

## SECOND INDONESIA-VIETNAM CONFERENCE

February 18-19, 1985<sup>+</sup>

Vietnam has been isolated from the Western countries since 1979 after its military occupation of Kampuchea. It became closer to the Eastern Bloc countries and was blamed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for the political crisis which brought increasing great power rivalry in the region. Vietnamese leaders, however, have since tried to persuade their neighbors to accept Vietnam's security needs and the status quo in Kampuchea. So far, such political activity has not been successful and Vietnam is still trying to be accepted in the international community. Its relations with the ASEAN countries have been more than bad, mainly because of the Kampuchean problem. Indonesia, a member of ASEAN, has long been sympathetic to Vietnam. Yet, the relations between these two countries were also affected by the Kampuchean issue. Nevertheless, there have recently been attempts from both sides to talk to each other in order to find a way out of this dilemma and to improve bilateral relations.

The Indonesia-Vietnam dialogue has been institutionalized since February 1984 after an official conference in Hanoi. The second conference was held on February 18-19, 1985 in Jakarta.

This conference - like the first one - was organized by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Indonesian government think-tank, and the Vietnamese Institute of International Relations (VIIR), an Hanoi based government institution. The Vietnamese delegation, a 15 man team, was composed of diplomats, scholars and military officials. The Indonesian delegation was also composed of officials from the CSIS, the Foreign Ministry, the Defense Ministry, as well as scholars and businessmen, numbering over 60.

The three-day conference covered four major topics: global political and international economic developments; economic issues in Southeast Asia; the recent political situation and the solution for peace and stability in Southeast Asia; and Indonesia-Vietnam bilateral relations. The Conference was more politically-oriented because of Vietnam's recent strongest ever dry-season offensive in Kampuchea and the subsequent collapse of resistance bases near

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the Thai border.

In the first session of the conference the major focus was on the role of the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to as China) in the region. The two countries disagreed over whether a newly pragmatic China would be a blessing or a threat to Southeast Asia. Indonesia viewed China as a "virgin" entity that needs to be explored. Vietnam, however, viewed China as a "rose" which might have a fragrance, but also lots of thorns that may injure those who try to approach it.

There were also differences in perception concerning international development and economic issues. Indonesia believed that she herself and the other ASEAN countries would benefit more from a rich and modern than a poor and backward China which could endanger peace and security in the region. Vietnam in contrast, considered China's new pragmatic foreign policy to have disastrous effects for the region as well as the world. They were of the opinion that a strong China - economically and militarily - would be a greater danger to the countries in the region.

Differences were even greater in the second session of the conference with regard to the Kampuchean question. The Indonesian side demanded that the question of Pol Pot and the Vietnamese withdrawal should be delinked. It stressed that Vietnam has lost the confidence of the ASEAN states and that it should resolve the psychological threat to Thailand. It was also requested that Vietnam abandon its plan for a military solution and start negotiations with ASEAN for a political solution acceptable to all parties. Vietnam is to take first action to avoid direct confrontation with ASEAN and to bring about negotiations to find a solution.

Vietnam responded by saying that it had no plan to invade Thailand but that it would continue to eliminate Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge militarily and politically. It demanded of Thailand and China to stop supporting the Pol Pot clique militarily and, especially of Thailand, to take first action by refusing sanctuary to Pol Pot guerilla forces. The only consensus between Indonesia and Vietnam was that Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge should not return to power in Kampuchea.

In addition, the Vietnamese reiterated a five-point program for a solution to the Kampuchea problem:

- the Vietnamese troops will withdraw from Kampuchea after the elimination of the Pol Pot clique, militarily and politically;
- once the Pol Pot clique is eliminated, the Kampuchean people can hold a free general election in the presence of foreign observers to decide their own fate;
- Southeast Asia should be converted into a zone of peace and stability and an area of peaceful coexistence among the countries with different social systems;
- respect by states outside the region of the national rights of the Southeast Asian countries;
- the establishment of an international guarantee and supervision of agree-

ments reached.

This plan for a solution to the Kampuchean question, however, was not new but a mere repetition of a statement made by the three Indochinese foreign ministers on January 18, 1985.

The last session of the conference focused on Indonesia-Vietnam bilateral relations. The Indonesian side touched on the negligible trade between the two countries by pointing out that, despite the good diplomatic relations, a trade agreement was lacking, and even Singapore and Thailand, both more hard-line ASEAN members, had stronger trade relations with Vietnam than Indonesia.

The conference agreed to set up two study groups to find ways and means to promote relations between the two countries. One workshop is to study the potentials and constraints in the relations and to make suggestions on how to solve the problems. The second, consisting of businessmen and government officials, is to try find ways and means to expand trade relations.

It was obvious that the Indonesian side had more interest in economic issues, whereas the Vietnamese were more concerned about putting forward their political interest. Nevertheless, both sides agreed that the dialogue is beneficial and should be continued and even expanded to promote mutual understanding as well as peace and prosperity in the region.

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