

# Indochinese hold their first summit

by Daniel Sneider

For the first time ever the leaders of the three Indochinese nations—Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam—met in a summit conference on Feb. 22-23 in Vientiane, Laos. The summit, which had been expected for some months, issued two statements—one on the coordination of policies of the three countries and a second on the presence of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.

The latter statement announces a second withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia, following the withdrawal carried out last year. According to the Vietnamese ambassador to the U.N., Hoang Bich Son, there will be partial withdrawals of troops on an annual basis, provided those moves do not threaten the “peace and security” of Cambodia.

The ambassador told newsmen at the U.N. that Vietnamese forces would “totally withdraw” “when and if” the threat from the Chinese has ceased and when Thai territory is no longer used to provide sanctuary for the military bands of the deposed Pol Pot regime and its allies.

The Indochinese announcement was clearly timed to precede the upcoming Non-Aligned summit in New Delhi, where the issue of Cambodia is expected to come up. The ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia have been pushing for the presence at the summit of the “coalition” of the Pol Potists, former Prince Sihanouk, and former Premier Son Sann, as “representatives” of Cambodia. The Vietnamese and others have called for Cambodia to be represented by the government of President Heng Samrin in Phnom Penh.

Diplomatic sources in New Delhi report that it is almost certain that the summit will reaffirm the decision taken at the previous Non-Aligned summit in Havana to leave the Cambodia seat empty. The Indian government, despite the fact it maintains diplomatic relations with the Heng Samrin government, will push for this position, and has already made it officially clear that they will not allow Sihanouk to come to the summit to speak. While the Vietnamese government intends to publicly call for the seating of Heng Samrin, Vietnamese diplomatic sources privately say they are satisfied for now with the maintenance of the status quo.

ASEAN, which is represented in the Non-Aligned movement by Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, is expected to make a large noise in New Delhi on behalf of the Cambodian “coalition,” backed by some countries like Yugoslavia, a

leader of the so-called “moderates,” and North Korea, where Prince Sihanouk lives in exile. Yugoslav diplomatic sources, however, admit that the issue is essentially closed, and the Indonesian government is not eager to press the issue.

The joint statement of the three Indochinese governments contains some indications of their approach to foreign policy. On the question of relations with the United States, the statement says: “The three countries of Indochina, with respect for their friendship with the American people, express their desire to have normal relations with the United States on the basis of equality, respect and non-interference in each country’s internal affairs.”

A private delegation of four former U.S. State Department officials, including Emory Swank, the former U.S. ambassador to Cambodia, completed a trip in late February to both Vietnam and Cambodia; according to a report from Bangkok in the *Christian Science Monitor*, members concluded that the “U.S. policy of diplomatic isolation and economic pressure on Vietnam was . . . not working.”

The Indochinese statement takes a tough line toward China, although one carefully phrased so as not to rule out the possibility of improved relations, and progress in the Sino-Soviet dialogue now going on. The document refers to the Pol Pot “clique” as “henchmen of reactionary forces in Beijing ruling circles” and declares that: “At present, Chinese expansionists and hegemonists have not yet abandoned their aggression and annexation schemes against the three countries. Neither have they given up their multifaceted sabotaging activities against Laos, Vietnamese, and Kampuchean revolutions. . . .”

At the same time, the statement refers to “an age-old tradition of friendship with the Chinese people” and the assistance of the Chinese during the struggle for independence. It refers to “the present abnormal situation in relations,” responsibility for which is laid at Peking’s doorstep, and concludes: “The three countries, persistent in their policy, will spare no efforts to restore normal relations with the Peoples’ Republic of China on the basis of co-existence in peace. . . .”

## Economic cooperation

The other main message of the summit is a commitment to further coordinate the policies of the three countries, which contains an implicit firm commitment to the continued existence of the Heng Samrin government. The statement says that the foreign ministers of the three countries will meet twice a year, and regular summits of the heads of state will be held. “A committee for economic cooperation . . . will be established in each country to promote economic cooperation and coordination of national plans for economic development.” The document also envisages cooperation in the sphere of science and technology. In the long run, economic and scientific collaboration may have the greatest implications for closer Indochinese integration.