

# THE END OF CONFRONTATION

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Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past  
— T.S.Eliot (Four Quartets)

Specially screened at the Centre for Strategic and Information Studies (CSIS) theatre in Jakarta one night in August 1996 was an Indonesian film on the end of confrontation against Malaysia. Shown were scenes of negotiations held in Bangkok between Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak followed by scenes of the signing of the Jakarta Accord on 11 August, 1966 officially ending hostilities. Present as witness was General Suharto, then Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces, and later President.

The film was produced by Des Alwi, once Information Officer in the Indonesian Embassy in Manila. Also shown was the welcome accorded to Tun Razak on his return from Jakarta, and later the arrival of Adam Malik.

Among guests at the screening were Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, former Information Minister, Tun Hanif Omar, former Inspector General of Police and General Kamal Idris, former Indonesian army commander in Sumatra. In his brief address Ghazali spoke the debt of gratitude owed to those from Indonesia and Malaysia who were instrumental in the ending of confrontation.

“Many of them are absent tonight – they have passed away. We are where we are now because of them. They would have wanted us to forever ensure the friendly ties and unity between **or** two countries”. The remarks drew warm applause from all present, including members of a Malaysian delegation specially invited to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of confrontation.

In the foyer of the CSIS building itself was a statue of General Ali Murtopo who played a key role on behalf of Indonesia in the secret negotiations, to end hostilities.

Published on the same day in **Kompas**. Indonesia's highest-selling newspaper was a special article marking the anniversary with a picture of Tun Razak together with several Indonesian military officers involved in negotiations in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok.

The Indonesian team was headed by Murtopo, then a colonel from the Indonesian armed forces intelligence bureau, sometimes described as a Machiavellian character. He had been given special instructions by General Suharto, and assisting him was then major Benny Murdani, later to become head of the Indonesian armed forces and Defence Minister.

The road to peace had been tortuous given the fact, among other things, that at the early stage of confrontation over 21,000,000 volunteers had registered in the campaign to crush Malaysia. The future was announced with great fanfare in Jakarta on 3 May 1964. Speaking at a ceremony in Jakarta much later on the prevailing geopolitical situation President Sukarno suggested the formation of a Fifth Force to complement the army, navy, air force and police. "Call it what you will, the Volunteer force, the People's Force of whatever," he said in the address to senior Indonesian armed forces commanders.

Speaking at a rally of mass organisations on 19 January 1965, PKI party leader Aidit called for the arming of 10 million presents and 5 million workers in order to crush Malaysia.

Several factors have been mentioned as paving the way of reconciliation. First was the failure of Gestapu the consequence of which was a fundamental change from the old regime to the New Order.

Another was the deepseated desire of many in both Indonesia and Malaysia to seek reconciliation without mediation by a third party.

The failure of Gestapu did not, however, effect immediate changes. Till the transfer of authority to Suharto, President Sukarno, minus the PKI's baleful influence, continued his campaign to crush Malaysia. His Foreign Minister, Dr. Subandrio in November, 1965 reaffirmed confrontation as the country's "historical task".

Noted too was the statement by Major General Ibrahim Adji, commander of the elite Siliwangi Division in late 1965 that his units were ready at the country's borders "till Malaysia is crushed". Even General A.H. Nasution, known for his anti-Sukarno stance, stated in January 1966 that confrontation should continue unabated.

In the end of confrontation was ended because President Suharto willed it so. For Malaysia is the tantalising question: could it have been otherwise had General Nasution assumed the leadership of the Indonesian Armed Forces after Gestapu?

With the passage of time, especially the absence of the PKI, the process of reconciliation was at last effected. Another factor contributing to it was the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. Yet other reasons have been noted in a case study by Dr. Ridayat Mukmin on the role of the Indonesian Armed Forces in the Country's foreign policy and the ending of confrontation. One was the

realisation that in the event of open war with Malaysia and its allies – Britain, Australia and New Zealand – ABRI would have to send its units to places “outside Java”. The vacuum in Jakarta, the nation’s capital, would have posed grave dangers given the PKI’s strong political role.

Thus it was that measures were set for peace feelers initiated by Murtopo on the instructions of Suharto.

Murdani had originally been transferred to Bangkok with orders to conduct covert operations against Malaysia, infiltrate agents into the country and support “progressive elements” considered anti-Malaysia. The objective was to move southward in conjunction with planned army operations from Sumatra. His cover then was as ticketing officer in the Garuda Indonesian Airways office.

New orders came from General Suharto, and Murdani’s mission was to put out “peace feelers” to Tun Razak. It was condemned Operasi Khusus (Special Operations). This was in the aftermath of the abortive PKI coup on 30 September, 1965. The PKI then was the major factor in the confrontation against Malaysia with its incessant calls to “Ganyang Malaysia” (Crush Malaysia).

The Communist collapse led to the transfer of authority and power from President Sukarno to General Suharto on 11 March, 1966, later given the acronym “Supersemar” (Surat perintah sebelas March). This was effected when three senior generals met with Sukarno at his palace in Bogor. The next day the PKI was outlawed followed by arrests of 15 ministers suspected of involvement in Gestapu. Among them were Foreign Minister Dr. Subandrio and Cheerul Saleh, Speaker of the Indonesian Parliament.

Playing a key role in the secret talks was Des Alwi, adopted son of Hatta and Sutan Shahrir, later Vice-President and Prime Minister respectively, when both were exiled by the Dutch government during colonial rule to Bandanaira, a cluster of islands in East Indonesia. Des was later sent to study in England where he became a close friend of Tun Razak then doing law studies. Both, along with others spent their holidays in Europe, travelling third class always. Razak was to meet both Hatta and Shahrir during his studies in London.

Joining the Indonesia Foreign Ministry in 1952. Des became press attaché but resigned during the period of the PKI’s rise to power in the Sukarno regime. He had settled down in Kuala Lumpur as a businessman.

The first secret contact occurred in July, 1965 at Hotel Amarin in Bangkok when Des was persuaded to meet Murtopo and Murdani. Asked to broach matters with Razak about the peace feelers Des promptly agreed, cancelling his trip to Switzerland to visit Shahrir then undergoing medical treatment.

Razak's response was prompt and positive after Des explained that the peace initiative came directly from General Suharto himself. Razak had earlier met Suharto when visiting Indonesia as leader of a Malayan delegation which stopped over at Jogjakarta where Suharto was with the Diponegoro Division.

Came later a golf tournament to which Razak, on the back to Malaysia after a visit to Burma, was invited. Murdani invited Razak to his room at Hotel Erawan, and the real contact took place.

As Murdani was to explain later the 45-minute meeting with Razak ended on a positive note. Certain messages and a letter were passed to Razak. Murdani was pleased that his credentials had been accepted by Razak who was also impressed with his good English. Of Bugis descent Razak's attitude was also moulded by his experience during the Japanese military occupation when he was chosen to undergo training in the Kao Kunrensho, an officer's training course. Together with him were trainees from Sumatra, already strongly nationalist and talking about plans to secure Indonesia's independence.

As a gesture of goodwill Razak promised the release of Indonesia volunteers who had been captured during earlier landings and incursions. Among them were over a hundred who had landed in Pantai Kecil in August 1964.

In addition special documents were arranged for Murdani to travel freely in and out in Malaysia. Murdani and Des later flew to Kuala Lumpur via Hong Kong.

Also planned as part of the peace initiative was the visit of a special delegation of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) to Kuala Lumpur. In all of this Tengku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister was not informed. Nor was President Sukarno.

Planning the visit was a difficult task as it had to be kept secret from the British High Commission and the Australian Air Force base in Butterworth. The Hercules plane bringing the important Indonesian delegation could well be shot down.

On the night before its departure on 20 May, 1966 an item was broadcast on the Indonesian radio: "Dari Keluarga Sumolang kepada Keluarga Mogot, Bapak dan Ibu Sumolang esok akan menuju Menado". The message was heard in Kuala Lumpur and Murdani quickly informed Ghazali Shafie about the plane's arrival the next day.

The delegation which was headed by Rear-Admiral O.B.Syaf included, among others were Murtopo and General Kamal Idris. They were welcomed by Ghazali Shafie who directly brought them to Sri Taman for breakfast with Razak.

The delegation's arrival was of supreme importance in the circumstances prevailing for it was meant to convey the message "to

Malaysia that apart from the civilian sector the military too wanted peace".

Preparations were then made for the delegation to meet Tengku in Alor Star which necessitated flying over Butterworth air base. From Ghazali came the message: "At the time the plane flies over Butterworth please be assured that I'll be in the plane. Shoot if you will".

The Indonesian delegation's arrival in Alor Star was spontaneously and warmly welcomed by thousands and by Tengku himself. To each member was presented a Rolex watch as a small gesture of thanks. In the mood of enthusiasm Razak and Ghazali too were presented with the watches.

Recalled by Tengku later in an interview with an Indonesian writer was a dream which Tun Razak had. "Razak told me about a visit to Jakarta and to Istana Merdeka. He passed through the entrance but did not see Sukarno there. Dimly seen was another figure".

The next day the Indonesian writer met Ghazali Shafie and told him Tengku's story. Ghazali then explained that the dream was concocted by Razak because Tengku like many leaders in Indonesia believe in omens, premonition and such like.

The delegation's visit was followed days later by formal negotiations between Malaysia and Indonesia in Bangkok. The Malaysian delegation was led by Razak and the Indonesian by Adam Malik who had earlier cleansed the Foreign Ministry of communist and left-wing elements in keeping with General Suharto's decree outlawing the PKI.

The agreement reached in the Bangkok talks from 29 May to 1 June, 1966 drew Sukarno's ire. His bitter and strong criticisms were voiced in his address to the nation on 17 August, title "Never Leave History Behind" (Jangan sekali-kali meninggalkan sejarah), later given the acronym "Jas Merah" (red shirt). It was to be his last presidential address to the Indonesian people.

He declared:

"(reference) the Bangkok talks between Adam Malik and Tun Abdul Razak, I shall not accept them .... To those who shout 'konfrantasi has ended' and 'Hooray, there'll be peace with Malaysia' I now say 'No! Konfrantasi will continue...."

Sukarno contemptuously regarded Adam Malik as "quick-yielder".

Adam Malik, nonetheless, had the last say as he had the backing of General Suharto. And so on 11 August, 1966 an agreement to

normalise relations between Indonesia and Malaysia was signed with Suharto as witness. For both it was accepted as a "win-win" situation. The word "konfrantasi" so often voiced by Sukarno, Subrandrio and the PKI was not used anywhere. Foiled was Sukarno's intention to enlarge Kalimantan to the whole of Borneo. For Malaysia the crucial role in ending confrontation was played by Razak, and with it the way was paved for the birth of ASEAN. As Ghazali Shafie was to put it later rhetorically. " ASEAN came into being out of the ashes of confrontation".

### **Note**

When Razak passed away most Jakarta dailies described it as "the loss of a brother". In Hong Kong the Far Eastern Economic Review described him as one with an "inherent sense of fair play".