,000 troops to contain and control them all. 600,000 troops just are not available, and the matter unfortunately is made more involved in this area by the instability of the Government in South Vietnam itself.

The conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia is more clear-cut because in Malaysia there is a sound, stable and democratic Government which has the support of its people. The campaign conducted by President Sukarno, however, is not unlike the campaign conducted by North Vietnam and Communist China against South Vietnam. Terrorists have infiltrated across the borders of the Borneo territories of Malaysia, others have been taken across the straits separating Indonesian Sumatra and Malaya in boats, and paratroopers
have been dropped from planes. While the scale of the Indonesian effort does not cost Indonesia very much, the effort to contain these things is expensive for Malaysia.

One of the reasons it is expensive to contain this kind of threat while it still remains cheap for the aggressor is that under rules that have been imposed by the Western countries upon themselves we have not, up till now, struck at enemy bases. The consequences of doing this, of course, could be great. It could lead to a more general war; but if President Sukarno knew that any renewed attack or threat against Malaysia would result in an attack against his own bases he may cease in his efforts to destroy Malaysia, at least by military means. It is the knowledge of the superiority and strength of American retaliation that has clearly deterred the Russians from renewing the threats over Berlin and Cuba. Might not the same kind of knowledge deter President Sukarno?

South-East Asia is obviously the testing ground for this kind of subversion and the West's ability to meet it, and this is why the major East-West threat has shifted from Europe to our near north. It is also why we are much more concerned with the whole international situation, while Europeans feel they can relax. The threat has moved from their theatre.

There is another factor that complicates the problem. South-East Asia is also the testing ground in the conflict between Russia and China. If China can prove that her methods are more successful than Russia's in defeating the West, more Communist countries will probably support her in the internal argument within the Communist empire.

The division between Russia and China will cause both countries to intensify their efforts to prove their own method successful and to win allegiance from countries like Indonesia. It could well be the cause of the renewed Russian commitment to supply arms to Indonesia.

The unfortunate thing about all this for Australia is that the changed intensity of the cold war and the West's present
inability to meet the threat of subversion in adequate terms, means that the main struggle in the next few years is likely to involve South-East Asia rather than Europe. This means that we are no longer on the edge of the world power struggle - we are being drawn towards its centre.

This, then, sets the local struggles with Indonesia and in South Vietnam in their world perspective. We can expect both Russia and China to exploit the instability of the region to cause Australia and her allies as much trouble as possible.