

K O N F E R E N Z E N

Third US - ASEAN Conference: ASEAN in Regional and International Context(1)

6.-11. January 1985, Chiang Mai (Thailand)

The Third US-ASEAN Conference "ASEAN in Regional and International Context" was jointly organized by the Institute of East Asian Studies (IEAS), University of California, Berkeley, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Jakarta, as well as the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, and was held in Chiang Mai (Thailand), January 6th to 11th, 1985. This conference was the 3rd in a series of US-ASEAN conferences which study issues relevant to US-ASEAN relations in general. The first of these conferences was held in November 1981 and focused on political, economic and security issues in Southeast Asia in the 1980s.(2) The second was held in March 1983 and dealt with the security and political development of the ASEAN countries.(3)

The conference was attended by about 100 US and ASEAN policy makers as well as academicians, and views on the relationship between domestic and foreign policies of the six ASEAN countries as well as Burma and Vietnam were exchanged. Relationships between Southeast Asian Countries and the Great Powers and their implications for regional politics were also discussed.

The conference was opened officially with a speech by the Thai foreign Minister, ACM Siddhi Savetsila, in which he noted that Vietnam had intensified its efforts in Kampuchea in the military field after having lost battle on diplomatic ground. He also reminded Vietnam that the kind of regional order Hanoi had envisaged could not possibly ever become a reality.

The key note speech was delivered by the former Thai Foreign Minister Dr. Thanat Khoman, one of the co-founders of ASEAN. He described the achievements of ASEAN in establishing regional political stability and improved relations among its member countries. He appealed to the Western countries not to fall back to protectionism amidst world-wide economic recession. He also pledged for continued support of ASEAN policy in order to bring about a comprehensive political solution in Kampuchea.

In the first part of the conference, discussions were focused on the linkage between domestic politics and

foreign policy. The over-whelming concern of all countries in the region was the issue on coming leadership changes and economic development. A heated debate touched off on the perception of the Vietnamese threat towards Thailand. Some described the threat as real, concluding that Hanoi has not given up its ambition to expand its influence in the region. A few Thai participants even pledged for support of the US-government to stop this danger by helping the Thai government. Concerning the Philippines, most participants agreed that a political crisis is looming and might become unmanagable. But some believed that the USA with its military bases in that country would have to take some positive actions to pressure the Marcos government for reforms and a democratic rule. The perceived continuing American support for the Marcos government could generate anti-American feelings among militant as well as moderate Filipinos in the long run.

The second part of the conference was devoted to a wide ranging discussion on relationships between ASEAN and the USA, USSR, China, Japan and Indochina as well as ASEAN as a regional organisation in terms of security, politics and economics. It was also debated to what extent the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea might threaten the stability of Thailand as well as of other ASEAN countries. The role of the People's Republic of China in Southeast Asian development was also highly controversial. Some participants argued that China is a stabilizing factor in the region by checking Vietnamese adventure in Indochina, some argued that China is a real and potential threat to the stability of the region because of its strong ties with Overseas Chinese and with banned communist parties in some ASEAN countries. Regarding the relationship between the USSR and the ASEAN countries, there is little prospect of improvement unless the Soviet Union changes its present policy: Termination of military support of the Vietnamese government and support of ASEAN in seeking a political solution to the Kampuchean question. The Soviet use of military bases in Vietnam, especially in Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay, was seen as a threat to the security of Southeast Asia.

Being an US-ASEAN dialogue, it naturally touched on the issues of economic relations between the USA and the ASEAN countries. The USA praised ASEAN's success in economic development and requested a continued political stability of the region. The ASEAN side demanded better treatment of products from the ASEAN region and warned against growing protectionist sentiments in the USA. However, they agreed that the present good relations could even be better for

the benefit of both sides. The conference was held in a friendly, cordial atmosphere and discussions were lively and at times controversial. The proceedings of this conference are to be published soon.

Notes

- (1) The author's participation was made possible through a travel grant by the German Volkswagen Foundation as part of a research project on ASEAN.
- (2) The proceedings of this conference see: Robert A. Scalapino and Jusuf Wanandi (eds.), *Economic, Political and Security Issues in Southeast Asia in the 1980s*. Berkely, CA.: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1982.
- (3) The proceedings of this conference see: Karl D. Jackson/M. Hadi Soesastro (eds.), *ASEAN Security and Economic Developments*. Berkeley, CA.: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1984.

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Southeast Asia Days in Passau

In early January (10.-12.1.) 1985 the first "Southeast Asia Days" at the University of Passau (Bavaria) took place. They were organized by the newly founded chair of Southeast Asia Studies in Passau and they included a cultural evening and a scientific symposium on Modern Southeast Asian Studies. The idea was to introduce the Southeast Asian region, its cultural tradition, some of its modern problems as well as topics of scholarly debate to the academic community in Passau and to a broader public in Lower Bavaria which, as yet, is not so familiar with this new field of studies.

The cultural evening was performed by folkloristic groups from Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. The program was arranged in cooperation with the diplomatic missions of the various Southeast Asian nations in Bonn. An audience of about 700 people watched with fascination the dances and musical performances of more than 70 actors who succeeded in making the public aware of the variations in the cultural traditions but also of their beauty and their charm.

The symposium - which could convene thanks to a generous grant from the Volkswagen-Foundation, Hannover - discussed the problem of "Theory and Empiricism in Modern Southeast Asia Studies". More than 30 Southeast Asia specialists from