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BANDPHOTO

Suharto has big plans for Indonesia as a regional power

Reagan in Bali: focus on Vietnam

By Clayton Jones
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Manila

President Reagan's talks this week with Southeast Asian allies — especially Indonesia — are expected to help Washington decide what to do next about improving ties with Vietnam.

Those ties are currently strained over the slow progress on the issue of American soldiers unaccounted for since the Vietnam war. They could become warmer or cooler, dependin on how Mr. Reagan reads the mood o the United States' partners in the As sociation of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) this week on the paradis isle of Bali.

Indonesia has been courting Hanoi much to the displeasure of fellow ASEAN member Thailand, whic faces the threat of some 160,000 Viet namese troops along its border wit Cambodia. That's why Reagan's pr

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ASEAN: Asia's counterbalance to Vietnam

The six-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations — made up of Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei — was established in Bangkok on Aug. 8, 1967. The association was formed to set the framework for regional cooperation and gained political prominence as it tried to fill the vacuum left by the US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975.

Since the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979, Vietnam has been a chief target of ASEAN's political activity. ASEAN hangs together today mainly to resist Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia by backing Thailand-based guerrillas of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia). The CGDK is made up of three anti-Hanoi Cambodian resistance groups: the communist Khmer Rouge and two noncommunist factions, one of which is led by Cambodia's Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

Although as a political entity the association has had considerable success, it has not gone far with its efforts at economic cooperation. Trade within ASEAN has actually declined since its founding, and the notable economic success of some member states in recent years has been accomplished by the individual countries.

ASEAN was instrumental in the UN rejection of the credentials of the Vietnam-backed government in Phnom Penh. The organization also had considerable influence on the outcome of the July 1981 UN International Conference on Kampuchea. The 83 countries in attendance adopted a resolution calling for a cease-fire and withdrawal of all foreign troops with monitoring by a UN peacekeeping force; urging Hanoi to join the talks (Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and other Soviet allies boycotted the parley); and establishing a seven-country committee to open talks with all involved parties.

Structure: ASEAN heads of government are the group's highest authority, but annual meetings of the member states' foreign ministers set general policy. A standing committee provides continuous supervision of ASEAN activities.

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vate meeting with Indonesian President Suharto tomorrow, besides his joint talks with the region's six foreign ministers, could reset the pace of negotiations with Hanoi.

"If we are going to have improved relations with Vietnam," a top US official says, "then Hanoi has to get good relations with ASEAN."

A shift in ASEAN's stance toward Hanoi would be just a small step toward the long-term US strategic goal of encouraging Vietnam to drop its alliance with Moscow and deny the Soviets the warm-water ports and airstrips left behind by the US in Vietnam. To clear the way for better ties, Hanoi has promised to solve the missing-in-action issue by mid-1987, although its occupation of Cambodia and Laos remains a major barrier.

If ASEAN slowly backs Indonesia's moves toward improved ties with Hanoi, the American official says, "then Japan and the US will follow — and that will box in China to go along.... That's the American goal for now."

China, in its attempt to gain better trade and relations with noncommunist nations and neighbors, would have difficulty in continuing to pressure Vietnam into its historical subservience to China if the US, Japan, and ASEAN improved ties with Hanoi, ASEAN and US officials s[illegible]

The traditional enmity between China and Vietnam (including China's periodic shelling across their mutual border) is Hanoi's main publicly stated reason for continuing its occupation of Cambodia. Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia in 1979, ousting the Peking-backed Khmer Rouge.

For Indonesia to push ASEAN any further toward talks with Hanoi requires, to some degree, a green light from the US, which in turn has to guarantee Thailand of adequate security against any possible Vietnamese invasion. (The US began plans this month to provide Thailand with a war-reserve weapons stockpile.)

So far, overtures to Hanoi by Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja have had little backing from the US. Still, Indonesia pushes ahead. A year ago, the Indonesian commander in chief, Gen. L. B. Murdani, offered military cooperation to Vietnam.

But Indonesia seeks Reagan's blessing this week, not only for the sake of better regional ties with the US's former enemy, but because Mr. Suharto's government envisions Indonesia as becoming the major power in the region.

As the world's fifth most populous nation, with more than 160 million people, Indonesia has been flexing its diplomatic muscles beyond the confines of ASEAN. Under the 20-year rule of military-backed President Suharto, it has achieved steady economic development at the cost of an open, Western-style political system.

In addition, Indonesia believes it has recovered from the diplomatic isolation caused by its 1975 takeover of the former Portuguese territory of East Timor, despite continued guerrilla fighting there.

Like its ASEAN allies, however, Indonesia remains wary of any diplomatic shifts that might allow China to wield more influence in the region (once called the "South China Seas" region), especially through the overseas Chinese minorities in ASEAN countries. Indonesia blames China for the 1965 attempt of the Indonesian Communist Party to take over the country.

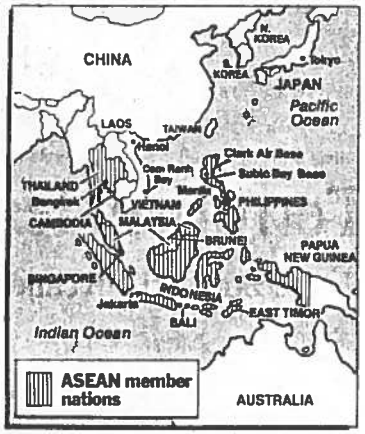
BANDPHOTO

Indonesia's Kusumaatmadja: his overtures to Hanoi not fully backed by US

US policy toward Indonesia is cool but comfortable. The State Department, in its 1985 human rights reports, said: "Indonesia's government has its authority concentrated in a small group of active and retired officers and civilian technocrats. President Suharto is the decisive political figure."

At the very least, Reagan's trip to Bali is seen as making amends toward Indonesia, which was deeply offended by the last-minute cancellation of a Reagan trip to Indonesia and the region in November 1983 — although the trip was dropped to avoid the embarrassment of a US embrace of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos after the August assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino Jr.

JOAN FORBES — STAFF



Reagan's endorsement of Indonesian talks with Hanoi could depend on how close the US wants its ties with Suharto. Like Mr. Marcos, he came to power in 1965 and has kept the far-flung archipelago in a tight grip. And as Marcos did, Suharto faces a tough question of who will succeed him. The dramatic rise of democratic forces in the Philippines last February and the ouster of Marcos — with only last-minute US help — provide an all-too-current lesson for the US in its dealings with Indonesia.

As with Marcos, much may depend on the personal relationship between Suharto and Reagan.

OPINION

The Indonesia Reagan won't recognize

By Barbara Koeppel

CHARLES Dickens was mistaken. Had he understood something of geopolitics, he would have known that sows' ears are transformed into silk purses all the time, everywhere. It's all in the labeling.

Where military bases, oil, profits, and the like are at stake, the Reagan administration's standard for civilized behavior is flexible: When our foes behave poorly, say, by denying press freedom or civil liberties, they are loudly condemned. Allies, however, are measured by a different stick.

Take Indonesia, for example. President Reagan is making his predictable pronouncements about "winds of freedom," friendship, cooperation. Images we can relate to.

Reality, however, stirs a different set.

Since General Suharto seized power in 1966, his grip has been fierce; his reign, bloody. In the first six months, Army and religious groups linked to the government committed wide-scale massacres.

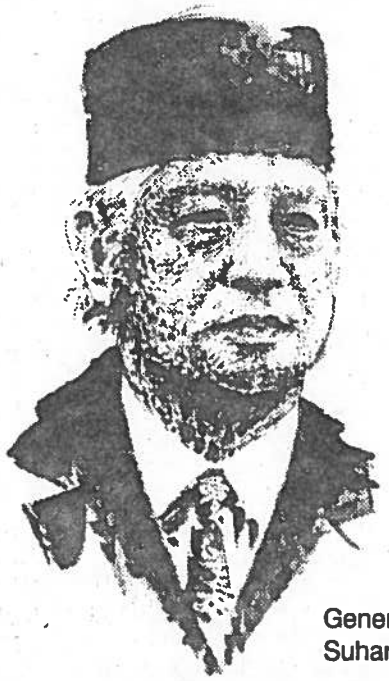
A former Indonesian vice-president put the figure at half a million killed, but Amnesty International says the number is twice as high.

The targets, members of the then-legal Communist Party and those suspected of sympathizing with it, were simply wiped out. Thousands more fortunate were jailed, and to this day are persecuted. The United States, fighting its own war against communism in Vietnam, applauded.

Then came East Timor. After the Portuguese left their former colony, in 1975, the Indonesians invaded. During the next few years the nationalists paid dearly for demanding independence. Suffering direct attack or aerial burning of crops that led to famine and starvation, the population of 600,000 was decimated.

Conservative estimates place the deaths at 100,000, but others give a far higher estimate, and today, nearly a decade later, there are only 450,000 people in East Timor.

For Suharto, the use of repression is routine. In 1984, when thousands of Jakartans rioted, the general simply called out the tanks, leaving more than 100 dead.



TOM HUGHES

General Suharto

Big-time corruption, the sort practiced by the Marcos and Duvalier families and their friends, is another item that could have concerned President Reagan, particularly since revelations about the fortunes of two former dictators and US allies are front-page stuff almost daily. But again, the issue did not mar the Reagan visit.

In fact, the general has not done badly: Estimates by David Jenkins, the foreign editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, credit Suharto and cronies with accumulating some $2 billion to $3 billion since taking power.

A free press, high on the Reagan list of requirements when judging governments democratic or devilish, has been getting little presidential attention. Yet censorship is endemic and total.

In the 1970s, at least 11 major dailies were closed; and since that time, numerous journalists have been fired (once, an entire editorial board) for covering that which displeases.

The press knows well the taboo topics, but, taking nc chances, officials call the papers daily to advise on what can and can't be reported.

For those that disobey, punishment is certain — closure or, at the least, financial loss: The government cancels its ads and pressures businesses to do the same. Finally, all radio and television are state controlled.

The foreign press has also been attacked. When five Australian television newsmen tried to cover the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, they were murdered by security forces.

More recently, expulsion seems the preferred tactic. In the last few weeks, two US reporters with the Far Eastern Economic Review, 11 Australian journalists, and Barbara Crossette of the New York Times were all denied visas to cover the Reagan visit. Their crime, it seems, was reporting on corruption, military matters, or local dissatisfaction. Or, in the case of the Australians, it was guilt by association (with Jenkins's piece on corruption).

Despite such doing, the general has been well rewarded.

In the last 10 years, the US has granted him nearly $2 billion in military and economic aid. From the World Bank, theoretically nonpolitical (despite recent US blocking of funding to Nicaragua), Indonesia landed more than $4 billion in loans the last three years alone.

Where was the outcry from the US public, the press, or Congress during the last 19 years? Where was the pressure before the current visit, demanding that the President denounce the abuses he passionately decries elsewhere and used to justify American military strikes? Is Suharto's terror any the less terrifying?

With South Africa, Washington was finally moved to press for change because a growing constituency refused to let the matter rest. Lacking such support in the US, Indonesians (who make up the world's fifth most populous country) can expect only more of the same.

Barbara Koeppel is executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, in New York.