

## Cambodia 1987: Time for Talk

Serge Thion

Many talented diplomatic correspondents have already analysed in detail the multiple signals of an impending period of negotiations on Cambodia. I shall not duplicate their subtle comments but I wish to draw attention to the Cambodian side of the question and the long-term consequences that any kind of international agreement may have on this dismembered country. This paper does not deal with the complexities of the negotiations to come but with the perspective after the settlement. From this point a feedback will concern the content of the negotiation and touch on its phasing.

First, it should be clear to anyone that the present division into four so-called "factions" in which Cambodian political forces are grouped may not be representative at all of the actual political feelings among Cambodians at large. In fact, Cambodians in the country or in Thailand have no choice about their political affiliation. It is determined by the locality of their permanent or temporary residence. Persons who wish to switch their allegiance from one group to another have to change their place of residence, something which can be done only with an amount of money big enough to bribe one's way out into a new abode. Otherwise, the displacement is risky and, at times, may prove dangerous or even lethal. The vast movements of populations which have been observed since January 1979 had many motivations, the first priorities being food availability and family regrouping. Political affiliation has ranked rather low and has been very often superseded by other more immediate needs. Typical of this would be the many cases of former civil servants or professionals who left the country, while professing nationalistic or militant views, to build a new life in a third country, losing thereby any possibility of exercising political weight in the politics of their country.

I will not take into account here the quite considerable mass of exiles who have been resettled abroad. Whatever the reality of their achievements in the third countries, these people will not come back to their native land because, even with an amiable political solution, the country will remain very poor for a very long time and will not provide amenities even remotely comparable to those which the exiles now routinely enjoy. Moreover, in the safety of exile, they have developed an amazing number of political or cultural-political organizations which are mostly squabbling with each other. Their function is mostly to procure prestige for petty leaders and their potential contribution to the future of Cambodia seems quite negligible.

In the PRK area of control, which includes most of what the French geographers called "le Cambodge utile", that is the populated wet-rice growing core of the country, political choices are limited to one party, namely the People's Revolutionary Party under a shadowy National Union Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea, founded December 2, 1978, renamed Solidarity Front for the Construction and Defence of the Motherland of Kampuchea by the end of 1981. This PRP is obviously, from the point of view of historical legitimation, the successor of the old Communist Party of Kampuchea, founded in 1951 under the very same name. Later on, probably in 1967, as we know, the name was changed into Communist Party of Kampuchea and its birthdate was altered to 1960 by its then Secretary General, Mr. Saloth Sar, alias Pol Pot. This party proclaimed its own dissolution in 1981 though in reality it is the very backbone of the "Khmer rouge" faction, still very much in existence. In order to strengthen the legitimacy of their intervention together with stressing the closeness of their relationship with the brotherly Cambodian party, the Vietnamese, days before the fall of Phnom Penh, marshalled a congress of the PRP, so that it could appear as a legitimate child of the old Indochinese Communist Party, besides the Pol Pot's bastard one. The attempt to rebuild the Cambodian party from the scratch would be the subject of a fascinating story in which I am not going to indulge here. Enough will be said if we consider that there was in the PRP a massive influx of non-Communist personalities, most of whom had no political commitment in the past, while some had a minor role in the administrations of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol periods. Obviously these persons had no revolutionary experience and were induced into the Party only on the basis of their administrative competence – a rare commodity at the time – or just their willingness to play a role in the rebuilding of the state under Vietnamese supervision. Since there was no way to transform these people into militants, the alternative was to teach them socialism in class rooms. Hence the endless "seminars" and "conferences" that so many people in Cambodia had to bear. These courses, sometimes held in Viet-Nam for higher ranking officials, generated mostly boredom. Every former teacher in Cambodia, like me, has experienced at times the very strong passive resistance of minds who protect their inner thoughts by learning by rote. Intellectual escapism and passivity are two protective weapons that are widely used by Khmers when they refuse to enter into a challenge they have not chosen. Anyway, classroom communists cannot be counted as real.

The result is that more and more non-Communists have a function in the Phnom Penh administration, both in the Party and in the government, and even at ministerial level. Some observers have been struck by the fact that replacements for veteran regroupees who had spent the years 1954-1970 in Viet-Nam were often former Khmer rouge junior local leaders, thus branding the Heng Samrin admin-



istration as "a continuation of the Khmer rouge". But this is a partial, if not partisan, view. Notwithstanding the very minor role these people had played in the DK period, the complete picture should allow for the even wider entry of former non-Communists into the power circle. This is paralleled by the very unique type of economy now enjoyed by Cambodia, a "socialism" without a large state intervention and connected by a wide open channel to the world market. At one time, it was the border trade with Thailand. Nowadays this huge traffic is mostly maritime. Boats are shuttling between Kompong Som, or Koh Kong, and the Thai coastal harbors. This trade is not well known but involves certainly several million bahts daily.

This long development leads me to believe that political uniformity is not so clearly established under the PRP as appearances would have it. This party is obviously far from being homogeneous and its non-Communist component is itself both wide and diverse. Socialism in Cambodia got a very bad name after it was "practiced" by Pol Pot and claimed by the Vietnamese and their allies. In a situation of political opening, of competition among parties, the PRP would have to revise drastically its program in order not to shrink, maybe to the point of adopting a reformist social-democrat line, which after all was the case of the old Pracheachon Party. It could have been a very significant force in Cambodia, had not the king at the time altered the rules of the game, not to mention a somewhat ferocious repression.

The French people, who have undergone quite a number of revolutions and insurrectional periods in their recent history, are also known to show a remarkable stability when it come to elections, even over more than a century. Parties have waxed and waned but political sensibilities have mostly remained stable. This has been thoroughly researched by historians. I want to submit here the hypothesis that Cambodia also possesses this kind of stability with this restriction that free elections are almost completely unknown there. For the past periods, actual political feelings have to be surmised through indirect means. But there is more to that.

## **The Border Situation**

In terms of real numbers, the border population, compared with the population inside the country is very small indeed, around 250,000 people as against 7 millions. These figures are not guaranteed, of course, they just give a proportion. It would then seem that, in the hypothesis of a political settlement, these border people would not carry a great political weight at home. But the real question lies not in numbers, but

in the potential attraction of political parties, as they have evolved along the border since 1979. They might be allowed to settle in the country in order to compete in an electoral process.

Several interesting phenomena must be underlined. First, although there was a situation of theoretical freedom in which parties could have developed their own personality, the border situation has been closely scrutinized and in fact drastically controlled by the Thai authorities, with a predominance of the Thai military point of view. This resulted in an almost complete absence of political freedom of choice. In that respect, it is quite comparable to the PRK side. Consider, for instance, the almost complete impossibility for the Sihanoukists to organize themselves during the first years. Some tiny groups were tolerated – on the Khmer side of the border – but pressure was constantly on them. The prince himself was far from being welcomed in the kingdom. It was only after prince Sihanouk reluctantly gave his approval to the Coalition Government formula that he was allowed in the country and his partisans permitted to get organized. But even the political choices available to the Khmer border population remained severely limited. It is then not so astonishing to see that no new political force could emerge. Basically, the three options offered to the military and civilian people on the border are representative of the three last political regimes which have ruled Cambodia in the last twenty years, chronologically the Sihanoukist, the Lonollist and the Khmer rouge regimes. It is quite probable that, on the one hand, quite a number of people would like to have new alternatives since all of these three regimes ended in dismal failure and, on the other hand, many people suffered personally or through their kin, under one, or two, or possibly three of these regimes. Expectations generated by the remnants of these ruling classes cannot be expected to run very high. This is the basic fact which was entirely disregarded by those who, for the sake of their own diplomatic goals, installed the so-called Coalition Government, which was in reality totally repugnant to at least two of its components and, for different reasons, to most of the grassroot supporters of the three movements. Even before coming into its shadowy existence, the Coalition Government was a dead horse, as far as the Cambodian political future was concerned. Continuous flogging failed to get it into motion.

### **The Khmer Rouge Faction**

Let us take case by case. First the Khmer rouge. The solid veil of secrecy which surrounded most of the history of the Khmer Communist Party is still intact, with the added protection extended by the Thai military who act as a rampart between the Khmer rouge encampments and Western “humanitarian” activities. In almost all



cases, UN or volag personnel are not allowed into the camps and sometimes not even near the camps. Their activities take place at some point two or three kilometers from the camps, and in most cases they have no activities at all, for lack of permission. Goods and food for the civilian population is given to the Thai Army which is supposed to serve the camps. This is an effective way to shelter these camps from Western opinion. Neither the New York-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights nor Amnesty International have been able to document the situation in these camps, although bits of information and rumors available at the border point to systematic coercion. Disobeying orders is not usually sanctioned by summary execution but by hard labor or participation in dangerous missions. Manpower, carriers and fighters are recruited in the same old authoritarian way as before. The cadres exercise the same dictatorial power as in the DK. The power structure which binds the whole together being the same, it has not been conceivable to change seriously the relations between the apparatus – the Angkar – and the civilian population. The big difference compared with the 75-80 period is that the biggest part of the people under KR control managed to escape at one time or the other. By September 79, at the time when they had to cross over into Thailand, the KR had some 300,000-400,000 people under their sway. This figure (just an indication of magnitude) has dwindled to less than 100,000 people. There is a limited access to some camps, in particular Site 8 which is the Khmer rouge showcase. Information coming from Site 8 shows great tension between the mass of the civilians and the Khmer rouge administration. In early 1987 the Khmer rouge had to shell the camp to prevent unrest and demands for transfer to other places, like Site 2. Internal sources say that, if given a chance, three-quarters of the population would leave at once. This shows how far the “change” in the behavior of the Khmer rouge has gone.

What should be remembered here is the role of secrecy as a tool, as a means of political action. See, for instance, what the number 2 of the Party, Nuon Chea, said on this issue in 1978: “Now (in full DK glory) we struggle openly and in secret with secret struggle as the basis of our struggle ... Secret work is fundamental in all that we do... Only through secrecy can we be masters of the situation and win victory over the enemy who cannot find who is who.” And he adds: “The leadership apparatus must be defended at any price. If we lose members but retain the leadership, we can continue to win victories. Defending the leadership of the party is strategic. As long as the leadership is there, the party will not die. There can be no comparison between loosing 2 to 3 leading cadres and 200-300 members”<sup>1</sup>. Note that the party leadership is still intact.

1 “Statement of the CPK to the CWP of Denmark, July 1978” as introduced by Laura Summers, *The Journal of Communist Studies*, 3, 1, March 1987.

## The Pro-West Factions

Let us turn towards the KPNLF side. Any simple talk with ordinary refugees shows that people in KPNLF camps, i.e. mostly Site 2, are deeply unconcerned by the quarrels among leaders intermittently splashing in the Bangkok press. In a very traditional way, people "belong" to one camp which is said to follow one or another "chief". This does not leave much room for political choice as "dissidents" have been in many instances beaten up or imprisoned in camp gaols if they voiced too strident criticism of the leaders. As usual in Cambodia, people tend to accept passively their self-appointed leaders. In the KPNLF, leaders are of two kinds: warlords and returnees. Warlords are the products of the complex situation prevailing at the Khmer-Thai border since the 60's when smuggling developed into quite a large and profitable industry, due to the nationalization of foreign trade. With ups and downs this situation remained, even during the Pol Pot period, but was further complicated from 1975 onwards by the arrival of refugees from inside Cambodia. They were not always welcomed and some looked towards "uncontrolled elements" for protection. Smugglers often turned into bandits to protect their trade and were in a favorable position to control the enormous resources put into the border area by the international response to the 1979 emergency<sup>2</sup>.

The huge influx of refugees gave the opportunity to the smugglers-turned-bandits to emerge as warlords, complete with private armies, enormous cash incomes and close relations, though conflictual at times, with the Thai military. Then came the returnees, mostly former military officers from the Lon Nol army establishment. They had been refugees, often resettled in the United States. Although their military record was usually quite poor, they tried to establish themselves as "natural" leaders of a would-be resistance, by virtue of their former training and status. For a long time, their power was more apparent than real; their overlordship was recognized by the warlords as long as it fitted their interests and provided a shield to their striving business. Former politicians, also returned from exile in Western countries, provided a blanket of political respectability. Their attempts to uproot the border trade triggered many skirmishes but they never really got the upper hand. Among all these people with a leader's status, the competition for resource control and actual power developed into a series of small scale conflicts, with killings, corruption and even bombings of refugee camps. The strongest pressures put up by the Thai military failed to resolve the conflicts; at best, they sometimes

2 See L. Mason and R. Brown, *Rice, Rivalry and Politics. Managing Cambodian Relief*, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1983, for the basic facts; a much better book by the way than William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1984, which I reviewed in "Modern Mythologist on the loose", *Inside Asia*, n°8, April-May 1986.



were patched up by some kind of formal reconciliation but the composite nature of the KPNLF system, the isolation of the self-appointed leaders and the restricted freedom of their followers are the continuing causes of further strife.

The interesting point is that underneath these competing leaders, one can find a layer of competent cadres and administrators, people endowed with drive and skills who manage the camp situation quite well, given the circumstances. These people are quite close to the refugees, they know their plight and, given the opportunity, could provide a quite competent leadership. But their "junior" status prevents them from playing any role in a much needed reform of the KPNLF system.

It seems that the question of democracy never arises in the thinking of the KPNLF elite. The word is used just for external consumption, as the Front is supposed to uphold Western political values but the idea of starting to apply democratic principles to the workings of the Front itself seems entirely ludicrous to all people concerned. Democracy is not for now, it is argued, it would weaken our struggle against the enemy. There is obviously not the slightest confidence in the democratic process as a source of political strength. What in 1970, seemed on the surface to be a process of destroying the "Ancien regime" in Phnom Penh and replacing it by a bourgeois revolution, with democracy as a new base and source of legitimacy, is entirely forgotten. The political working of the KPNLF is very much a return to the old traditional pattern of Cambodian politics, with its powerful leaders, surrounded by the retinue of their clients, fighting each other for higher status and looking for foreign support<sup>3</sup>. It smacks of conservatism in the full meaning of the word.

It is difficult to assess how Khmers inside Cambodia view this group. Whatever support it gets now is probably related to the problem of the presence of the Vietnamese. But so far the Front has been unable to develop an image of a new Cambodia that could be politically attractive in the future. Moreover, its leaders are either unknown or discredited for their corruption or brutality. The only chance of the KPNLF to survive in a peace process period is to give prominence to younger and more skilled administrators and to initiate a democratic process which would be a real novelty in Khmer political history.

The growing success in the past few years of the Sihanoukist group stems mostly from the failure of the two other border groups to attract spontaneous support. This was demonstrated by the fact that it was led for several years in Thailand by a well known political figure, prominent during both the Sihanouk and the Lon Nol periods, Mr. In Tam. In April 1975, he fled to Thailand with an intact military force. Only in 1983 was he replaced as leader on the field by Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

---

3 S. Thion, *The Pattern of Cambodian Politics*, in: *The Cambodian Agony*, ed. by D. Ablin and M. Hood, New York: Sharpe, 1987.

Leadership conflicts occurred there too but the authority of Prince Sihanouk prevented their dissemination and it is no surprise if the Sihanoukist group seems both better organized and more efficient. It is the only group which put up a real fight when the Vietnamese troops attacked the border camps in 1985.

There is no political program to speak of. Royal charisma is more than enough. In all his speeches and writings, prince Sihanouk staunchly defends his past policies, he sees no faults in them and he considers criticism as a veiled attack against him. His enemies of yesterday are his enemies of today and he did not come out with any really new proposal. It has to be assumed that he is in favour of a regime as similar to his past one as circumstances might permit. But it may also be presumed that most of his present followers, some of them having taken quite serious risks to join his group, have been attracted more by the protective nature of his royal figure than by the political perspectives he offers; they are still very much shrouded in mystery. It would be entirely out of the question to have the population interested in anything else, on the political level, than approving decisions taken by Samdech Euv, to use the paternal appellation the prince likes best.

### Needs and Prospects

Nobody should be surprised by the conclusion that traditional forms of politics are extremely prevalent among Cambodians, whatever their allegiances, because, basically, the country has not yet experienced real social and economic modernization, as a by-product of intensified exploitation of resources, both human and natural, by high intensity and massive capital. With its old exports of rice and rubber, and its very low agricultural productivity, Cambodia was and still is a poor country, even if Cambodians tend to believe the opposite. A peaceful settlement, whenever it comes, might, or might not, according to circumstances, bring with it the economic input for a reconstruction and a modernization of production. For the sake of political stability and to allow such an economic process, it would seem safer to look for a new political system which should include a relative modernization of access to as well as the exercise and sharing of power.

At this stage, preliminary reflexion should be the task of Cambodians themselves. They know too well the defects of the regimes under which they have lived. Some new institutions and a new political spirit should be evolved to accommodate not only the several existing parties, or factions, but also those which could emerge if a free choice is given to the Khmers at large. The most probable thing is that present political groups will either explode or be severely diminished in an open competition. Others might grow out of proportion to their real ability to solve the country's



problems. There is a great need to have these new institutions designed by Khmers themselves, to cater for the very specific requirements of Cambodian politics. Otherwise, if there is no agreement between the present factions, the institutional pattern will be designed by foreign patrons who will try to ensure their ability to intervene in the internal affairs of the country. It will come naturally to the mind of all of them.

This reflexion, this search for a new formula should take place before the diplomatic settlement, which otherwise will include a framework in which Cambodia will have to be remoulded. And there is one very good reason why it should take place now.

A date has been given by Hanoi for the evacuation of its military forces: 1990. Most probably this date was chosen as the earliest time when a credible Cambodian army may be raised in the bosom of the Heng Samrin regime. Obviously the Vietnamese want an ally in Cambodia, a force strong enough to guarantee that the security of Vietnam will not be threatened from Cambodia. On the other hand, the proposals for negotiations put up by Hanoi, whatever their acceptability, show that the famous sentence by Pham Van Dong, "the situation is irreversible", should be qualified. The Vietnamese, and we have much proof of this, never believed Cambodia was ripe for a socialist regime; this has been a bone of contention between them and the CPK since the mid-sixties. And they did not push for collectivization in Cambodia. They even left the channels with the world market open. And of course they did not commit the stupidity of trying to "vietnamize" Cambodian society as mediocre war propaganda would like us to believe. They control security, which has far-reaching and sometimes damaging consequences, but it is altogether an entirely different enterprise. Idle talks about "ethnocide" are quite irresponsible and out of context. They come from one-sided minds which are out of touch with the complex realities of the country<sup>4</sup>. The Vietnamese communists know Cambodia well, and they have already withdrawn two times, in 1954 and 1975. They entered Cambodia because they had every reason to believe that if they did not, others would, directly or indirectly, and would attack them. All this is established fact<sup>5</sup>.

---

4 For instance, Marie A. Martin, "Le processus de vietnamisation au Cambodge", *Politique internationale*, 24, été 1984.

5 It is a particularly striking defect of the Hanoi public relation system that the present conflict is always presented in the Western media as resulting from a "Vietnamese invasion". The fact that for two years before this "invasion" the Khmers rouges led an unpublicised but atrocious war in the border areas inside Vietnam is entirely forgotten in most learned commentaries. Nayan Chanda, in his *Brother Enemy*, New York, 1986, provides a good account of this "secret" war which explains why the Vietnamese entered Cambodia in 1978.

If the Vietnamese repeatedly committed themselves to a date for evacuation, both before their own population (and the war is quite unpopular at home, especially in the South) and before their own Cambodian allies, it means they have considered the alternative: either there is an international settlement by 1990 or there is not. If there is one, it includes some provision to guarantee Vietnam's security. Cambodia will then be a kind of neutral country with a non-socialist economy, and among its political forces it will include people whose power and influence will derive from their alliance with Vietnam. But the other situation – no international agreement – is possible too. Some commentators – a minority among experts, I believe – claim that the Vietnamese will not withdraw in this case. But if they had accepted that view, the Vietnamese would not have committed themselves so adamantly. Breaking their own promise would involve a loss of face, increased international condemnation and a further delay in economic take-off, more unrest in Southern Vietnam and more trouble in Cambodia, all things that seem quite undesirable from the Hanoi point of view.

We then have to face what would happen if the Vietnamese withdraw before there is an international agreement. Hanoi thinking could envisage only one possible thing: spreading chaos in Cambodia. Whatever the military growth of the Heng Samrin armed forces, they will not suppress the Khmer rouge. The fight for ultimate power will intensify, not only between the Khmer rouge and the Phnom Penh armies, but also between the Khmer rouge and the other components of the Coalition Government. The most logical prospect is a tacit alliance between these components and the Phnom Penh forces in order to stop the Khmer rouge, bent on destroying all of them. But the fortunes of war are quite unpredictable, at this stage at least, and Pol Pot's army taking Phnom Penh again is a distinct possibility. In that case, two or three million people would flee to Vietnam, the only road open for escape. The Vietnamese army would intervene again but this time with wide support, as the international community is not prepared to accept Pol Pot again. The political future of Cambodia would be extremely grim, whatever the military outcome of such a chaos, which would become a permanent feature of this wretched country. It would then be possible to speak of the destruction of Cambodia as an entity.

I insist that this horrendous scenario, chaos in Cambodia, is based on facts. It belongs to the realm of concrete possibilities. Think of Beirut. It makes an agreement all the more necessary. But it implies also that the maximalist position of ASEAN – negotiation after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops – should be abandoned for a more realistic approach – negotiations along with a withdrawal. It underlines also the need for negotiations between the Khmer parties which should be distinct from that between the powers concerned. Saying this does not support Hanoi's fiction that the Cambodian question should be solved by Cambodians only and that



Hanoi is not concerned. In its essence the Cambodian question is two-fold: one part is international because Cambodia is a battleground where big powers settle their quarrels, as Lebanon and other places can be; and the other one is a very old unresolved problem: what kind of state can be built that would be representative enough to maintain a peaceful development of the country? Historians can reasonably assert that this problem has been open for two centuries...

Nobody denies the right of the Cambodians to have a political body of their own. Since 1979, the ongoing war has not borne any profit for anyone. The positions of both sides are now not very far from each other. The only serious disagreement concerns the Chinese position on the Khmer rouge and their refusal to disarm the factions. A compromise may be sought which could provide, for instance, an integration of most of the Khmer rouge together with the exile of some leaders, like Pol Pot and Ta Mok. Western and ASEAN powers could clearly tell their Chinese friends that the present Khmer rouge leadership is unacceptable on the basis of common law – and common sense. To pave the way, the most useful process is to start now a negotiation among Khmers to try to reach an agreement on a new political system in Cambodia. Those who harbor friendly feelings towards Cambodia should help them to succeed. And fast.

*July, 1987*

### **Addendum: The Afghan Model**

The calculated risk of a long term chaotic civil war just on the other side of the border has been carefully taken. The Soviets are withdrawing their troops from Afghanistan, although they could not reach a political settlement. They know they have enough friends and influence in this war-torn country to keep the conflict going on for years, the factions bleeding each other white. Whatever the outcome, the resulting regime will reign over a ravaged land and will owe something to the Soviets for the establishment of peace and for reconstruction.

This, I believe, gives strong credence to the chaos hypothesis in Cambodia. Intense diplomatic activities, since September 87, have gone a long way towards bringing us closer to an international settlement. In particular, there have been several sessions of talk between the Soviets and the Chinese entirely devoted to the question of Cambodia. Everybody can see the key is there, in a Sino-Soviet agreement, but so far no complete account of the talks has been made available. In Cambodia, Vietnamese troops left the border areas and a sizeable amount of troops, including the high command, have been withdrawn. This did not trigger an increase in insecurity. Obviously, the Khmers rouges are satisfying themselves by stock-

piling weapons, food and other implements and keeping a rather low military profile in order to be in a position to play their cards after the complete withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops, probably by the end of 1989 or the beginning of 1990.

All of a sudden, the West, in particular the United States, on the one hand, and the ASEAN countries, on the other hand, awoke to the real possibility of an agreement which would lead towards a military and political comeback of the Khmers rouges. The Americans realized at the Reagan-Gorbachov meeting in Washington that something was happening, that their policy of letting the Chinese run the show was outdated and dangerous. Which American president would like to be held responsible for the return of Pol Pot to Phnom Penh? They scrambled for re-evaluation. Part of Prince Sihanouk's gestures was designed to ring precisely this bell: what would his return to Cambodia mean as Head of State without an insurance against a new take-over by the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary group? All available information from defectors, including a recently acquired document from inside the Ta Mok group (North and Central Cambodia) point to a strong continuity with the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) line. Its final objective is to regain total control by the elimination of other political groups. In case of negotiation leading to a settlement, the Khmers rouges will probably resort to their old tactics, i.e. a formal split between a politically "acceptable" party, led by some characters like Son Sen and Khieu Samphan, and a "refusal" guerilla group including the real CPK core, Pol Pot, Ta Mok, Nuon Chea, which will remain in the forest, living on accumulated reserves of food, gold and weapons, refusing to bow even to Chinese "wishes", confident that they will be able in the long run to undermine any real attempt to reconstruct a Cambodian state. In order to resist this military sabotage, a new Cambodian state, whatever its political colour, will need to be strong and will require a sizable amount of support from abroad. That is the condition for containing the Khmer rouge deep in the forest and to wait for its natural decline, like the Malayan CP, this being possible only if Thailand agrees to cut all its links with it.

As a diplomatic problem, Cambodia is on the road towards a settlement. But as a social problem, we have seen no progress at all. In spite of several conferences, symposia, papers, talks of every denomination, no serious proposal has been advanced to build a new political system which would bind the Cambodians together and give them a sense of a common destiny. Every faction, or subfaction, is clinging to its own dogmatic and unrealistic point of view. Paradoxically, the most flexible seem to be the people in power in Phnom Penh, probably because they do face reality. But we are still far away from a real solution. In its stead, we are contemplating rivalries, old feuds, struggling ambitions, spiced with the most deadly Cambodian specialty, the dream of power. There is now not a single reason to be optimistic about the post-settlement future.