

Cambodia 1988

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Each year since 1980 the UN has decided by vote that the government of Cambodia sits in a collection of jungle camps along the Thai border rather in Phnom Penh, a decision which is each year more surprising as the Phnom Penh regime extends its life beyond the spans enjoyed by its predecessors and with better conditions of life for its people than prevailed during 1970-1979.

The non-recognition of the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) seems particularly aberrant because it has succeeded Democratic Kampuchea (DK), which all of ASEAN and many European countries hastened to recognize in spite of its victory through revolutionary war in April 1975, just as there had been a scramble to recognize Lon Nol's Khmer Republic in 1970 in spite of the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk who had also enjoyed universal recognition. The alleged reason for the continued isolation of Cambodia since 1979, and the suffering which that enmity imposes on the Cambodian people, is that the Phnom Penh government does not represent a real Khmer state, but is an artificially created puppet of Vietnam, set up after an illegal invasion, and through which the latter rules and colonizes Cambodia.

How accurate is that assessment?

Historical background

After nearly a century of French colonial rule Cambodia became independent in 1953, and its independence was confirmed by the Geneva conference of 1954. As in Vietnam independence was a result of armed struggle against the colonial power. As in Vietnam, this struggle was at first led by left-wing groups seeking independence, a vaguely defined socialism, and a republic; and they considered their struggle, in cooperation with the Vietnamese, to be part of an Indo-China wide movement.

The nature of the Cambodian struggle was such that it represented as great a danger to the traditional native ruling elite as to the French. Until 1952 King Sihanouk's royal government felt safer under French protection than pressing for independence, and Cambodia was a safe base for French operations against Vietnam. Only when it was clear that the anti-royalist as well as anti-French forces were winning support in large areas of the country did King Sihanouk appropriate the demand for independence, arguing to the French that if they did not give independence to his traditionalist rightwing government, it would be taken by the Cambodian left. The hard-pressed French saw the truth of his claim, and Cambodia became in 1953 the first independent and united

country of Indo-China.(1)

Unlike Vietnam, independence and peace was a victory for the Cambodian right. The revolutionary troops which had battled the French since 1946 were forced to disarm, and over 1,000 of their political and military leaders fled to Vietnam. Within the country the provisions of the Geneva Accords forced Sihanouk and his supporters to make some concessions to democracy, in the form of a general election in 1955 according to the existing constitution, a democratic statute which Sihanouk had sought to emasculate in 1952-1953.

Just as Ngo Dinh Diem, with U.S. support, succeeded in frustrating the Geneva Agreement by refusing to hold the promised elections, so Sihanouk even more effectively outflanked his opponents by holding the elections, supervised by an International Control Commission with representatives from Canada, India, and Poland, but through fraud and intimidation assured victory for his own party. Thereafter he ran a one-party dictatorship in which the parliament was largely a rubberstamp body, and the constitution meaningless. The International Control Commission, interestingly, certified the elections as 'correct', illustrating the dubious value of such supervision in a troubled country where the nuances of democratic practice are unfamiliar.

In March 1970 Sihanouk was deposed by a government led by one of his closest collaborators, General Lon Nol. Although the coup leaders alleged they overthrew Sihanouk because of his collaboration with Vietnamese revolutionary forces, Sihanouk had in fact been seeking a rapprochement with the United States since 1969, and his deposition represented the victory of one fraction of the Cambodian business and political rightwing over another fraction, rather than a reflection of international political manoeuvring.

Lon Nol's new Khmer Republic quickly benefited from recognition by most of the international community, including both the United States and the Soviet Union, and Sihanouk, who thereby lost recognition, fled to Peking and proclaimed himself head of the revolutionary forces opposing Lon Nol. The Khmer Republic instituted an open anti-Vietnamese policy in collaboration with the U.S., as Sihanouk had been doing clandestinely. This included a state-inspired *pogrom* against the 400,000 Vietnamese residents of Cambodia, driving half of them across the border into Vietnam. The war within Cambodia which had been going on since 1968 quickly spread to virtually the entire country, not least of all because of an American invasion in support of Lon Nol in April 1970. Thereafter Lon Nol's Khmer Republic remained a U.S.-backed puppet regime, totally dependent for its existence on American financial and military support, in particular the fierce bombing which devastated the central rice-growing areas where most of the Cambodian population lived. In spite of the dependant nature of the Khmer Republic, and its lack of control over the national territory from soon after its creation, there was never any suggestion within the international community that

it should be deprived of diplomatic recognition, and even Sihanouk's prestige on the side of the revolutionary forces did not secure their international legitimacy.

Lon Nol in his turn was overthrown violently by new foreign-backed forces, the revolutionary army which established Democratic Kampuchea. Their crucial foreign support had been early in the struggle, during 1970-1972, when much of the fighting with Cambodia was done by Vietnamese troops, without whom the revolutionary struggle might have been short-lived. By the time won in April 1975, they had established their independence, and as is normal in international relations they were given wide international recognition, the U.S. being a major exception. Sihanouk, returning to Phnom Penh as first head of the new state, benefited from this recognition.

During its short life of just under four years Democratic Kampuchea carried out a revolution which, in spite of their rhetoric about 'Marxism-Leninism', was different from any previous revolution in modern times. Understandably Cambodia could not be forced into Marx's original scheme of communism developing out of capitalism at its highest stage, but Pol Pot and his colleagues also rejected Lenin's programme of vanguard intellectual-proletarian leadership in a largely peasant society, as well as Stalin's plans to squeeze the peasantry in the interest of rapid accumulation of capital to finance industrial growth. Reasonably, peasants were viewed in Cambodia as the main revolutionary class, but Democratic Kampuchea went far beyond Maoism, which admitted the value of a large, skilled urban proletariat and continued development of existing industry. In Cambodia the urban working class, along with all other urban groups, were held to be class enemies, and from April 1975 were forced out of towns to become poor peasants, the only progressive class recognized by the Democratic Kampuchea regime.(2)

Democratic Kampuchea also rejected another tenet of traditional Marxism-Leninism, 'proletarian internationalism', which if not always observed by older communist regimes, was at least a principle to which lip service was paid. The resulting chauvinism was directed particularly at Vietnam, and soon after the April 1975 victory the Cambodian Vietnamese residents still remaining after Lon Nol's racist campaigns were also forced to leave for Vietnam.

As the domestic policies showed signs of failure, the Cambodian leadership refused to undertake a policy review, but attributed the failures to sabotage and subversion, concluding that they must be directed from Vietnam. The responsible cadres were removed and often executed, and the purges spread to associates, families, and subordinates.(3)

From 1977 open aggression against Vietnam was undertaken, with fierce attacks across the border into Vietnamese villages. Some of the attacks seem to have been for conquest of disputed border territory; others were to loot equipment. Vietnamese forces riposted, and the con-

flict escalated in intensity throughout 1977 and 1978.(4)

At the same time Democratic Kampuchea was seeking an opening to Asian capitalist countries, with Foreign Minister Ieng Sary telling ASEAN representatives in April 1977 that "we are not communists" and do not "belong to the commonly accepted grouping of communist Indochina.(5) Democratic Kampuchea, following the paths of Sihanouk and Lon Nol, was offering collaboration to powers who were actual or potential enemies of Vietnam, and the latter could not help but view Cambodia, under whatever regime, as a threat to Vietnamese security.

There was of course opposition to such policies, even within the Cambodian party leadership. A leading faction comprised those who may be called 'Vietnam veterans'. They had collaborated with Vietnam in the fight for independence from France, and then over 1,000 of them moved to Vietnam until 1970. Close to them in outlook were other pre-independence revolutionaries who remained in Cambodia after 1954, engaging in legal, then illegal, politics.

The two latter groups objected in varying degrees to the policies imposed by the Pol Pot-ist leadership, and the objection increased as Democratic Kampuchea went down an increasingly anti-Vietnamese path, declaring that country its main enemy, and from 1977 initiating cross-border attacks with the avowed purpose of reconquering those parts of southern Vietnam inhabited by a large Cambodian minority.

The most serious resistance to regime policies was in the East Zone, where the largest number of veterans of the old communist faction, educated to friendship with Vietnam, held positions of leadership. Vietnam probably counted on them to eventually reverse the trend inimical both to Kampuchea-Vietnam friendship, and to the socialist development of Kampuchea itself. In May 1978 the East was attacked by troops loyal to Pol Pot, most of its leaders, and many of its population massacred. Thereafter there was little hope for serious change from within, and those survivors of the anti-Pol Pot tendency fled to Vietnam to cooperate with the Vietnamese in the overthrow of Democratic Kampuchea.(6)

The Vietnamese invasion thus occurred when there was no longer hope for a reform of Democratic Kampuchea from within, and when the Cambodian regime, both in its own actions and in its international associations, was definitely embarked on policies constituting threats to Vietnam.

The military campaign in late December 1978 and January 1979, proceeded with unexpected rapidity, so fast that the Vietnamese outran their own supply lines and had to halt briefly. The Phnom Penh administration, with its armed forces, and several tens of thousands of civilian population retreated to the Thai border, and there was no resistance from the Cambodian population, who viewed the invaders, even though Vietnamese, as liberators.(7)

The will of the people, demonstrating the principle of self-determi-

nation through action - 'voting with their feet', to use the American expression - was clearly on the side of those who overthrew Democratic Kampuchea.

State structure and politics

The People's Republic of Kampuchea thus came into existence after 7 January 1979, following the destruction of the previous Democratic Kampuchea regime by Vietnamese military forces in response to attacks during 1977-78 by Democratic Kampuchea against Vietnamese territory, and in support of Cambodians who had been opposed to, and in some cases resisted the extreme DK policies. These Cambodians became the nucleus of the new state administration.

The new People's Republic of Kampuchea immediately reversed the basic policies of Democratic Kampuchea. Freedom of movement and in choice of work was announced, normal urban-rural differences were re-established, educational, medical, administrative structures rebuilt, non-revolutionary intellectuals, technocrats, administrators who had been restricted to peasant labour during 1975-1979 were invited to return to work in their former occupational areas. Thus the change in January 1979, in addition to political and economic rationality, represented vast improvement in personal freedom and human rights.(8)

The first state structure was of revolutionary type, a People's Revolutionary Council, with Heng Samrin as President, Pen Sovann as Vice-President and Minister of Defense. In its composition two 'factions' could be recognized those who had been active in the independence struggle of 1946-54 and had then gone to Vietnam; and those who had remained in Cambodia and participated in the Democratic Kampuchea administration before going into dissidence. The latter included Heng Samrin, Foreign Minister Hun Sen, and Interior Minister Chea Sim, none of whom had figured prominently in information about the years 1975-79, while Pen Sovann was a Vietnam veteran. By the time the Peoples Revolutionary Council had been fleshed out in mid-1980, twelve Vietnam veterans against five former Democratic Kampuchea personnel could be identified, with only one non-revolutionary, Chan Ven, a pre-1975 teacher, as Minister of Education.

In 1981 a constitution was adopted. It went through at least three drafts before the final text. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) constitution was obviously studied as a model, but in many significant areas the PRK texts moved away from it; and where the SRV model has prevailed, it may be for the good, as in ethnic affairs, where the SRV constitution is more sensitive to relations with national minorities than the original Cambodian drafts.

With the adoption of a constitution, the state structure was changed to an executive branch consisting of State Council plus Council of

Ministers and a National Assembly. Elections for the latter were held on 1 May 1981, with its 117 members chosen by province according to size of population. Although there were no competing parties, each provincial list contained more candidates than seats to be filled. The new National Assembly met on 24 June. Heng Samrin became President of the State Council and Pen Sovann President of the Council of Ministers, or Prime Minister. Most of the Revolutionary Council ministers remained in equivalent posts in the new structure. In terms of the two 'factions' noted above, the balance began to shift away from Vietnam veterans. After May 1981, there were eleven Vietnam veterans, eight former DK, and five non-revolutionaries, the latter being Chan Ven, moved from Education to Secretary General of the State Council, Pen Navuth, another former teacher, as new Minister for Education, US-educated Kong Samol in Agriculture, plus two more in Health and Culture/Information.

Since then this tendency has gone even further. In December 1981 Pen Sovann, who had been considered the most powerful person in the government and Hanoi's pro-consul for Cambodia, was suddenly removed. Since it was inconceivable for the foreign press that Hanoi's man would be replaced by more nationalist Khmers, Pen Sovann was rebaptized an agent of Moscow, but closer study since then suggests that such external factors were not decisive, and that Pen Sovann was removed over disagreements on domestic issues. At least there has been no noticeable change in the excellent relations with the Soviet Union, and direct Soviet aid is the largest foreign aid programme in Cambodia.

The Vietnam veteran group was reduced again by the death of Pen Sovann's successor as Prime Minister, Chan Si, in late 1984, and the elevation of Hun Sen to Prime Minister, retaining his previous post of Foreign Minister. Still more significant in this direction was the 1985 appointment of former non-revolutionary Nay Pena to the powerful Ministry of Interior.

By 1986-1987, the analysis of government personnel at ministerial level showed six or seven of the Vietnam veteran group, only three former DK officers, and at least eleven of the former bourgeois non-revolutionaries. The latter moreover are being assigned ever more significant departments. In addition to the Interior Ministry, Agriculture, Cambodia's most important economic sector is under Kong Samol, who obtained his degree in agricultural science from the United States, and people of similar non-leftist background now head Finance, Trade and Education, the last particularly significant given the controversy over the direction being taken by Cambodia's cultural development.

Still another significant group of young newcomers are some who as students joined the revolutionary side of the war against Lon Nol and the United States during 1970-1975, but were then rejected by the DK authorities and forced to spend the following four years as disfavoured agricultural laborers. Among this group are Kong Korm, Foreign Minister since 1986 and Koy Buntha, Defense Minister.

Two of the Vietnam group deserve special attention. Unlike most of the others of that group in the PRK executive Say Phouthang, a Vice-President of the State Council and Bou Thang, Minister of Defense from 1982 to 1985, remained in Cambodia in dissidence against Pol Pot after 1975, and both are of ethnic minorities, the former a Thai from Cambodia's southwest and the latter a Tampuan from the northeast.

Bou Thang also symbolizes one of the most striking social changes in Cambodia since 1979, the prominence given to ethnic minorities and their full integration into national life. In addition to Bou Thang, north-eastern natives have held several other top military posts and are in charge of administration or Party affairs in their own provinces, a situation which might prove attractive to similar minority groups in some of Cambodia's neighbouring countries.

The same evolution in factional tendencies is even clearer in the Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea.

During the first two years of the People's Republic of Kampuchea the party was rarely mentioned, and even more rarely was anyone identified by party position. There was serious discussion as to whether the party should continue as 'Communist Party' (the DK name), or re-define itself as a new organisation. The decision was to take a name implying continuity with the 'Khmer Peoples Revolutionary Party' of the 1950s, from which Pol Pot's movement is considered a deviation; and the new party was formally announced after its 4th Congress in May 1981. Another reason for the new name is that the People's Republic of Kampuchea defines itself as only 'progressing towards socialism', not a full-fledged communist state.

In 1981, eleven full members of the Central Committee and one alternative were of the Vietnam group, with Pen Sovann as Secretary-General, and seven had served in the DK administration. The disappearance of Pen Sovann, replaced as Party Secretary by Heng Samrin, and Chan Si here also weakened the Vietnam group, while new people enlarged the other factions. Following the 5th Party Conference of October 1985 the Central Committee holds 31 full and 14 alternative members, only five of whom are of the Vietnam group, while nine to ten were DK cadres, nine were revolutionary combatants who broke with Pol Pot by 1975, and at least 20 are young professionals who neither went to Vietnam nor joined Pol Pot.

Such Kremlinological analysis of PRK leadership shows that one aspect of the 'Vietnamization' charge levelled at the new Cambodian state does not hold up. All of the PRK government and party positions are occupied by Khmer, not Vietnamese, and when the Khmer population has to deal with officialdom, they deal with fellow Khmer.

The new people who are rapidly moving up to the top ranks of the state bureaucracy and party represent the pre-1975 upwardly mobile 'middle class', that is Khmer who were moving upward socially and economically via modern education and state employment, often out of a

peasant or non-elite urban family background. In general they found places then as school teachers, administrators, technicians, or were still students in 1975. Without the war and revolution they would have, and in some cases did, serve under the regimes of Sihanouk and Lon Nol.

During 1975-1979 they were all relegated to arduous field labour as members of the mistrusted urban enemy class, and in 1979, after the Vietnamese-wrought liberation, they could easily have fled across the Thai border as refugees. Because of their education and knowledge of French or English they would have found rapid acceptance in one or another western country where they could rapidly have achieved a successful adjustment to society.

Instead of that they have chosen to stay in Cambodia and work for the PRK out of nationalist commitment, ideology, idealism, or of course in some cases inertia. Noteworthy is that because of the great loss of skilled manpower between 1970 and 1979, most of them now have higher positions than they could have expected under a peaceful evolution of Cambodia after 1970.

The Economy

The economic situation facing the People's Republic of Kampuchea in January 1979 was one of near absolute zero. Democratic Kampuchea has succeeded in their goal of creating a classless society, but at the price of neglecting all sectors but basic agriculture, a few related industries, and some hastily conceived irrigation works, not all of which functioned usefully.

Because of the emphasis on poor peasants as the only worthy class, trained personnel had been ignored, their abilities unused, and in 1979 most were dead or dispersed. All infrastructure - roads, transport, buildings - had been allowed to deteriorate. There had been no money, no private exchange, no personal income, and no taxes since 1975, in large parts of the country since 1970. Neither had there been written records, formal judicial proceedings, codified laws, nor conservation of archives.

The PRK programme was to reverse nearly all policies associated with Democratic Kampuchea. There was sudden freedom of movement, and as the population set out on the move to find old homes and family, there was a period of anarchy in which stored food was consumed, there was little preparation for the new planting season, and general neglect of all production.

There was also freedom in choice of work, or to not work, and freedom to trade pending reconstruction of a national economy. Surviving skilled people were invited to join the new administration, but, as examples of the problems which were faced, only 7,000 of 20,000 pre-1975 teachers reappeared, only 50 of 500 doctors, and only three persons with

legal training.

This does not mean that all of the others had been killed. Many surviving teachers fled abroad to refugee camps in Thailand; and at least half the pre-1975 number of doctors had escaped overseas, mostly to France, before the end of the war in 1975.

There was an immediate flourishing of petty market trade to satisfy the demand of a population starved of commodities. People who had concealed valuables since 1975 took them to the Thai border to trade for goods which were brought back into Cambodia to supply the markets, in which rough equivalencies were established among Vietnamese, Thai, and U.S. currencies, gold and rice.

The 1981 constitution consecrated three economic sectors, state, cooperative, and family, the latter referring to small-scale agricultural and artisanal work. To these, following the 5th Party Congress of October 1985, has been added a fourth, 'private', where individuals may invest funds in small-scale manufacturing with hired labour, with profit constituting the entrepreneur's income.

The basis of Cambodia's economy is acknowledged to be agriculture, where 80-90% of the people are occupied.

Land is owned by the state, and thus it cannot be used for speculation or loan guarantees, and cannot be lost to users for non-payment of debt. Land is distributed for cultivation to families and 'solidarity groups', and individual families have house and garden plots, use of which may be inherited.

Agricultural production since 1979 has been disappointing. Reasons are destruction of seed varieties under Democratic Kampuchea, disruption of water supply in some areas by misconceived irrigation projects of Democratic Kampuchea, destruction of draft animals, and disproportion of women in the work force. Until 1983, peasants were free to sell their produce on the free market, then taxes began to be imposed, and since 1984, there has been strong exhortation to sell to the state, including increasing obstacles to free market access. This plus the guarantee of land use removes the incentive to plant large surpluses, and many peasants may be limiting production to their own needs.

Industry is acknowledged to be subordinate to agriculture, and to produce what agriculture needs, based as much as possible on local raw materials. Between 50-60 factories are in operation, none up to capacity, need, or plan except cigarettes and soft drinks.

The reasons for the poor performance of industry, even in those areas, such as rubber and cotton, for which Cambodia is well endowed with primary raw materials, are obsolete plants which cannot be rebuilt in present conditions, and inability to import raw materials, such as chemicals.

Typically a cloth factory in Phnom Penh may contain machinery of the 1960s from diverse sources, say Japanese, Czech, Belgian, German, all in the same plant. In most cases the machinery is no longer being

manufactured, and spare parts are not available even if the People's Republic of Kampuchea could afford to import them. Only a total re-equipping of such plants will permit production up to capacity, and this requires normal international relationships and foreign aid.

Personal incomes consist of consumption plus cash on sales of surplus in the majority agricultural sector, while market traders and artisans live on profits. The state sector (officials, factory workers, professionals), receive salaries, and here there has been a major shift from the pre-1975 situation.

During 1979 there was no Cambodian currency, state employees were given rations, while market activity was conducted through barter, in gold and silver, or with foreign currency, such as dong and baht. A new *riel* was established in April 1980, with riel based on the market value of 1kg of rice, and salaries set very low, intended as basic subsistence only. The 1981 salary level in riel was between 65 riel for a worker and 260 riel for the three highest state officers; in 1984 this was raised to 140-500 riel, with no further raise when I checked in early 1986. To see what this means, some sample market prices were in 1981: 14-20 riel/kg for meat, 2.5-3 riel for rice, 1 riel per single egg, 3 riel for a piece of laundry soap; by 1984 they had risen to 16 riel for chicken, 40-45 riel for beef and pork, 4-6 riel for rice, 2 riel for an egg, and 12 riel for soap; and by 1986 meat prices were around 60 riel, with rice up to at least 10 riel.

In Cambodia's best pre-war years of the 1960s basic food prices in riel were nearly the same, but salaries were about 10 times their present level. This means the rural/urban income ration has shifted drastically in favour of peasants, and the state salary structure no longer gives its occupants an automatic economically privileged position.

The economically privileged are those with private incomes, which was also true in the old days, some representative examples being 1,000 riel for a one-hour English class of 30 students, 1,800 riel per month for home weaving, 400-700 per image for makers of concrete Buddha images, and 1,200-2,700 riel per month for some fishermen and fruit growers near Phnom Penh.

The private incomes are subject to taxation, which began in 1983, but was nominal until the end of 1984. By 1986 taxes had risen several fold, and are intended as a serious source of state income. So far market activity does not seem to be adversely affected, and Cambodia in fact enjoys a free market, and nearly free import, in all commodities but those produced by state factories, although such freedom is not formally authorized by law.

Cambodian currency management has been much more successful than monetary policy in Vietnam, and the movement of the riel shows that the two currencies are quite independent. When the new riel was established in 1980 it was assigned a quite artificial official rate of 4 riel=\$1. A year later the free market rate was 50 riel=\$1, in 1984 over

140 riel, in 1986 155 riel, but in late 1987 120 riel. These figures show de facto inflation and devaluation rates no worse than many Third World capitalist countries, while in Vietnam the currency has declined disastrously, by hundreds of percent.

The economic policies so far followed, in part purposeful, in part ad hoc responses to difficult situations, surprisingly satisfy most of the demands made of Third World countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in order to qualify for aid from those institutions. Thus, Cambodia has (i) concentrated on agriculture, (ii) avoided too much industrialisation, (iii) liberalized imports, (iv) increased the domestic tax burden, (v) frozen wages, and (vi) allowed the currency to depreciate until it found a stable level at which it has recently seemed to be recovering on its own. Another standard IMF/World Bank demand, attraction of foreign investment, does not depend on Cambodia, but requires first relaxation of the U.S.-led embargo on normal economic relations with the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

An area in which significant progress has been made is education, which had to start from zero after the disastrous Democratic Kampuchea policies. No more than 5,000 of the surviving teachers returned to teaching, many preferring to take other positions in the new state apparatus in which anyone with education was much in demand. By 1984, new teachers had been trained and primary school enrollment had exceeded 1.5 million in the 7 million population, comparable to the last pre-war year, 1969. Secondary level enrollment and teaching staff still have not recovered, and tertiary education within the country is limited to the Soviet Technical Institute and the Medical School, with over 2,000 university students abroad, the largest number in the Soviet Union.

The Ministry of Education has from 1979 been in the hands of professional teachers, trained before 1970, and who were not associated before 1979 with any revolutionary faction. The syllabus for primary and secondary schools is very nationalist in form and content, with all instruction in Khmer, in contrast to the pre-war schools in which several subjects were taught in French by French teachers. Now more hours per week are devoted to the study (7) of Khmer language and literature than was customary before 1975, and the teaching methods used in Khmer language instruction are those developed in the 1960s and early 1970s by a new generation of Khmer nationalist intellectuals.

As of 1986 no foreign language instruction had yet been introduced into the general school system, which may also reflect an intention to emphasize the nationalist character of PRK cultural development.

Foreign language instruction in official institutions has been limited to a special Language Institute where Russian, German, Vietnamese and Spanish - in order of importance - are taught to students intending to pursue advanced study abroad or careers as interpreters for the PRK government. In 1985, English was added to the official curriculum, with the first experts and material coming from Vietnam; and in early 1986,

the English programme received an Australian input with the arrival of an adviser and the prospect of teachers to be assigned from Australia, or recruited by one of the private foreign aid groups. According to the Australian expert the Vietnamese-sponsored English programme was of high quality, and she foresaw good possibilities of cooperation.

Medicine was in an equally poor condition in 1979. Between 200 and 250 of the country's 500 doctors had fled abroad during the war of 1979-75, and only 50-60 of the remainder survived Democratic Kampuchea, over half of them enticed away after 1979 by the refugee-resettlement system.

A combined Medical-Dental-Pharmaceutical school, located in the surviving premises of the pre-war Faculty of Medicine, was among the first priorities of the new People's Republic of Kampuchea, and it has seen notable achievements in training new personnel. Much foreign aid has gone into medical and health care, in particular from Vietnam and Cuba in the beginning. One of the major aid programmes in 1986 was a UNICEF child-vaccination programme. There is nevertheless a serious lack of medicines because of the limited capacity to finance purchases from abroad.

Other notable examples of successful foreign aid in health care are the World Vision Pediatric Hospital, and an animal vaccine laboratory set up by the American Friends Service Committee and showing an admirable cooperation among Sri Lankan laboratory technology, Lao training of Khmer technicians, with further instruction on the new equipment by an American expert in Phnom Penh.

Unfortunately, all such efforts to restore essential services and improve the quality of life are impeded by the investment of scarce resources which must be made in re-armament and defense against attacks by the DK coalition. There is now five-year conscription, in an attempt to meet the threat independently and create an army to replace the Vietnamese troops which have ensured the country's defense since 1979. There is also labour conscription for defense construction along the Thai border; and both take manpower needed elsewhere, and involve strict security measures which are inevitably onerous for the population.

When Democratic Kampuchea was overthrown in 1979 the non-communist world press had for four years emphasized the brutalities of that regime, and in the United States even otherwise reasonable people had called for an international intervention to replace Democratic Kampuchea by something more human, yet when the Vietnamese did it they met with general condemnation. When the nearly destroyed DK forces reached the Thai border in the Autumn of 1979 an international rehabilitation and re-equipment operation was set in motion, much of it disguised within the large refugee camp network which was being simultaneously built up. This reaction may have surprised the Vietnamese, who perhaps counted on U.S. sincerity in condemnation of Democratic Kampuchea. At least the foreign-sponsored reconstruction of the DK forces

ensured that Vietnamese troops would have to undertake the defense of Cambodia for some time to come.

In addition to re-armament of the DK forces, an international diplomatic campaign was mounted against the People's Republic of Kampuchea. First the International Conference on Kampuchea in July 1981 passed resolutions calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops, internationally supervised elections to replace the present government with one more freely chosen among the contending factions both inside and outside the country, and a non-aligned and neutral Cambodia, all such proposals either too late or misdirected.

In 1979 it might have been possible to achieve quick withdrawal of Vietnamese troops through international pressure, if it had been accompanied by a guarantee that sanctuaries and support would not be offered to anti-PRK and anti-Vietnamese groups on the Thai border. The opposite policy was followed, however, ensuring that nothing short of battlefield defeat could force the Vietnamese to withdraw before they were ready. As for internationally supervised elections, the experience of 1955 had shown how ineffective such supervision might be, and in the minimally democratic atmosphere of Southeast Asia, why should Cambodia alone be expected to submit its electoral practices to foreign supervision? Furthermore, enforcement of truly fair elections on all Cambodian factions might require a foreign armed force even more numerous than the Vietnamese troops within Cambodia, and of the factions outside the country which were to participate on equal footing with the People's Republic of Kampuchea, only Democratic Kampuchea could pretend to any international legitimacy. The other foreign-backed factions opposing the People's Republic of Kampuchea descend from the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes which successively lost international recognition as those who overthrew them were recognized.

The next international anti-PRK effort was the enforced formation of the coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in 1982. The goal was to make Democratic Kampuchea respectable by adding Sihanouk and Son Sann with his Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front (KPNLF), but as groups the last two represent governments from whom which had also lost popular support before being forced from office. They are truly foreign creations as much as the People's Republic of Kampuchea is alleged to be.

Some slight progress toward realism was the 8-point peace plan of the Coalition, announced in Peking in March 1986. It at least talked about negotiations with Vietnam, but it demanded that the PRK consent to demote itself to one part of a four-part coalition government under Sihanouk as president and Son Sann as premier, totally unrealistic in its refusal to recognize the People's Republic of Kampuchea as a functioning government. Still among the demands were internationally supervised elections, this time with the added condition that Cambodia would have a "liberal, democratic regime", which if achieved would be the only

one in Southeast Asia. The final provision, a non-aggression and peaceful coexistence pact with Vietnam, is too late, for such a pact has already been signed by the People's Republic of Kampuchea.(9)

Even the way in which the demand for Vietnamese troop withdrawal was presented shows lack of realism in its 3 points about 160,000 Vietnamese troops alleged to be in Cambodia, definite time frame for withdrawal, and UN supervision of the withdrawal. There is thus refusal to acknowledge the annual partial withdrawals beginning in 1982 and which may have brought the total down to 100,000 by 1986, the definite time frame, 1990, which has been set by Vietnam and the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and the circumstance that as Vietnam and Cambodia effect the withdrawal on their own there will be nothing for the UN to supervise.

Although ASEAN and most of the western press have treated the partial withdrawals as sham, the American government expert Edmund McWilliams admitted that the first partial withdrawal had reduced the number from 180,000 to 150,000 during 1982 (10), and the better western estimates since then have dropped, although with some delay and reluctantly. If successive withdrawals had been even as small as 10,000 per year, the total is now under 100,000, with good probability for all to be gone by 1990. Then the main demand of Phnom Penh's enemies will have been realized without their intervention.

It is significant in this connection that since 1986 Thai military authorities have reported the disappearance of Vietnamese troops from near the border and their replacement by PRK Cambodian forces.(11) Moreover, Sihanouk's son Norodom Ranariddh in his own comment on the 8-point plan said he thought the Vietnamese troops were leaving the countryside to concentrate in the towns.(12) Since, however, the numerous western foreign aid workers in Cambodia do not see evidence of increased troops in the towns, they must be leaving both rural and urban areas.

The Pol Pot forces also indirectly acknowledge the reality of Vietnamese withdrawals. Since 1985 rural Cambodians contacted by DK patrols within the country have reported their new line as stressing the disappearance of Vietnamese protection by 1990 after which the Cambodian population will have to face the return of the forces which ruled them during 1975-1979. The implicit threat is that it would be safer to give support to the coalition now.

Since the People's Republic of Kampuchea is faced by an aggressive foreign-armed enemy on its north-western border, a corollary of Vietnamese withdrawal is the creation of a PRK army capable of defending the country; and the possibility of achieving this is regularly denied by those who also deny the reality of Vietnamese troop withdrawal. The conventional figure cited for PRK forces is 30,000, of poor quality and prone to desertion.

This figure of 30,000 was calculated in 1982 by the American diplo-

mat-scholar Timothy Carney, and at the time it was reliable, based on careful analysis of all available sources.(13) Since then, however, development of the army has been a major PRK goal, with 5-year-conscription, much internal propaganda to encourage voluntary service, and always the awareness that the Vietnamese, whose departure is desired, will only leave when the People's Republic of Kampuchea can defend itself. The military build-up probably receives Soviet support, training, and financing - directly, not through the Vietnamese. Since 1982, then, the PRK army has certainly grown, and if the not unreasonable figure of a 3-5,000 annual increase were estimated their forces would now be numerically about equivalent to the effective fighting force which opposes them.(14)

A realistic picture of Cambodia today, then, reveals a People's Republic of Kampuchea which has endured longer than its two predecessors, has built up a new state apparatus staffed by nationalist Khmers, and, more slowly, is developing a defence capability. Its enemies have not been able to destroy the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and it is not a client which can be delivered to its enemies by the Vietnamese.

For the first time in coalition circles some realism was shown in Norodom Ranariddh's further reactions to the 8-point plan cited above. He said "we will have to give the Vietnamese some sort of guarantee that the Heng Samrin regime will not crumble", "we have to accept the reality that the Heng Samrin regime does exist".(15)

This realism pre-figured that shown by his father, Sihanouk, in finally agreeing to negotiate directly with Phnom Penh representatives at the end of 1987 and early 1988. In all of Sihanouk's sometimes confusing shifts of position since the 1940s there has been a significant continuity. He always tried to stay with the stronger side. It seems that now he recognizes the viability of the People's Republic of Kampuchea and the increasing instability of his coalition.

Significantly the 4-point communique following the first Sihanouk - Hun Sen meeting did not mention retreat of Vietnamese troops, an implicit recognition that this problem is disappearing of itself.

On the PRK side they are faced with economic stagnation caused by the war and its attendant international blockade, and they now offer, in their efforts to attract Sihanouk, concessions which they refused to make a few years ago: pluralistic elections to choose a new government, agreement to continued existence and political role of the DK faction pending elections, and international supervision of the elections.

The ideal solution for the People's Republic of Kampuchea would be a two-part coalition with Sihanouk, excluding the Democratic Kampuchea and in which Sihanouk would be a powerless figurehead (Son Sann's KPNLF is now a negligible force), while Sihanouk seems to be hoping that international support will force the People's Republic of Kampuchea to accept a new 4-part coalition over which he could exert balancing control and achieve some real personal authority. This would

be a return to the solution of 1954-1955 which permitted Sihanouk to exercise near dictatorial power.(16)

Whether or not the DK faction participates in the new government will probably depend on the reaction of those foreign powers, first of all Thailand and China, which have been most active in providing support for the coalition and in particular its DK component. The position of Thailand is particularly crucial, for all aid to the Democratic Kampuchea and the coalition,

whether arms from China or Singapore, which are transported by the Thai army, or food and medicine from western countries channeled through refugee camps, depends on Thai acquiescence. Any change in Thailand's Cambodia policy will have immediate repercussions on the relationships among the Cambodian factions; and during the past two years there have been clear signals from Thailand that sharp revisions in their Cambodia policy are under consideration.

In a 1986 ASEAN SERIES publication of the Malaysian Institute of Strategic and International Studies M.R. Sukhumband Paribatra, one of the most influential of Thailand's younger political scientists, argued that perhaps the best ASEAN can hope for in Cambodia is "a 'Finland solution' (a country whose neutrality is respected but flawed in the sense that it is heavily influenced in key questions by the interests and requirements of neighbouring great powers)". This means that "the situation in Kampuchea cannot be reversed in the short - and medium terms except possibly through a major war", "the presence of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea is undeniable in the foreseeable future", and there must be "an acceptance, over the short - and medium terms, of Hanoi's predominance in Phnom Penh." M.R. Sukhumband also argues that the DK faction should be excluded from any type of future coalition.(17)

Perhaps a more convincing signal for those who might retort that M.R. Sukhumbang is 'only' an academic, is the new position suddenly taken late last year by General Chaovalit Yongchaiyut, the Commander of the Thai Army.

On 3 November 1987, General Chaovalit said the Cambodian problem was a civil war involving "mainly the dispute and fighting between two communist factions in Kampuchea", a statement totally at variance with the position of his own Foreign Ministry and ASEAN which have considered the problem to be one of Vietnamese aggression. A few days later, in the face of criticism, Chaovalit again issued the same signal in another way with the remarks that the "prime concern [in Thailand] should be given to how to develop the Northeast, and not on military threat from Vietnam", and "Vietnam wouldn't have invaded Kampuchea had there been no dissident faction in Phnom Penh".(18) The clear signal for the Thai public and interested foreign observers is that if a Vietnamese military threat is not of prime concern, Thailand's current policy is without justification.

The other crucial external power, China, has also sent out signals indicating certain, if slow, change.

Perhaps the first was the sudden diplomatic recognition of the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime on 9 December 1985, in the face of U.S. efforts to secure continuing Chinese aid for the Contras. The Sandinistas are among the oldest friends of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, and their recognition by China signals a change of attitude toward both Moscow and the People's Republic of Kampuchea.(19)

Of course, Chinese policy on Cambodia since 1975 has always been more related to its dispute with the Soviet Union than to approval of DK ideology and domestic policies, particularly since the reforms of Deng Xiaoping. As Sino-Soviet relations improve, China's interest in the Democratic Kampuchea is certain to diminish. A sign of this change is overt Chinese acquiescence in the Sihanouk-Hun Sen negotiations after years of insisting that Democratic Kampuchea was the only legitimate government.

Finally, the Soviet Union may have a role to play quite different from that imagined by foreign observers who concentrate on supposed Soviet pressure on Vietnam to remove its troops - a view which ignores the gradual withdrawal taking place since 1982 and the existence of a genuine Khmer state in the People's Republic of Kampuchea. The real Soviet influence may be rather in efforts to improve relations with ASEAN, in particular Thailand. In May 1987 the Thai Foreign Minister visited the Soviet Union. He was followed by Army Commander General Chaovalit in November, and a trip to Moscow for Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda was being planned for early 1988. Such a flurry of visits to Russia by high-level Thai personnel is unprecedented. At the same time it was announced that Thai permission had been given, after years of refusal, for the "Soviet Union to bring in ships, including hydrographic, supply and navy vessels, for repair in Thailand", the "first time that Thailand has granted permission on a permanent basis to a socialist country to repair its ships here", and now at a time when the Thai Foreign Ministry feels that "Thailand is more open to the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries."(20)

The Soviet contribution to resolution of the Cambodia conflict may in the end be to convince the Thais, through improved diplomatic and economic relations, that there is no danger to them in a 'Finland' solution which would leave the People's Republic of Kampuchea in place as a close ally of Vietnam.

All of these signals mean decreasing support for the DK faction, and suggest Sihanouk should hasten to conclude a bilateral agreement with the People's Republic of Kampuchea, a move which would by itself go far toward normalisation for Cambodia.

Notes

- (1) see Vickery, Michael: Looking back at Cambodia, in: Kernan, Ben/ Bona, Chantou: Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1947-1981; Kernan, Ben: How Pol Pot came to Power; Vickery, Michael: Kampuchea, Politics, Economic and Society, chapter 3.
- (2) see Vickery, Michael: Cambodia 1975-1982, in particular chapter 3.
- (3) *ibid.*
- (4) *ibid.*, chapter 4.
- (5) quoted from: Far Eastern Economic Review, April 29, 1977, p.11; and see Vickery, Michael: Cambodia, *op.cit.*, pp.228-289.
- (6) Vickery, Michael: Cambodia, *op.cit.*, chapter 4; Kernan, Ben: How Pol Pot came to Power; Vickery, Michael: Kampuchea, *op.cit.*, chapter 4.
- (7) Vickery, Michael: Cambodia, *op.cit.*, chapter 4; Picq, Laurence: Au dela du ciel, cinq ans chez les Khmers rouges. Paris: Editions Bernard Barrault.
- (8) All aspects of PRK organisation are treated more fully in Vickery, Michael: Kampuchea, *op.cit.*, to which the reader is referred. Analysis of factional composition later than the publication of that book is based on announcements in the PRK press and the BBC Survey of World Broadcasts. Other recent information is from my own observations in the PRK.
- (9) Nation, (Bangkok) and Bangkok Post, 18 March 1984.
- (10) McWilliams, Edmund: Vietnam in 1982: Onward into the Quagmire in: Asian Survey, January 1983, pp.62, 70.
- (11) Bangkok Post, 27 June 1986, p.4, statement by Prasong Soonsiri, then Secretary of the National Security Council; Far Eastern Economic Review, 15 May 1986, p.28, reported by John McBeth.
- (12) Nation, (Bangkok), 19-20 March 1986.
- (13) Carney, Timothy: Heng Samrin's Armed Forces and a Military Balance in Cambodia. Paper presented at the International Conference on Kampuchea, Princeton University, 12-14 November 1982.
- (14) In June 1986 a U.S. Embassy official in Bangkok estimated PRK forces as possibly up to 39,000, a 3,000 per year increase since Carney presented his figures.
- (15) Nation (Bangkok), 19-20 March 1986.
- (16) See Vickery, Michael: Looking Back at Cambodia; Kernan, Ben: How Pol Pot Came to Power; Südostasien aktuell, März 1988, pp.134-135, for Sihanouk's comments on the negotiations.
- (17) Sukhumband Paribatra: Kampuchea Without Delusion. ASEAN SERIES, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, pp.15, 16, 20.
- (18) Nation (Bangkok), 4 November 1987; Nation, 5 November 1987, Bangkok Post and Nation (Bangkok), 6 November 1987, Nation

(Bangkok), 8 November 1987.

- (19) Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 July 1987, p.28; Kampuchea (Phnom Penh) 7 August 1986; SWB, 9 December 1985;
- (20) Nation (Bangkok), 18 October 1987, 30 October 1987, 6 November 1987.