

A New Asian Alliance

FOREIGN MINISTERS of five non-Communist Southeast Asian nations are meeting in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the possibility of establishing a neutral, non-aligned organization which would constitute a "peace zone" there.

The idea first surfaced four years ago and comes up again now with new urgency.

The Association of Southeast Asia Nations — Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand and Singapore — reportedly would like the new political and economic alliance to include the Communist governments of Vietnam and Cambodia.

Member nations would be prohibited from entering into defense agreements with outside powers and foreign military bases, such as those in Thailand, would be phased out.

America's rapidly diminishing influence in Southeast Asia surely will be accompanied by new alliances of this sort.

Thailand is understandably nervous about its position, and is acting with some dispatch to get U.S. forces out of the country. This, the argument goes, will show Thai Communists and neighboring revolutionaries that Thailand wants to remain an independent country within the new realities.

There is some indication that inclusion of Communist governments in a new alliance would not damage its purpose of non-alignment — if China and the Soviet Union do not influence the independent courses the new governments claim to be charting.