

Book reviews: Philippe Richer, Games four in South Asia. Paris, France
University Press, 1982, 244 p.

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Genève
1983

Translated from French

First published in French in Relations Internationales, no 34, Summer 1983, p 257-59, Institut des hautes études internationales et du développement, Genève, Suisse
under the title

``Notes de lecture : Philippe Richer, Jeu de quatre en Asie du Sud Est``

This book is a natural end result of one Mr. Philippe Richer released a year earlier: *South Asia: Independence and Communism* (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1981). It is also its normal and essential complement.

In the first book, the author has studied the internal development of the countries of the region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He devoted a chapter to international relations (Ch. VI), but the period is only going from 1943 to 1975 and the focus is always on the countries of the region. Obviously he could not offer in it a detailed analysis of policies of the great powers because such an analysis would have considerably lengthened the book (which had already 430 pages).

In this book, the author mainly analyzes the "game" of the four major powers that have important strategic interests, economic and political interests in the region: China, Japan, United States, Soviet Union. He preferred the term "game" to politics, probably because it is indeed a multiple-set part, in a moving situation. Consciously or not, he "played" too, and his game is seeking to pierce the veil of the future, until the year 2000, and to making us participate in this thrilling game. In this, he fully succeeded. His predictions contained in the last chapter, titled "games" are perfectly acceptable in the light of extensive documentation and a close analysis, although presented in a manner that risk crinkling some eyebrows, particularly among conservatives, because it borders on journalism. But if it's journalism, it is one of exceptional quality. In fact, this is one of the merits of the book: it reads very simply and pleasantly, especially the last

chapter (which is less crammed with details and, in addition, can be read independently of the others).

What we just said concerns the whole of the book. When we go into details, the chapters seem uneven. Those on China and the Soviet Union are non-objectionable. The one on the Soviet Union, in particular, is noteworthy because, for the first time perhaps in Southeast Asia, the USSR is undressed, so to speak, and we realize that it really is, as the author puts it, "a beast of appetite." The penetration of the Soviet Union in this area is a new phenomenon in the sense that, this time, she is openly and clearly, really successful; and the author was able to show us clearly why and how. One is tempted to ask whether, in fact, the Americans did not fight in favor of the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere in Europe.

Regarding Japan, the author may be too rigid. "Business, just business", "middle-man policy", "no military diplomacy." Does Japan, defeated and disarmed by the United States and moreover having Article 9 of the Constitution imposed on them, maintaining the country under near total political control until recently, have other means of spending its overflowing energy to assert its national dignity, and be recognized as an economic power? The "diplomacy without arms" cannot be diplomacy. There is no diplomacy, no politics, when there is no army. Let us recall the words of General de Gaulle on this subject! But things have started to change since the withdrawal of the US from Vietnam in 1968, especially since the signing of the Sino-Japanese Joint Statement of 29 September 1972 and the Sino-Japanese Friendship Treaty of 12 August 1978. Japan begins to exert some political actions, if not influence, in the region and, by 2000, we can expect from her actual diplomacy, not "unarmed diplomacy" or "middle-man policy", because by then Japan will have a bona fide army. This will inevitably cause a stir in Moscow and the capitals of Southeast Asia, but probably not in Beijing.

Regarding the United States, the author may have exaggerated the influence that this country currently holds or can exercise in Southeast Asia in the next twenty years because the United States itself, as a nation, went offside. After what happened in Indochina between 1968 and 1975 - acceptance of defeat, withdrawal (Guam doctrine), total abandonment of Vietnam and Cambodia - the people of Asia know they cannot, and should no longer count on the United States and must look elsewhere (most look to China). Despite appearances, the Americans are weak and, in any case, they have proven to be unreliable allies and this is partly because they are ignorant (of Asian realities) and easily demotivated, but mostly because promises and commitments by the President become dubious (to say nothing of the

Secretary of State) due to the constitutional structure and attitude of the United States Congress. Let's refer to the speech by President Ferdinand Marcos at the University of the Philippines on April 16, 1975 (the eve of the fall of Phnom Penh). In that speech, Marcos said aloud and brutally what people and governments in the region say softly and carefully. Here are two revealing excerpts: "The Mutual Defense Treaty between the Philippines and the United States contains no firm guarantee that the United States will take immediate retaliatory action in case of aggression against the Philippines. US constitutional procedures will apply, which makes us doubt the powerful disposition of the retaliatory action, which may not be military, that the US Congress will see fit to take ... ". " Given what is happening in Indochina, we should revisit, in mutual consultation, the commitment statements by the President of the United States to the US Congress and the American people. In a context where the mutual defense treaty contains ambiguities, we should seriously question whether our security arrangements with the United States provide enough for our security and survival . " That is quite clear.

Mr. Richer speaks of "tremendous turnaround", "affirmation" of a presence, "will to oppose the Soviet-Vietnamese influence" of "military pressure" on Vietnam, the United States facing their role as "imperial power in Southeast Asia" ... This is being very generous to the United States. There have been "hardening" "reversal ", no doubt, within the government, i.e., the American Executive. But there also has been defeatism, or indifference prevailing in universities, youth, media, among US politicians, and especially the famous "War Powers Resolution" passed by Congress, November 7, 1973, despite the presidential veto, which no longer allows the President of the United States to act effectively in foreign policy. He can talk, and even talk loudly. But this will not go very far. As long as the "Vietnamese syndrome" and pacifism will continue to dominate the US, decisive action of the United States in South Asia, as elsewhere, is excluded. It is not enough to have a lot of planes, ships, guns, rockets, to be a great power. There needs to be a will to fight. And this will, the United States, as a nation, does not currently have. In fact, they are rather a "great impotence." And, in Southeast Asia, everyone knows, or thinks so.

Since ASEAN, now and for many years to come, is from the military point of view, a baby, if not an embryo, security and stability in the region depend on what will China, and especially Vietnam, will do. This has obviously not escaped the acumen of Mr. Richer. In fact, in the last chapter, he discusses at length the "flight forward" of Vietnam. Is it a way to recognize that in the "game" of power in Southeast Asia, there is a fifth power which is Vietnam, the most turbulent of all,

and thus, the most dangerous too? But Vietnam has to reckon with China. Until the situation in Indochina --the "special" relations between Vietnam and its neighbors Cambodia and Laos , and the orientation Vietnam itself engages in -- has not been accepted by China, instability continues to reign, regardless of the current Vietnamese leaders' arrogance or blindness, because it is a constant in the history of two thousand years of Sino-Vietnamese relations. This is also what Mr. Richer saw clearly when he concludes his book with these words: "For many years, accomplished facts, accepted or not, and the Sino-Vietnamese conflict will trouble the South China Seas and the waters around the Straits of Malacca."

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