

**KHMER ROUGE STRATEGIES (1970-78): AN  
EVALUATION OF ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CAMBODIA**

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**DECLARATION**

Certified that the dissertation entitled “**KHMER ROUGE STRATEGIES (1970-78) : AN EVALUATION OF ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CAMBODIA**” submitted by **MS. SARALA JAIN** is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of this university. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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## PREFACE

Khmer Rouge, a Political organization, ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1978 and has remained controversial ever since. It zealously professed in the ideology of radical Marxism – Leninism. Its brand of Communism was most egalitarian. Its carried out guerilla warfare against its adversaries. But the affects of both its ideology and strategies were most disastrous for Cambodians. While fighting against Vietnam, it became the darling of the EU, US and ASEAN Countries but did not retain that good will for long. It did not cooperate with UNAMIC or UNTAC and did not join the democratic process after 1993. It continues to fight against the government forces and therefore it has remained the greatest threat to Cambodian Government.

The main focus of this research work is to examine and analyze the strategies that Khmer Rouge adopted both in war time and post war time and their impact on Cambodia. The first Chapter examines Khmer Rouge in the framework of a political organization with main emphasis on its ideology, institutional structure and mobilization tactics. The second Chapter traces the origin and growth of Khmer Rouge and those forces which helped or hindered it during its formative stages. The third next chapter discusses its main agenda in the domestic sphere and the last fourth chapter has analyzed its foreign policies with main focus on Vietnam and China. Finally concluding observations are given in the last Chapter.

I will remain forever indebted to my supervisor Dr. Ganganath Jha, who has rendered me his constructive and valuable guidance. My sincere thanks goes to him for without his great help and moral support this research work would not have materialized. My heartfelt thanks to my parents who have been the constant source of inspiration and encouragement in my life. Finally I owe a lot to my friends who supported me during my rigorous research work.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the heart of Indochina there is an ancient country of ten million people who used to live reasonably cheerful lives – short of idyllic, no doubt, but not very far short. This country-Cambodia was once a mighty power in the mainland South East Asia. While the Vietnamese were still ruled by China nearly a thousand years ago, and while the Thais had yet to establish their power in the country that today bears their name, the great Cambodian empire with its centre at Angkor was already well established and set on a path that was to make it one of the greatest states in early South East Asian history.<sup>1</sup> At the height of its power in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Angkorian Cambodia ruled over areas of mainland South East Asia that are now parts of Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh city was once a Cambodian provincial capital. The power of the ruler at Angkor stretched far to up the Shore of the Mekong River into distant parts of modern Laos.<sup>2</sup>

In this period of Cambodian greatness, the mighty temples of Angkor were built that still remain as testimony to human energy and artistic capacity. Even in the late thirteenth century, a period that historians now call the declining years of Angkorian Cambodia, a proud ambassador from imperial China could still state without hesitation that Angkor was the greatest of the cities in the southern lands.

Yet Angkorian Cambodia was a fragile state and it collapsed under pressure from the growing power of Thailand in the fifteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Jusmai, Manich M.L., "History of Thailand and Cambodia", Bangkok, Chalermint, 1970, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Osborne, Milton, "Before Kampuchea: Preludes to tragedy", Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1979, p-2.

century. Once Cambodia's decline began it seemed that it would never halt, for as the centuries passed Cambodia faced twin threats of stronger neighbours to both the east and west. The Thai's has been the people who had brought the Angkorian empire down, but it was the Vietnamese to the east and north of Cambodia who from the seventeenth century onwards seemed set on ensuring Cambodia's extinction.<sup>3</sup>

Virtually nothing of this was known in distant Europe and America, which were scarcely even aware of the magnificent temple ruins that lay hidden in the tropical forests until a French explorer published their existence in the middle of the nineteenth century. By that time Cambodia was a vassal of both Thailand and Vietnam and a state whose very existence was in question. During the 1830's Cambodia had undergone the experience of full scale occupation by the Vietnamese who, like their descedants one hundred and forty years later, established an administration in Phnom Penh composed of "their" Cambodians.<sup>4</sup> Only agreement between Vietnam and Thailand that Cambodia should survive as a buffer sate temporarily staved off what appeared to be the certainty of national disappearance. Cambodia was saved from the probability of extinction by France<sup>5</sup>. Hoping unrealistically, to find a way into China from Vietnam, France extended colonial control over Cambodia in 1860s to prevent that weak and scantily populated country falling into the hands of a supposedly hostile. And rival British. The Mekong River run through Cambodia and it was up the Mekong that French, initially, saw their

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p 2

<sup>4</sup> Vickery Michel, "Cambodia (Kampuchea): History, Tragedy and Uncertain Future", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Vol 21., No. 2/4, April-December 1989, p 36.

<sup>5</sup> Jusmai, manich M.L., n-1, p-15

road into China as lying. The Mekong very shortly proved to be no commercial route into China but the French remained in Cambodia.

Amazingly, the serious problems started to crop up only after France left Indochina and granted Cambodia her long demanding independence. However the regional situation was far from conducive for an independent Cambodia to concentrate on development and nation building. On its Eastern frontier, in Vietnam there was a Communist insurgency which had drawn the cold war rival Super Powers along with their allies into the South- East Asia. As the Indo- China war progressed, so the involvement of the countries in the region who joined either of the Side. But the Vietnamese war had the greatest repercussion on those immediate neighbouring countries which shared border with it such as Cambodia and by early 1970s the Cambodians saw themselves drafted, drilled, uprooted, rent by violent factions, infiltrated by fanatic partisans, invaded by armies, driven from their homes and pulverised by explosives dropped from foreign planes<sup>6</sup>. How could this happen?

The Cambodians had no studied designs on neighbor's territory and no irredentist ambitions. Far from seeking involvement in the "national liberation" wars on the region the Cambodian leadership headed by Sihanouk, had worked long and with much success to avoid precisely that involvement. Yet it came not because Cambodians could not abide each other, but because a Cambodian war somehow fitted into the plan of outsiders – both regional and external players.<sup>7</sup> It's fate was sealed as the war between North Vietnam and US escalated. Sihanouk found it increasingly difficult to maintain a neutral stand, to

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<sup>6</sup> Shaplen, Robert. "Time out of Hand: Revolution and Reaction in South East Asia", New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> Simon, Sheldon, W. "War and Politics in Cambodia: A communication Analysis", Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1974, p 4.

sit on the fence and much against his own will, he had to take one side. Thus, the tragic years of Cambodian history was not entirely of his making.

The Cold war at her doorstep not only limited the options before Cambodia, it also created turbulence and instability at the domestic front. And this was exactly the opportunity any radical, ultra nationalist and chauvinist party wait to seize the power, riding on the wave of mass discontent and rebellions. Khmer Rouge had most humblest beginning. Till 1960s hardly people outside the region were aware of its existence. It's growth was most spectacular in 1970's and thanks to internal and external dynamics, it captured Phnom penh in 1975, dislodging the Lon Nol government from the seat of power. It promised the people an age of unlimited happiness for all and people welcome it with open arm.

Their illusions proved to be short lived. In fact, with capture of power by Khmer Rouge, a society collapsed and another was being born from the fierce drive of a revolution which was incontestably the most radical ever to take place in so short a time<sup>8</sup>. The population of a country that had suffered so much in the closing years of second Indo-China war continued to suffer in the years of peace. They were forced to abandon the city life, settled in the countryside and took up the profession of cultivator whether they liked it or not. Worst of all, the cherished socio-political economic institutions were disbanded and people were asked to forget their glorious past, their cultural norms and ethical moors. Khmer Rouge mercilessly tried to mould them according to their own ideological and utopian requirements. And any sign of protest or slightest hesitation in obeying its command led to certain death.

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<sup>8</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, "Cambodia Year Zero" Allen Lane, London, 1978, p 184



It is more than twenty years since Khmer Rouge was overthrown by Vietnamese forces. But still it continues to arouse interest for what it did, for what it undid and for what it didn't. Its rule is the perfect example of the application of an ideology pushed to the farthest limit of its internal logic. Its rigid application had disastrous effects on people who were made to suffer and sacrifice their lives to achieve the Khmer Rouge's ambitions and unachievable goals. In fact, Cambodian atrocities were the most serious that had occurred in the world since Nazism and nothing less than autogenocide<sup>9</sup>. And hence, though Khmer Rouge may be withering away, the tragedies of those terrible four years are certainly not.

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<sup>9</sup> Simon, Sheldon, W., N-7, p- 12

## *Chapter-1*

# **KHMER ROUGE: A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

A political organization is a group of people joined together in the pursuit of common political goals. The membership of a political organization is usually voluntary in nature; people are welcome within its fold as long as they are convinced in its political objectives. These political objectives may be implicit or explicit. The necessity of forming political organizations arises from the fact that they give direction to the mass efforts for any societal changes. In fact, if the causes represented by mass efforts are to continue to be espoused, they will continue through organizational efforts or not at all. Passions can be aroused and for the moment directed, they cannot be sustained. Organization provides continuity and predictability to social processes that would otherwise be episodic and uncertain.<sup>1</sup>

The origin of political organization are found in those social changes which disturb the prestige or the power of the established classes, castes or races, pre –eminently in those influences which have worked so constantly in the evolution of society, the new wealth of trade and commerce, and the concomitant growth of cities.<sup>2</sup> When the power derived from these influences is great enough to challenge the prestige of the ruling classes, the time is ripe for the formation of the political organizations. In other words, political organizations are anti status quoist, they are change oriented. They check the absolutist tendency of ruling class by constantly posing a challenge to them.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, James Q, "Political organizations", Basic Books publishers, New York, 1973, p.207.

<sup>2</sup> McIver, R.M., "The Modern State", Oxford University press, London, 1926, p.396.

They bring in new ideas and concepts, thereby providing vitality to the society.

However, the varieties and activities of political organizations are not uniform across all the societies. Rather it depends on the pattern of power relationships within a country. The greater is the decentralization and dispersion of political authority in a country, greater is the number and variety of politically active organizations. Thus, a democratic, decentralized country invariably has greater number of political organizations than an autocratic/ dictatorship country. The reason is simple: the former views positively a political organization as a means of debate and discussion, freedom of speech and association – the very building blocks of any democratic society. In fact, it encourages the formation of more and more political organizations by providing free access to political power and authority and by giving a wider political space to political organizations.

No political organization can rest on its past. It must always find new issues or revive old ones. It must adapt its fundamental principle or interest so that it will make its appeal effective in current state of public opinion.<sup>3</sup> After all, political organizations are open system “constantly interacting with their environment in the two way process of influencing and being influenced by it”. In order to not to make itself irrelevant or redundant, it must keep pace with the current mood of the masses. It also helps in convincing their members about the value of their membership.

Political organization should not be confused with a political party. It is broader than a political party and more than it. Political organization is also a medium of social expression and action as well

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.401.

as a form of organized special interest. Individuals and groups will seek to vocalize their political desires through it and thereby magnify the potency of their demand on the government. Political organization has its own machinery and personnel in addition to mass supporters whose roots are sunk into a soil composed of habit, self-interest, political theory and history.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the ultimate goal of any political party is to come to power through constitutional and legal means which may not be the case with political organizations. Nor do they are bound by legal means. In fact they do often employ extra constitutional means such as lobbying, pressurizing etc. to get its demand fulfilled.

The main aspects of the political organization can be enumerated as below :

### **IDEOLOGY :**

The ideology is a fundamental foundation of the political organization: it is a guiding, supporting and restraining factor in the political behaviour of individuals, groups and nations. "Prior to Political Organization, beneath it, enveloping it, restricting it, conditioning it is ideology."<sup>5</sup> Rejecting ideology, like rejecting abstraction or being sincere and natural, is more easily said than done.

However, there is no unanimity among the writers on the very meaning of ideology. Karl Marx viewed ideology as the ideas of the ruling (capitalist) class, seeking to rationalize and justify the prevailing order (capitalism) and their privileged position in it. Karl Mannheim, in a similar view, labelled "ideology" as the conservative,

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<sup>4</sup> Wit, Daniel. "Comparative political institutions," Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc. New York, 1953, p.218.

<sup>5</sup> Dahl, Robert A, "A preface to Democratic Theory," university of Chicago press, Chicago, 1956, p.132.

interest based and biased ideas of the dominant class in society. Gramsci and Bahktin, on the other hand understood ideology as a matter of participation rather than one of domination or manipulation.<sup>6</sup> However, a working definition of ideology is that “it is a belief system that explains and justifies a preferred political order for society, either existing or proposed, and offers a strategy (processes, institutional arrangements and programme) for its attainment. It is a verbal image of the good society and the chief means of constructing such a society.”<sup>7</sup> It offers a reasonably coherent body of ideas covering practical means of how to change, reform (or maintain) a political order.<sup>8</sup> Thus, ideology includes a set of basic assumptions, both normative and empirical, about the nature and purposes of man and society and serve to explain and judge the human condition and to guide the development of or preserve a preferred political order.

Ideologies do not indicate the direction we should take or methods we should adopt to achieve what we claim to be our ideological goals. The history of Soviet Union, for instance, does not serve as a guide to the ideology called Marxism. Neither do the doctrines of Marx and Lenin serve as a guide to Soviet history.<sup>9</sup> Not do the ideologies refer to the process, a knowledge of which can indicate how the world will change. In fact, unless we understand that ideological commitment is logically a commitment to action of political significance and that this practically requires that we form or join an appropriate group or political organization, we do not understand what it is to be an adherent of an ideology. In other words,

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<sup>6</sup> Genavebl, Elizabeth Fox, “Ideologies and Realities”, *Orbis*, Fall, 1999, p.532.

<sup>7</sup> Downs, Anthony, “An Economic Theory of Democracy”, New York, Harper, 1957, p.96.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich, Carl J. “Man and his Govt : An Empirical Theory of Politics”, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1963, p.90.

<sup>9</sup> Manning, D.J., “The forms of Ideology”, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1980, p.78.

an ideology demand from its followers to identity their lives with it, accept its tenets and most importantly work loyally for it. Ideology usually exercise a strong emotional appeal (or repulsion) for those who accept (or oppose) it. The power of an deology derives from the feeling it arouses or action it incites-from the human energies it unleashes.<sup>10</sup>

The features of ideology can be enunmerated as given below:

- Ideologies arise in conditions of crisis and in sections of society to whom the hitherto prevailing outlook has become unacceptable.
- Ideology has a broad but varying scope.
- Ideology is a systematic pattern of political thought. Moreover, it is self contained and self sufficient.
- Ideology includes both empirical and normative content.
- Ideology tends to be exclusive, absolute and universal.
- Ideology is a persuasive argument designed normally to motivate active involvement.
- Ideology is personalized and scripturalized having its heroes, sacred documents and rituals.
- Ideology undergoes development but is resistant to fundamental change.
- Ideology is entwined in political movements.

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<sup>10</sup> Lasswell, Herold D and Kaplan, Abraham, "Power and Society : A Framework for political inquiry," Yale university press, New Haven, 1950, p.104.

Ideology performs some important functions in every body's everyday life. It provides a cognitive structure – a formula of ideas through which the universe is perceived, understood, and interpreted. Not only that, it acts as a guide to individual and collective action and judgement as a dynamic force in individual and collective life, providing a sense of mission and purpose, and a resulting commitment to action. And most important of all, ideology defines self-identification. In an important sense, ideology is a personal, group, or societal impressionistic self portrait. Ideology defines the being of men and communities and fore shadows their becoming.

Coming to the ideology of Khmer Rouge, its leaders repeatedly claimed that they were not following any particular “ism” or “model”, rather they have devised their own model. And it was certainly true to some extent. Khmer Rouge had borrowed elements from several ideology and hence their ideology could not be branded with any prevailing ideology. The Khmer leaders drew their fundamental doctrine from several sources. Important among them, even though they hid it from public view until late 1977, were Marxism-Leninism and Maoism. Pre-Revolutionary Khmer society, they believed was engaged in a class struggle between an oppressor class --“imperialist, feudal and capitalist” – and the oppressed class, the workers and peasants. For them, the worker peasant class had expelled the French colonialists and defeated the American imperialists and the Cambodians who served them - the feudal landlords, reactionary capitalists and comprador bourgeoisie.<sup>11</sup> The former oppressor class was replaced by the worker-peasant class when Khmer Rouge came into the power. However Khmer Rouge also diverged from traditional

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.33.

communist practice in several important respects. It gained power at a time when most other communist regimes, having long since crushed internal resistance, had abandoned the use of mass, naked terror, thus contributing to the impression that the Cambodian situation was some thing of an aberration. Nevertheless, the fact is that the history of communism provides numerous precedents for Khmer Rouge policies, including the most inhumane.<sup>12</sup>

Khmer leaders were also greatly influenced by the Mao's thought. The Cambodian Revolution broke to surface at the tail end of Mao's long reign in China, during a virulent period of chinese radical politics. Uncompromising political ideas from radicals in China, such as the empowerment of the poorest peasants and perpetual class warfare, were copied and embellished by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>13</sup> It's ideological pronouncement mirror radical Maoism, especially the primacy of human will power over machinery and weapons, the superiority of wisdom of the common people over academic learning and the power of heroic labour to overcome all nature and material obstacles.<sup>14</sup> They echoed the idea put forward by Mao that technical and theoretical education divorced from the common people and from the work situation itself was a throwback to imperialism. Furthermore, the Khmer leaders displayed a fundamentalist belief in independent national development, somewhat akin to that in Maoist thought. They revered nation self reliance and independence which was echoed in the declaration of Ieng Sary, the deputy Prime Minister that "what we are trying to bring about has never occurred before."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Puddington, Arch. "Pol pot in Retrospect, Commentary, Vol 12, No.2, April 1987, p.50.

<sup>13</sup> Chandler, David, "Epitaph for the Khmer Rouge?!", *New left Review*, No. 205, May-June, 1994, p.89.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, Karl D., "Cambodia 1977 : Gone to Pot", *Asian Survey*, vol.17, Jan 1978, p.89.

<sup>15</sup> Zasloff, Joseph J and Brown Mac Alister, N.14, p.33.



What distinguishes the Khmer leaders from the other revolutionary leaders was their rigid adherence and application of the proclaimed ideology. There was no room for any deviation from their ideology, no matter what the consequences could be. In their hands, the ideology became a dogma when carried to its extreme end. And in its extremity, their ideology left all the touches of practicalities, set up the unachievable utopian goals. Consequently, Khmer Rouge failed to achieve a single goal it had targeted. In fact, Khmer Rouge is a perfect example of utter failure of a rigid ideology.

### **Institutional Structure**

Every political organization has a definite institutional structure to carry out its various functions. An organization must have a hierarchy of Subsidiary agencies / institutions and personnel to perform different specialized functions such as policy making, mobilization, feedback report etc. However, different political organizations have different internal mechanisms and hierarchies. There may be few allied institutions and all the power may be concentrated in the hands of a top few. Or there may be decentralization of power and authority with different subsidiary agencies and personnel were given autonomy to perform special functions independently without much supervision from the high command.

The institutional structure of Khmer Rouge as a political organization was "Angkar" which literally means "Higher organization". Khmer Rouge ruled the country till September 1977 in the name of this mysterious organization. Moreover, it elevated Angkar as the object of adoration, which organized everything, the anonymous Angkar was the incarnation of the people's will.<sup>16</sup> Thus it

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<sup>16</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, "Cambodia year zero," Allen Lane, London, 1978, p.127.

placed Angkar on the higher pedestal of supra human and people were taught to trust it. From day one, 17 April 1975, the Angkar was given as justification to commandeer vehicles, to order people out of hospitals or later to order people to their death. Every act was carried on in the name of Angkar.

Khmer Rouge could sense several benefits in promoting Angkar as the governing institutions, thanks to its anonymous and mysterious status. The very name Angkar instilled fear among Cadres and people equally. Cadres taught that Angkar must be trusted because “it had as many eyes as a pineapple” and saw all wrongdoings.<sup>17</sup> After all, fear was the only useful instrument with Khmer Rouge to maintain Authority. Moreover, an anonymous ruling Angkar, instead of individual leaders, also served the cause of egalitarianism and collective leadership to which the deposed Cambodian communisms were clearly committed.<sup>18</sup> People were asked to obey the dictates of Angkar and not of any particular individual leader. In a similar fashion, the individual leaders were freed of their individual responsibility for any failures and mistakes since every act was the manifestation of the will of Angkar.

However, not much is known about the internal mechanism and hierarchical orderings of Angkar. What were its subsidiary agencies, their works and leadership, the procedure which Angkar followed etc were kept in dark. And since it was accorded the status of deity, people were not permitted to ask these questions. However things became more clear when in 1977, Pol Pot announced the replacement

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<sup>17</sup> Zasloff, Joseph J and Brown, Mac Alister, “The passion of Kampuchea”, *problem of communism*, vol.28, Jan-Feb 1979, p.34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

of Angkar by Cambodian Communist Party (CPC). Since Khmer Rouge Ideology was influenced by Chinese, therefore the structure of the organization they built was the exact replica of the structure as prevailed in PRC. So it had the all powerful "Standing Committee" to make policies implement them and to evaluate the results. This Standing Committee was dominated by a handful few who concentrated all the powers of the organization in their hands. It had its Head Quarter in Phnom Penh. Since it believe in revolutionary warfare. It had the hardcore militia of about of Thirty Five Thousand Soldiers. It had militarily close relation with Chinese who were providing training to Khmer Rouge militia in Chinese arms and ammunition.

## **MOBILIZATION TACTICS**

Political organizations subsidize the costs of political information for members and therefore promote broader involvement in the political system. The empirical findings show that individuals who belong to political organizations are more likely to participate in politics than individuals who do not belong to any political organization.<sup>19</sup> The reason for this is simple-membership of a political organization make an individual aware of the current atmosphere and issues by interacting with other members of the organization. And an informed individual is better equipped to participate in the political system. Thus, political organization mobilizes the individual.

The strength of any political organization depends on its mobilization tactics. The larger the number of persons it is able to motivate and mobilize, the more successful a political organization is considered to be. However, the mobilization undertaken by

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<sup>19</sup> Leighley, Jan, "Mobilization of political participation". The journal of politics, vol.58, No.2, May 1996, p.447.

organization is not uniform over all the issues. It mobilizes the people only over those selective issues which are important for its own survival and growth and which serves the vital interest of its members. Furthermore, the mobilization tactics of any political organization varies from situation to situation and from issues to issues; otherwise it is doomed to fail. However, in every mobilization strategy some underpinnings of emotions and values can be detected. It is doubtful whether the hard facts and realities themselves can mobilize a vast strata of society. Some blendings of emotions makes mobilization more quick and successful.

Political mobilization by an organization may be “Intentional” or “Unintentional”. Organizations may promote political involvement by providing individuals the opportunity to develop skills necessary to engage in various types of political participation. Pollock refers to this as “unintentional” mobilization because it is an “unintended consequence” of individuals activities and experiences in a membership organization.<sup>20</sup> Intentional mobilization, on the other hand, is when the organization deliberately and consciously try to mobilize the individuals around particular issues. Here the individual may not possess the necessary understanding of a complicated issue, but believe in the righteousness and correctness of an organization and tends to get mobilized.

Khmer Rouge adopted two different mobilization tactics during two different period. In the war time period, its mobilization strategy emphasized mainly the real character of ruling disposition – both Sihanouk and Lon Nol’s. It propagated among the people that the Lon Nol government was a mere pawn in the hands of foreign powers, mainly American. It made the American imperialism and subjugation

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.448.

of Cambodia to the American wishes the major mobilization issues. Further it exposed the inability of the ruling government to address the major domestic problems such as law and order, economic under development, national defence and the loopholes of the policies which were ruining the country. During those years, it mobilized the people for a better world where there would be no poverty, inequality and terror once it comes to power. It talked about abolition of landlordism, equal distribution of wealth, collective ownership of lands and no foreign aggression within its territory. These were the issues which had strong practical and emotional appeal to the people in a war time and poverty stricken period.

But after Khmer Rouge came to power, it adopted an altogether different mobilization tactics. When it failed to achieve the world it had dreamt and counter many failures in almost all the fronts, it resorted more and more to terror, fear and coercion to mobilize the people.

In every respects, Khmer Rouge was a political organization which had the most humblest beginning. In fact, till 1960s, people outside the region was not even aware of its existence. Few had ever dreamt it to be a ruling power. But it did capture power in 1975 and went on to establish a regime which was undoubtedly the most inhuman and brutal in the world history comparable only with Nazism and Fascism. So, let's trace the evolution of Khmer Rouge and the way it came to power in the next chapter.

## *Chapter-II*

### **KHMER ROUGE: ORIGIN AND GROWTH**

History is witness to the simple truth that no political movement has ever grown out of vacuum at a single stroke. Rather they have turbulent beginning and torturous evolutionary growth. And Khmer Rouge was no exception.

The origins of the Khmer Rouge date from the anti-colonialist struggle against the French. In early 1930, on the initiative of the Ho Chi Minh, the Indo-China Communist Party (ICP) was founded. It was joined by a newly formed Cambodian section composed solely of Vietnamese and Chinese nationals living in Cambodia, who could exert "no" profound influence upon the Khmer people. Vietnamese communists thus took up the task of organizing a communist movement in Kampuchea but discounted the possibility of a separate Cambodian revolution. As a communist document of 1934 put it, "there is no place for considering a Cambodian revolution on its own. There can only be an Indo-Chinese Revolution".<sup>1</sup> Before the end of the World War II, however, little organizational work was carried out in Kampuchea. After 1945, Vietnamese communists were much more active in their Kampuchea oriented efforts. Operating through liaison organs both in Thailand (until the Right wing military coup there in 1947) and Southern Vietnam, as well as through cadres sent into Kampuchea itself, they encouraged, encadred and then attempted to establish communist hegemony over the movement for independence that was developing there. Although the movement they supported gave the French a good deal of trouble, the Vietnamese were not

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<sup>1</sup> Osborne, Milton, "Kampuchea and Vietnam: A Historical Perspective", Pacific Community, Vol. 9, No. 3, April 1978, p. 257.

completely successful in consolidating a communist movement or communist leadership of the independence movement in Kampuchea.

The Vietnamese supported resistance groups were fragmented geographically and faced credible competition from right wing maquisards and then King Norodom Sihanouk for popular recognition as the leader of the struggle for Kampuchean National Independence.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), which was founded in September 1951 as a result of the Vietnamese decision to split the ICP into three national parties, never achieved the status of communist party or genuine independence from the Vietnam Workers' Party (which succeeded the ICP in Vietnam). Thus, according to VWP documents, the KPRP was "not a vanguard party of the working class", but rather, "The vanguard party of the nation gathering together all the patriotic and progressive elements of the Khmer population", and the Vietnamese Party reserved the right to supervise the activities of its brother parties in Kampuchea and Laos".<sup>3</sup> Viet Minh influence over KPRP was easily maintained through the mainly ethnic Vietnamese cadres it had trained, who continued to predominate at the highest administrative levels".<sup>4</sup>

The KPRP suffered another blow at the Geneva conference in 1954, when the Vietnamese delegation acceding to pressure from the Soviet Union, tautly accepted Vietminh withdrawal from Laos and Kampuchea in return for an assurance that their neutralization would prelude the appearance of US military bases there.<sup>5</sup> It failed to win

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<sup>2</sup> Heder, Stephen, "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle: The Origins of an Independent Revolution", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Jan-March, 1979, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Kiernan, Ben, "How Pol Pot Came to Power", London, Verso, 1985, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> Coldwell, Malcom and Tan, Lek, "Cambodia in the South East Asian War", New York, Monthly Review Press, 1973, p. 89.

either international recognition of the legitimacy of the KPRP's resistance government of a Regroupment Zone for its forces within Kampuchea. As a result, the Khmer Issarak-liberated areas were finally handed over to the Royal government of Cambodia. In other word, the realities of the battlefield and socialist solidarity were sacrificed in the Geneva Conference.<sup>6</sup> On Vietnamese advice, many leaders of the KPRP took refuge in Northern Vietnam after Geneva, while the leaders and cadres, who stayed behind turned to almost total reliance upon urban oriented legal and political (i.e.; unarmed) struggle, went public and formed the people's group (Krom Pracheachon) political party and set up a number of newspapers and journals to protect the interests of revolution in Kampuchea. However the KPRP, in its truncated form, could not survive for long. Effectively blocked from parliamentary activity by Sihanouk's electoral machinery devoid of Vietminh help, and subject to arbitrary arrest, closure of publications and even assassination, the in-country elements of the KPRP leadership were decimated. By the end of the 1950s, 90% of its countryside infrastructure were neutralized in one way or another thanks to Sihanouk's police, with advice and material aid from US.<sup>7</sup>

Under these circumstances the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) was founded in September 1960. The membership of this party was drawn from 2 sources: first from among surviving members of old ICP and the Khmer's People Party; and second from among Kampuchean who had gone to France as students after world war II, became radicalized and returned to Kampuchea with hopes of making

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<sup>6</sup> Suryanarayan, V and Jose, Alice, "Inter Communist Conflicts- China Vietnam and Cambodia, Link, July, 1992, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Discourse on Comrade Pol Pot (typescript distributed by the Kampuchean Embassy in Peking), Sept. 27, 1977, p. 16.





revolution in their native country. Included in the first group, whose feelings towards the Vietnamese were probably often as bitter as they were comradely, was Jaub Samauth. Included in the second group were Saloth Sar (later Pol Pot) who returned to Kampuchea in 1953 to join Maquis, Ieng Sary who returned in 1957, Son Sen and Khieu Samphan. The newly founded CPK was headed by Tarch Samouth and adopted a long-term revolutionary line that added armed self-defence to political struggle. It was this CPK, which later came to known as Khmer Rouge.

Khmer Rouge was the creation of dynamic interaction between internal and external forces. Indeed, it is very difficult to say what future Cambodia and its politics might have without the unwarranted involvement of external players. They exacerbated the internal problems and acted like the catalyst for Khmer Rouge's revolution.

#### **INTERNAL SITUATIONS: FACILITATING INFLUENCE**

The myriad problems at domestic front facilitated the spectacular growth and popularity of CPK in 1960s. It capitalized on the failure of Sihanouk regime, made all the right moves and by the end of 1960s, it has become a mass movement, ventilating the frustration and aggression of rural peasantry.

The question is how did it happen. Certainly, Sihanouk played his cards extremely well. He tried to build a political consensus by bringing all the divided political groups and opinions under his "Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community). He held the parliamentary elections in 1955 and 1958 where his Sangkum won the largest number of votes thereby creating political stability. He even high jacked the agenda of CPK and adopted aspects of its programme of economic reforms. He sought to defuse the pressure from the left by



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simultaneously adopting aspects of its demands and suppressing its activities. A new wave of arrests and assassinations of communists was unleashed in 1961-62, the most important of which was the unpublicized liquidation of Touch Samouth by Sihanouk's police.<sup>8</sup> As the country approached the 1962-elections in which a Sangkum victory was certain, evidence of the widening social rifts between right and left mounted. In January 1962, Sihanouk banned the Pracheachon Party's newspaper and arrested its secretary General Non Suon along with thirteen of his associates on a charge of conspiring with agents of a foreign power to overthrow the regime.<sup>9</sup>

Here Sihanouk went wrong. His ruthless reprisals, and halfhearted reforms, which satisfied neither Conservatives nor Progressive elements of society and arbitrary arrests, had a double effect. First, it severed the most important remaining personal link between the CPK and the old ICP and catapulted the most influential of the returned students - Pol Pot - into the position of party leadership. Put otherwise, it brought the ascendancy of hardliners Ieng Sary, Pol Pot and Son Sen (who saw Prince Sihanouk as the chief enemy of people, preventing a true revolution from taking place and who must therefore to be defeated by armed combat), over the moderates Khieu Samphan, Hau Youn, Hu Nim and Chau Seng (who held a softer tendency - they should cooperate with prince because he was opposed to American imperialism and what they must do was to act within the structures of the kingdom).<sup>10</sup> Second, it increased the surviving CPK leadership, skepticism regarding the possibility of working with the Sihanouk regime.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview of Comrade Pol Pot to the Delegation of Yugoslav Journalists, March 1978, Mincegrph, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Coldwell, Melcom and Tan Lek, N-5, p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, "Cambodia year zero", London, Allen Lane, 1978, p. 179.

Secret police pressure on the left intensified during 1963 and precipitated the first formal rupture within Sangkum. It compounded the CPK's skepticism concerning the wisdom of forming a United Front with Sihanouk and the feasibility of continued primary emphasis on legal and urban organizing activities. The party's most important legal cadre, Khieu Samphan, and an associate, Hou Youn, was being hounded from their cabinet posts by Rightist criticism. Hundreds of teachers, university professors, and journalists began to disappear. Strikes in state owned enterprises and student rioting against the Sihanouk regime in the provincial capital of Seam Reap had resulted in an escalation of repressive threats and the exposure of leading CPK cadres, including Pol Pot, to public criticism by Sihanouk, which many felt was a prelude to imprisonment or worse.

These events probably contributed to the CPK's decision, presumably taken at its second National Congress, held sometime in 1963, to send 90% of the membership of the Party Central Committee to the countryside.<sup>11</sup> There they began to direct the organization of peasant opposition to the Sihanouk regime. Thus, Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Son Sen and other CPK Central Committee members went to the remote rural areas. Another reason for the CPK's decision to move into countryside was that Sihanouk's external anti-imperialism did not coincide with tolerance for internal communism. The CPK believed it had to draw away from Sihanouk in order to survive. It believed that it had to survive in order to organize strong anti-imperialist forces among the Kampuchean people that would oppose the elements that Sihanouk's domestic policies were strengthening. It believed that in Kampuchea, "the people" meant the peasantry. Therefore, CPK had to go into the countryside and meet peasant grievances against the

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<sup>11</sup> Pol, Pot, N. 7, p. 37.

Sihanouk regime not only because of the unviable situation in the cities, but also in order to fight imperialism.<sup>12</sup>

Coming to the economic scenario, Sihanouk announced in November 1963 that he was introducing measures to nationalize the country's export and import trade, and that he was nationalizing other industries and services including banks, insurance offices and distilleries.<sup>13</sup> A government agency known as SONEXIM (Societe Nationale d' Exportation-Importation) and two State Banks (la Banque Khmere Pour le Commerce and l' Indana Jati or Credit National) appeared to implement his policies. He also announced his rejection of any further American aid.<sup>14</sup> However, these economic measures, instead of paying dividend, backfired over the long run they in fact had the effects on the one hand of reducing the standard of living of the peasantry and thus of encouraging its rebelliousness, and on the other hand, of alienating but not destroying the anti-Sihanouk, pro American elements entrenched in the Sangkum and thus of encouraging their thoughts of a coup d' etat. As the peasantry grew more rebellious, and the right wing forces in Sangkum more desperate, the CPK was drawn deeper into rural revolution and driven more completely from the cities.<sup>15</sup>

Because of renunciation of American aid greatly reduced the amount of funds available to the Sihanouk regime both to balance its domestic budget and to pay for imports, the Phnom Penh government after November 1963 struggled to increase Kampuchean export earnings, especially rice export earnings. One means of doing this was

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<sup>12</sup> Pol, Pot, N. 7, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Osborne, Milton, "Before Kampuchea: Preludes to Tragedy", London, George Allen & Unwin, 1979, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> Heder, Stephen, No. 2, p. 5.

to lower the official price at which rice was purchased from the peasants. Thus, the average price offered to rice producers was reduced by 20% from 1963 to 1964.<sup>16</sup> This reduction not only tended to lower peasant incomes, it contributed to the stagnation in rice production due to unprofitability that brought about a general economic crisis in the rural areas after 1963. It also encouraged smuggling and peasant reluctance to deal with agents and government. The rural economic and political situation drew the CPK deeper into involvement with peasant grievances against the Sihanouk regime and improved its prospects for organizing peasants around the theme of land reform, which became a party slogan in 1964.<sup>17</sup>

Sihanouk's November 1963 moves also hurt the army and the urban elite. The army lost the American funds that financed the salaries of officers and men. The flow of American arms and spare parts ceased. As the years rolled by, the army became increasingly frustrated and angry. The army's ineffectiveness no doubt made it easier for the CPK to continue its work in the countryside and thus aided its struggle. The standard of living of the urban elite, was also undermined by Sihanouk's reforms, which entailed austerity for most and ostentatious corruption for only a few who held down strategic posts in the statist economy. The urban elite had been able to sustain luxurious life styles beyond the power of the Cambodian economy only as long as American aid was flowing. An abrupt end was put to all multiple openings for personal profiteering that the American presence and lavish American funds had offered. This created a social basis in the urban areas for a right wing move against Sihanouk, the objectives of which would be to undo nationalization; to punish

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Pol. Pot, No. 7, p. 38.

Sihanouk's corrupt entourage, to bring back Americans and to drive all leftists from legitimate political life.

The peasant movement led by CPK became strong by 1963. At the end of 1964 and the beginning of 1965, there was unrest among the tribal people in the North East in response to nomadic lands being taken over by capitalist farmers.<sup>18</sup> But on the vital question of whether the rural social and economic pattern in Cambodia provided opportunities for a communist insurgency opinion differs while Ben Kiernan argues affirmatively. Sheldon W. Simon<sup>19</sup> gives a negative answer. According to the latter, Cambodia has been remarkably free of tenancy - some 95% of Khmer peasants were estimated as owning their own 'fertile' land. Indebtedness was 'moderate', and with a population of only seven million, over population appears to be no problem. Nevertheless, he agrees that certain characteristics of the Cambodian political situation seemed to fit into revolutionary paradigm. Cambodia's economic development level was low, and the economy was decentralized, the government maintained only precarious control beyond the major cities, for its military arm was underdeveloped. There was, then a kind of political vacuum in the countryside, into which an organized political opposition to Phnom Penh could move.

By 1966, Sihanouk was increasingly unwilling to involve himself in the details of administration and he was reluctant to take broad policy decisions.<sup>20</sup> His control of Cambodian state ceased to be certain. Sihanouk made his choice by linking his own political future with the right. He believed that Cambodia's conservatives were his

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<sup>18</sup> Kiernan, Ben, N. 4, p. 216.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Sheldon W., "War and Politics in Cambodia: A Communications Analysis", Duke University Press, North Carolina, 1974, p. 119.

<sup>20</sup> Osborne, Milton, N. 13, p. 187.

natural allies, and this was the thinking that led him to allow the elections of September 1966 to go forward without his usual procedure of designating who should be the candidate to represent the prince's political movement, the Sangkum. It resulted in the Right victory and most conservative national assembly in the Kampuchea's history with many 'buying' their way into it. Sihanouk further approved the nomination of General Lon Nol to be new prime minister.

The events of 1966 convinced many on the left that there was no alternative to revolution while they planted the thought ever more firmly in the minds of the Right that sooner or later Sihanouk would have to go. Cambodian leftists increased their insurgency in Kampong Chom and Battambang provinces. Samlaut 'Jacquerie' (peasant uprising) in 1967 further demonstrated the strengths of people rebellion. By the end of 1968 and despite Sihanouk's vigorous activities affected eleven of Cambodia's nineteen provinces were affected by Khmer Rouge operations, mainly in the east and northeast, but some also in parts of western Cambodia.<sup>21</sup> Khmer Rouge decided to abandoned all forms of cooperation with the Sihanouk regime and to make preparations to form, as soon as possible, a revolutionary army with which to wage all out armed struggle against it. Khmer Rouge was gaining in popularity and swelling in ranks. Many Cambodians joined it as cadres, not because all of them had a highly developed grasp of communist theory but rather a sense of total disgust with the system of government that prevailed in Cambodia with the men who were ready to serve that system, and with Sihanouk for presiding over such a state.

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<sup>21</sup> Simon, Sheldon, W. N. 19, p. 48.

## EXTERNAL DYNAMICS: A CONSTRAINING FACTOR

Indeed, it will be naïve to discuss Khmer Rouge phenomenon without placing it in the overarching contest of cold war ideological blocs and communist war in Vietnam. The ups and downs of Khmer Route was most succinctly and directly linked with the role of external powers and their perceptions and interpretations of Cambodia's Internal developments. Cambodia was perceived by both the parties of Vietnam war (North Vietnam and China on one side and US and Saigon Regime on the other) as linked to the struggle for South Vietnam to the extent that whoever commanded the territory of Cambodia, let alone its government, would be in a position to threaten or protect that entity.

As discussed previously, it was Vietminh, which organized the incipient communist movement in Cambodia, trained its cadres and supplied them both sanctuaries and weapons. Up to 1954, the objectives of the Vietnamese and Khmer communist movements converged. Similarly the goals of the Vietminh and China coincided: exclusion of any hostile colonial or neocolonial military power from the region and a genuine chance for the peoples of the region to determine their own future without outside interference. Geneva conference changed this, however, and after 1954, the Vietnamese and Chinese no longer envisaged a leading role for KPRP, which hampered badly its and its later incarnation CPK's growth. And indeed, the Cambodian Communist Party (the Khmer Rouge) was not a particularly formidable organization before Sihanouk was deposed in March 1970. At that time, the strength of the Khmer Rouge guerilla was generously estimated at a maximum of 3000.<sup>22</sup> Names that have become relatively well known in the 1970s were simply unknown to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 49.



all but the most acute foreign observers, and not always to them in the 1960s. Few, if any, who wrote about Cambodian politics in the 1960s, had heard of Ieng Sary or Saloth Sar.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the external actors cast a constraining and inhibitory impact on Khmer Rouge in late 1950s and 1960s.

After independence, Sihanouk established diplomatic relations with Hanoi and in early 1956, he rejected blandishments to join SEATO. The effect was that Hanoi now recognized Sihanouk as the principal ally in securing Kampuchea's neutralization in the fight against the US. Since the late 1950s, state to state relations between Sihanouk's regime and the DRV had been improving and the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) had evidently come to believe that it should be part of the CPK's task to employ united front tactics to encourage this trend and to keep Sihanouk out of the American Camp. Similar strains complicated the CPK's relations with China, because the People's Republic had also been cultivating the Sihanouk regime with hopes of deepening its commitment to an effectively anti-US neutrality.<sup>24</sup>

The escalation of Vietnam war resulted in the establishment of Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia for hospitals, rest and store houses for arms and ammunition. The Vietnamese communists with Sihanouk's at least tacit agreement were using sections of northeastern Cambodia for the shipment of supplies to their troops fighting the Americans and the forces of the Saigon regime in Southern Vietnam. Ships from the socialist countries used to unload supplies for Vietnam in the port of Sihanoukville.<sup>25</sup> This was coming from Sihanouk

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<sup>23</sup> Osborne, Milton, N. 13, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, Roger, "Cambodia's Foreign Policy", Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1965, p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> Sruyanarayan, V. and Jose Alice, N. 6, p. 29.

despite his understandable obsession about the sanctity of his frontiers and a constant fear of a large invasion. Naturally, Hanoi was comfortable with Sihanouk. Advantages such as these contributed to Vietnam's objection to Khmer Rouge inspired communist revolution. Whatever the objective political-economic conditions, Hanoi believed that Kampuchean struggle for Socialism should wait upon Vietnamese victory which was consistent with the Vietnamese view that Cambodia, as the "auxiliary battlefield" in the Indo-China conflict, would be strongly influenced by the outcome in "primary battlefield", - South Vietnam.<sup>26</sup>

Vietnamese had misgivings about CPK's decision to devote almost all of its energies for organizing and mobilizing peasant opposition to Sihanouk regime and about CPK's analysis of the situation. The Vietnamese had begun a new campaign to improve relations with Sihanouk in May 1963 by recognizing Kampuchean sovereignty over islands in the gulf of Siam claimed by the Diem regime.<sup>27</sup> The Vietnamese apparently felt that the CPK's choice of extensive rural organizing activities, which Sihanouk could easily blame on "Vietnamese communist" subversion, could undermine this campaign, which was no doubt considered essential for encouraging Sihanouk's anti-Americanism and anti-Diemism, and thus for protecting the flank of the struggle to liberate South Vietnam.

The CPK's position probably did not please the Chinese either, for similar, if less immediate reasons. In fact, Sihanouk's Cambodia had never been viewed by China as ripe for revolution. The prince

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<sup>26</sup> Chandler, D.P. and Kiernan, Ben, (ed.), "Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays, New Heaven, Yale University Press, 1983, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, Roger, N. 24, p. 121.

volatile nationalism was perceived favourably in Peking and Cambodia was even included as a member of the anti-imperialist camp. It was unnecessary for the country to go communist so long as it remained cut off from western ties. Chinese policy in practice tended to overlook the internal character of individual government and instead to emphasize on their anti-imperialist convictions. Thus, in May 1963, then Chinese president Liu Shaoqui had visited Kampuchea to endorse China's friendship with Sihanouk.<sup>28</sup> Liu and the Chinese foreign policy establishment as a whole probably felt, like the Vietnamese, the CPK should not so nearly abandon all efforts to build up anti-imperialist, United front organizations to support Sihanouk, that it should try hard to make the best opportunities created by Sihanouk's anti-imperialism to build up party strength, that it should give more consideration to 'working with Sihanouk' to keep the Americans out of Kampuchea, which would protect socialist Vietnam and socialist China.

Vietnamese and Chinese displeasure with the CPK's choice of tactics was probably reinforced by Sihanouk's diplomatic moves in late 1963. In August, he severed his ties with South Vietnam. More important in November, he renounced all American military and economic aid. Then he altogether severed his diplomatic ties with US in May, 1965. Sihanouk's relations with US deteriorated even further, mainly as a result of American and South Vietnamese attacks on Kampuchean border villages and the operations of CIA financed anti-Sihanouk guerillas. American persistence in disregarding Kampuchea's appeal for guarantee of its neutrality against all foreign threats including Thai and South Vietnamese threats also alienated Sihanouk. In these circumstances, Sihanouk's relations with China and the DRV both of which consistently condemned attacks on Kampuchean border

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

villages and supported most of Sihanouk's diplomatic initiatives improved. Obviously, both China and DRV in this situation might have liked to have seen the CPK reassess its analysis of the nature of the Sihanouk regime and would have preferred that the CPK at least modify its tactics of struggle against Sihanouk to allow more room for cooperation with him. Its logical and natural implication was that China and DRV was constraining the independent growth of Khmer Rouge.

This became more explicit during the visit undertaken by Pol Pot and other leading CPK cadres to Hanoi sometime in summer 1965. In Hanoi, agreement was apparently reached that Vietnamese communist forces would be permitted to take refuge in zones under the control of CPK.<sup>29</sup> The Vietnamese counseled them the strategy of criticizing and pressurizing but 'not undermining' the Sihanoukist regime which is readily understandable from Hanoi's point of view of maintaining the regional status quo.<sup>30</sup> From there, Pol Pot traveled to China and found that Chinese attitude towards the struggle tactics being pursued by CPK was not much more favorable than that of Vietnamese.

As the Vietnam war escalated in 1966, North Vietnamese forces began to carve infiltration branches of the Ho Chi Minh trail through eastern Cambodia, and beleaguered Viet Cong forces were increasingly driven to seek refuge across the Cambodian border. In order to make sure of a sanctuary safe from Cambodia as well as American harassment, the Viet Cong probably encouraged a series of communist insurrections in the eastern Cambodian provinces of Battambang, Kampong Speu, Kompot, Kohkong and Rattanakiri

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<sup>29</sup> Heder, Stephen, No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Kierman, Ben, N. 4, p. 230.

during 1967-68. Further, 1967 saw the height of proletarian Cultural Revolution in China when the foreign ministry was dominated by most radical elements. All Chinese previous skepticism about Khmer Rouge tactics and anti-Sihanouk activities disappeared into the thin air. Rather it seemed that Chinese influence pushed the Khmer revolutionaries over the edge into active revolution. Thus both VWP and China were actively supporting Khmer Rouge in 1967 and a communist revolution in Cambodia seemed immanent.

But things were not to be. As the external law and order problem deteriorated and peasants' rebellions grew in number, Sihanouk came under the Right pressure. Cambodia had elected most conservative National Assembly in 1966 and Sihanouk could no longer turn a blind eye to Vietnamese inspired rural revolutions. As the Viet Cong numbers were growing. Sihanouk was finding them increasingly upsetting: would they ever leave, once the war was over? He felt himself betrayed by the Vietnamese communists at this point, for he had believed that both DRV and NLF, in exchange for propaganda and diplomatic support, had agreed to Cambodia's version of its frontiers and their inviolability. He demanded that the Vietnamese withdraw their support and implied that they would lose Kampuchea's friendship, which presumably meant loss of the use of Kampuchean territory and its part, if they did not.<sup>31</sup>

However, Vietnamese communists after their military failure of the Tet offensive of January 1968 became increasingly dependent on the facilities provided by and through Cambodia for the prosecution of war in South Vietnam. Sihanouk's benign neutrality was now more valuable than ever. Further, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong relied heavily on Cambodian rice supplies from 1965. Most of these

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<sup>31</sup> Heder, Stephen, N. 2, p. 14.

supplies were provided by Chinese merchants through black market outlets and hence were lost as a source of foreign exchange. Hence, Cambodian government's acquiescence in the active border smuggling was necessary. So whatever little bonhomie was there between VWP and Kher Rouge dissipated after Tet offensive. In 1968, when Sihanouk's repression became yet more intense with the shooting and arrest of Khmer communists, "the major Vietnamese concern was still the increasing destabilization of the Sihanouk's regime."<sup>32</sup> To quote the 'Black Book' published in September 1978, "there was a fundamental contradiction between the Cambodian Revolution and the Vietnamese revolution. The Vietnamese wanted to put the Cambodian revolution under their thumb".<sup>33</sup> Further, there was a reversion of Chinese policy of supporting Khmer Rouge in late 1967. Indeed, in a 'People's Daily Map' of the world published in 1968, only Cambodia and Pakistan were excluded from a list of Asian states identified as ripe for communist revolution.<sup>34</sup> So, Khmer Rouge plan to wage an anti-Sihanoukist war had to put on hold without Chinese and Vietnamese supports.

This growing wedge between Khmer Rouge on one side and Vietnam and China on the other was exacerbated by the signs of improvements in Sihanouk-American relations. By 1969, Sihanouk openly accused Hanoi of "Vietnamizing our territory". Kampuchea re-established diplomatic ties with US and signed an accord with US backed Mekong project and applied for the membership in three US dominated international lending institutions International Monetary Fund, World Bank and Asian Development Bank. At the same time Sihanouk closed the port of Sihanoukville to Viet Cong supplies and

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<sup>32</sup> Kiernan, Ben, N. 4, p. 275.

<sup>33</sup> Suryanarayan, V. and Jose, Alice, N. 6, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Simon, Sheldon, W., N. 19, p. 11.

apparently agreed to an unacknowledged American Air bombardment of eastern Cambodia.<sup>35</sup> This rapture in Sihanouk-Vietnamese communists had direct impact on VWP and Khmer Rouge relation. The contradictions between VWP's needs in terms of liberating the south and the CPK's needs in terms of revolutionizing Kampuchea had become most acute. Each party saw the other as thinking and acting only in terms of its own interests.

### **THE COUP: BLESSING IN DISGUISE FOR KHMER ROUGE**

The overthrow of Sihanouk and assumption of power by Lon Nol in March 1970 provided the long awaited opportunity for the Khmer Communist to come centre stage. Even before the coup, Lon Nol had cut the flow of supplies from Kampong Son to the Vietnamese. The coup itself was the occasion for a demand that Vietnamese forces immediately and unconditionally evacuate from Kampuchean territory. Moreover, the coup was followed at the end of April, by a full scale US and South Vietnamese assault on the Vietnamese base areas, which, however idiotic in a strategic sense, did cost the Vietnamese dearly in the immediate tactical sense, and in terms of supplies and to lesser extent lives.<sup>36</sup>

With the overthrow of prince, one of the main fetters restraining the Vietnamese communists was broken. Vietminh forces no longer had to concern themselves with Sihanouk's carefully forged left leaning non-alignment which rendered any move against Cambodia a public embarrassment to them. A new Cambodian regime (Lon Nol Sirik Matak clique) had come to power with an already established

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> New York Times, June 4,5,7,9,29,30, 1970.

reputation for anticommunism, prepared to take on the Vietnamese as a foreign aggressor. So Viet Cong, forgetting its earlier animosity towards Khmer Rouge started looking for anyone or party which could organize an effective opposition to Lon Nol regime. At this golden moment China hosted the Indo-Chinese People's Summit Conference on April 24-25, 1970.<sup>37</sup> It formalized an alliance among the 'Liberation Movements' of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. So when subsequently, Sihanouk announced the formation of his exile government in China called the Royal United National Front Government of Kampuchea (or GRUNK, its French acronym), Hanoi gladly recognized and supported it and its military arm - FUNK (the Front Unie Nationale du Kampuchea). Sihanouk found in Khmer Rouge the best possible external ally since it was war weary expert guerilla organization. His participation added legitimacy to the Khmer Rouge cause and it exploit Sihanouk's name to get the support of Cambodian peasantry. Further, Sihanouk's endorsement brought support from many of his followers (subsequently known as Khmer Rumda), who would otherwise have been unwilling to accept the revolutionary leadership.

Thus, the post coup period saw a coalescing of interests of Sihanouk, Khmer Rouge, North Vietnam and China. The earlier constraining and inhibiting external influence was no longer there on Khmer Rouge. Rather, China backed it with massive material and financial aid besides weapons. Similarly, Vietminh resumed fighting policy planning and advising the Cambodian Liberation Front (of which Khmer Rouge was main constituent). The success of Chelna I and Chenla II operations amply demonstrated that North Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge forces could coordinate their fighting plans.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Coldwell, Melcom and Tan Lek, N. 5, p. 278.

<sup>38</sup> Simon Sheldon, N. 19, p. 85.



Khmer Rouge through Ieng Sary (its chief spokesman in FUNK inside Cambodia) gave positive signals about cementing the bonds between Viet Cong and Front. He declared: "This solidarity between our two peoples is a combat solidarity forged in the blazing flames of the revolutionary war for liberation of our two countries. It is permanent because our two peoples who are advancing toward the complete liberation of their respective countries need it for reconstruction."<sup>39</sup> By midsummer, 1970, with the help of the Vietnamese communists the Khmer Rouge had strengthened its following and political position to become the only well organized and experienced force within the National Liberation Army (NLA) providing perhaps 10000 to 15000 indigenous troops.<sup>40</sup>

The Khmer Rouge and Viet Cong had little difficulty in expanding their activities through the rural areas of Cambodia. Survivors of government suppression often chose to take to jungle rather than risk arrest by returning home. Coming into contact with guerillas, they were encouraged to take up arms in the name of Sihanouk's liberation army. The communist tactics were to draw Cambodian fire into villages, then to pull back and permit government forces to occupy a scene of death, destruction and new additions to the ever growing stream of refugees, who constituted an additional burden on the hard pressed Lon Nol regime. Then they will discredit Phnom Penh's inability to provide for the basic welfare even to the capital's population, thus undermining national morale. Another tactics was to cut the major highways into Phnom Penh in order to interdict the flow of raw materials and processed goods, necessary to keep the small industrial sector of economy operation. It resulted in the scarcity of

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<sup>39</sup> Simon Sheldon, N. 19, p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

goods and roaring inflation, which tremendously eroded Lon Nol's major base of popular support-intellectual and urban salaried classes.

These strategies of Khmer Rouge bore fruits. By 1971, the liberation forces overrun Cambodian border areas. They were fanning out all over Cambodia. The Cambodian left had reached an advanced stage of development of armed struggle, some of their leaders, such as Ieng Sany, Khieu Samphan, Hou Yous and Hu Nim had been guerillas for a number of years.<sup>41</sup> In a December 1, 1971 Press Conference in Paris, Chau Seng claimed that GRUNC controlled four fifths of Cambodia's territory and five sevenths of the population.<sup>42</sup> In the ensuing two years, Lon Nol army gradually withdrew from forward positions in much of the Cambodia in the face of vastly superior Vietnamese Cambodian communist forces. Rocket and Sapper attacks on Phnom Penh itself become virtually a monthly occurrence from spring of 1972, as a warning to the government to keep its forces close to the capital.<sup>43</sup>

However, the growing cooperation between Khmer Rouge and Viet Minh did not last long. The Paris Peace Agreement on Vietnam in 1973 put an end to their comradeship. One of the terms of that agreement was that the People's Army of Vietnam should withdraw from Cambodia (and also Laos) even though it had not yet installed a communist government in Phnom Penh.<sup>44</sup> As part of the package deal, the Vietnamese asked the Khmer Rouge to negotiate a settlement with Lon Nol, in other words, abandon the struggle. The Cambodian

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<sup>41</sup> Coldwell, Melcom and Tan, Lek, N. 5, p. 311.

<sup>42</sup> Pool, Peter, "Cambodia - the cost of survival", Asian Survey, Vol. XI, No. 1, Feb 1972, p.150.

<sup>43</sup> Simon, Sheldon W., N. 19, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup> Duncanson, Dennis, "Cambodian - An Elusive Nationhood", Australian Outlook, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1980, p. 258.

communists viewed Paris Peace Agreement as a stab in the back by Vietnam and it was increasingly viewed as an enemy rather than a friend.<sup>45</sup>

However, at this time, Vietnamese communists could not bulldoze Khmer Rouge to obey its advice. Khmer Rouge thought, with justification, that since the Lon Nol regime was utterly discredited, a military push would hasten its victory. Further, Vietnamese withdrawal did not hamper Khmer Rouge much. In fact from 1972 onwards it had started erecting indigenous communist infrastructure in countryside.<sup>46</sup> Further, Cambodia People's Liberation Armed Forces (CPLAF) offensives in the winter and spring of 1973 indicated a shift of fighting responsibilities to the FUNK. No doubt, Vietnam ceasefire lead to a cessation of communist supplies to FUNK forces, but its negative impact was mitigated as Sihanouk insisted that at the present FUNK has in stock arms and ammunition for two years of war".<sup>47</sup> So in post Paris Peace Conference, FUNK and Khmer Rouge were not caught weak.

Free from the rest of Indo-China the US resorted to savage bombing of Cambodia to prop up its puppet regime to forestall communist victory. During February -August 1973, the US dropped 2,57,000 tons of bombs, making a total of 5,40,000 tons since the secret bombing of Cambodia began in 1969. This was nearly three and half times more than the bombs dropped on Japan during the Second World War.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 261.

<sup>46</sup> Simon, Sheldon W., N. 19, p. 128.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>48</sup> Suryanarayan, V. and Jose, Alice, N. 6, p. 29.

How the Khmer Rouge survived that aerial bombardment we may never know. But Khmer Rouge succeeded in dislodging Lon Nol regime from power after twenty months is a reality. When defeat for the Lon Nol forces came in 1975, it was at the hands of an army numbering at sixty thousand, an army of peasant boys and youths ready to carry out unquestioningly the post war orders of leaders committed to transforming Cambodia.

### *Chapter- III*

## **KHMER ROUGE AGENDA**

The year 1975 brought historic changes to Cambodian politics and society. Five years of civil and foreign inspired war ended abruptly on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1975 as liberation forces, nominally led by Norodom Sihanouk entered the Khmer capital of Phnom Penh. They met no resistance. To the contrary, the city's population ran into the streets to greet and cheer the guerrillas. Even soldiers wearing the uniforms of the defeated army joined reunions in the streets.<sup>1</sup> Most had no clearer views about a social system than they had about politics, and in accordance with the best Khmer tradition they were perfectly ready to serve their new masters, to "bend with the breeze" as the Khmer saying goes.<sup>2</sup> The inhabitants of Phnom Penh were guardedly optimistic. Surely, they thought peace would be better than war and any regime than the one in power. They felt certain that the Khmer Rouge, about whom they knew almost nothing, would work with them as fellow Cambodians to reconstruct the country.

They were cruelly mistaken within hours of entering the city, the revolutionaries ordered a general evacuation. Every man, woman and child, including hospital patients and thousands of half starved refugees (Cambodian population numbering between two million and three million people), walked to food distribution centres in the countryside.<sup>3</sup> This was said to be a temporary measure, for three days only, to escape expected US bombing. However, within a week, more

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<sup>1</sup> Summers, Laura, "Consolidating the Cambodian Revolution", *Current History*, Vol. 97, Dec 1975, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, "Cambodia Year Zero", Allen Cane, London, 1978, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Summers, Lavra, N. 1, p. 218.

of Cambodia's city dwellers were driven at gunpoint into the countryside and ordered to take up agricultural tasks. When they asked questions to the soldiers who accompanied them, they were told to obey the 'revolutionary organization' (ang kar pade vat).<sup>4</sup> Over the next four years, Khmer Rouge went on to implement the policies, which made their regime the most reclusive and radical regime of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the zero years of Cambodian history had begun.

### **THE POLITICAL SYSTEM**

After the victory of April 1975, the government which was presented to the world was the Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia (RGNUC) headed by Sihanouk as chief of state: Penn Nouth as prime Minister and Khieu Samphan as Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of National Defence and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it was the Khmer Rouge representatives, which had dominated the government. The reason for this was simple while the combined Sihanoukist and Khmer Rouge forces- the NUFC- defeated Lon Nol it was the Khmer Rouge, which took the victory. Even Sihanouk harboured no illusion about the pre-eminence of Khmer Rouge in his government. He expressed his position on April 14, 1975 in the following way: "After victory I will be the head of state and there will be an entirely communist government administration. So either I am a puppet of the Khmer Rouge or I remain independent and there will be trouble".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Chandler, David, "Epitaph for the Khmer Rouge", *New Left Review*, No. 205, May-June, 1994, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Vickery, Michael, "Cambodia: 1975-82", Sydney-Allen and Unwin, 1984, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> Okane, Resenary T., "Cambodia in Zero years: Rudimentary totalitarianism. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 14, N. 4, 1993, p. 737.

A peculiar feature of the Khmer Rouge regime was the secrecy of the political system and its leaders. In other countries the communist organizations after capturing political power had gone to the public delineating their future political structure and institutions. But in case of Khmer Rouge government only in 1976 steps were taken for the institutionalisation of power and political institutions started coming into life.

On January 5, Cambodia's information minister announced the promulgation of a new constitution that sought to translate the 'wishes of the people, workers, farmers and the Cambodian revolutionary army for a national society characterized by happiness, equality, justice and genuine democracy" into reality.<sup>7</sup> According to the minister, the efforts to prepare a constitution reflecting the goals of the revolution began during the Special National Congress of April 1975 that is, shortly after the liberation and evacuation of Phnom Penh.<sup>8</sup> During the congress, a constitutional committee was empowered to consult with member organizations of the National United Front "at all levels" and with the royal government, the cabinet announced by prime minister Sihanouk from Peking in 1970, which was reshuffled several times during the war. This committee, the minister reposed, produced four consecutive drafts, resubmitting each revised version to all groups involved until a Third National Congress meeting in December agreed to submit the fourth document to the cabinet. The cabinet convened by Sihanouk at the beginning of 1976, unanimously approved the document.

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<sup>7</sup> Summers, Lavra, "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia", *Current History*, Vol. 98, Dec 1976, p. 214.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 214.

The preamble of the constitution restates the objectives of the Khmer Revolution: on the basis of the sacred and fundamental aspirations of the people, women peasants and other labourers as well as those of the fighters and cadres of the Cambodian Revolutionary Army, the revolution seeks to achieve an "independent, unified, peaceful, neutral, non-aligned, sovereign Cambodia enjoying territorial integrity, a national society informed by genuine happiness, equality, justice and democracy, without rich or poor and without exploiters or exploited, a society in which all live harmoniously in great national solidarity and join forces to do manual work together and increase production for the construction and defence of the country".<sup>9</sup>

The other articles of the constitution declares that the Khmer National is the state of the Khmer workers, peasants and other labourers who carried the heaviest burden during the liberation war and who make up 95% of the nation's population. All major means of production, including land, factories and machineries were declared the collective property of "the people's state and the people's community". The 'collective principle' as the constitution made it, was to be used in work relations and in government and administration. Whenever the collective principle was irrelevant, an egalitarian one was often prominent. Men and women were declared equal in every field; polygamy and polyandry were equally outlawed. And every citizen had "the right to have spiritual beliefs and religions or equally, the right not to have beliefs or religion".<sup>10</sup>

As for political institutions, the constitution establishes organs for law making (an assembly of People's Representatives) for law

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<sup>9</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, n. 4, p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> Summers, Laura, N. 7, 214.



executing (a cabinet named by and responsible to the Assembly) and for law enforcement (People's Tribunals and Appeals Courts set up by the Assembly.<sup>11</sup> Finally there was a provision for a three-person state presidium composed of a president and first and second vice presidents, which represented the state in domestic and foreign affairs, thus subsuming the formal duties of the Head of State.<sup>12</sup> It also served as a Supreme Court function, because the presidium is responsible for interpreting the constitution as well as the political "lines" defined by the Assembly.

The new constitution had changed the name of the country to "Democratic Kampuchea" and created a 250-seat National Assembly for which elections were held in March. Subsequently, Sihanouk resigned. Penn Nouth announced the dissolution of the cabinet known formerly as RGNUC, and on April 14 1976 the composition of a new government structure was partially revealed.

At the top was a state presidium with Khieu Samphan as Chairman, So Phim as first vice chairman, and Nhim Ros as second chairman. Below this was cabinet consisting of Pol Pot, Prime minister; Ieng Sary, Deputy Prime minister for foreign affairs, Vorn Vet, Deputy Prime minister for National Defence, Hu Nim, Minister for Propaganda and Information, Thioumm Thioeun, Minister of Public health; Ieng Thirith, Minister of Social Action, Toch Phoeun, Minister for Public Works; and Yun Yat, Minister of Culture, Education and Learning.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 214.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215.

<sup>13</sup> Vickery, Michael, N. 5, p. 154.

Under the Ministry of Economy, there were also six committees whose chairman held the rank of minister. Their names were not made public at time, but five of them were identified as follows: Agriculture, Non Suon, Industry, Cheng An Commerce, Kay Thuon, Communications, Mey Prang, and Rubber plantations, Phuong. The head of the sixth committee for Energy had never been identified.<sup>14</sup>

On September 27 it was announced that Pol Pot had resigned for health reasons and Nuon Chea, Chairman of the standing committee of the People's Representative Assembly become the Acting Premier.<sup>15</sup> Pol Pot re-emerged as prime minister, his controlling position greatly strengthened in September 1977. In a speech lasting for five hours at a rally in Phnom Penh, he declared for the first time that the Communist Party of Cambodia had controlled the country since April 1975 and that he was the party General Secretary.<sup>16</sup> Prior to this, reference had only ever been made to Angkar (the organization). Official statements made no mention of a central committee of the politburo of CPK. Such as one might expect to find in the organizational set up of a socialist country. However, a Central Committee did exist and the dominant figures in the all-important Standing Committee of its Central Committee were: Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Son Sen, Vorn Vet and Khieu Samphan.<sup>17</sup>

Democratic Kampuchea was divided administratively into seven geographical zones or areas (phum pheak) designated by the literary terms for the main directions of the compass - Oddar (north), Bophea (east), Bachim (west), Eysan (Northeast), Nirdey (south west), Peayap

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<sup>14</sup> Vickery, Michael, N. 5, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> Okane, Resembary H.T., N. 6, p. 738.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 738.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson, Karl, D., "Cambodia 1977: Gone to Pot" Asian Survey, Vol. 17, Jan 1978, p. 79.

(north west) and centre.<sup>18</sup> In addition to these areas, there were five 'Autonomous Districts' (Svayats): Kratie, Preach, Vihear, Siem Reap, Oddar Mean Chey and Kampong Som. The capitals of the areas and Autonomous District were not the same as those of the former provincial regions, all of which had been evacuated. Each zone was subdivided into Regions (dambans), all or nearly all of which crossed old administrative boundaries, and which were universally known by numbers. Below the regions, the administrative units seemed to have generally followed pre-revolutionary terminology: Srok (district), Khum (sub-district) and Phum (village).<sup>19</sup> The administration at each level was headed by a 'triumvirate of officials called the Committee and at the upper levels entitled respectively 'Secretary', 'Deputy Secretary' and 'Member'.<sup>20</sup> At the lowest two levels, they were usually local people chosen from among the poor peasantry and the chief was called protean, 'President'.

Thus, the administrative set up of Democratic Kampuchea was decentralized and considerably autonomous. In origin, these were the result of practical necessity. When the armed struggle began in the late 1960s, it began in different regions under different leaders in very loose coordination, perhaps even with different ideologies and programmes.<sup>21</sup> By April 1975, these zonal and regional leaders were the ones who controlled the armed forces and thereby potentially had the jump on political power.

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<sup>18</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, N. 2, p. 110.

<sup>19</sup> Vickery, Michael, N. 5, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

## **POLICY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE OF SELF RELIANCE**

Cambodia had undergone that period of cold war when it was unwillingly dragged into Indo-China wars. It had experienced the frustration and anger emanating from a total loss of control over her own destiny. Rather, it was invariably linked to the developments in the region and world. However, that ceased to be the state of affairs in 1975. In Khmer Rouge, she had found an obsessive guardian of her independence and sovereignty.

National Defence and self-reliance became the guiding principles or 'fundamental aims' governing all revolutionary action and teaching in Kampuchea. Communist regime statements continually emphasize that 'foreign enemies want to violate, encroach upon, threaten and annex our Cambodian territory'. There was extensive concern for 'spy rings', 'imperialist plots', land grabbing and 'enemies of all strips'.<sup>22</sup> There was a feeling of paranoia, of enemies hatching machinations to sabotage their revolution and submerge their sovereignty. So the policy of National Self-Defence was given utmost priority.

For Khmer Rouge, self-reliance was pre-requisite for national independence. Both these Policies are inter-dependent and inter-sustainable. The population has been implored to place independence, sovereignty and protection of Kampuchean race above everything else.<sup>23</sup> The KCPs account of its own history, its refusal of outside food and medical assistance immediately after the capture of Phnom Penh in 1975 etc. all flow from an apparent fundamental fear of dependence on any and all foreign influences and institutions. Democratic

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<sup>22</sup> Jackson, Karl D., N. 17, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> Jackson Karl, D., "Cambodia 1978: War, Pillage, and Purge in Democratic Kampuchea, Asian Survey, Jan 1979, p. 73.

Kampuchea centred on its own strength alone and wanted nothing from anybody. The reply given to the UNICEF representative, when he offered his organizations assistance to help care for Khmer children, was, "our Angkar has everything it needs".<sup>24</sup> The Khmers refused all forms of foreign help, regarding it as unjustifiable interference in its domestic affairs and an insult to the country's independence and sovereignty.

## ECONOMIC POLICY

Within the French colonial system in Indo-China, Kampuchea was assigned the role of producer of cereals, meat, fish and forestry products meant for supplying Vietnam, which was given a rather substantial industry. In 1953, the few badly equipped small enterprises processing agricultural and forestry products could not even be considered an economic nucleus. Though some progress in industrialization was made between 1954 and 1968, Kampuchea still remained a backward agrarian economy with little heavy industry.<sup>25</sup> Till 1970, growing rice was the principal activity of the major portion of the population.

The US bombardment of Kampuchea ruined whatever little remains of an economy. All rubber-processing factories were destroyed. The old working class had practically disappeared because of the destruction of industry. When the fighting ended, the country was shattered by the dislocation and destruction resulting from brutal revolutionary offensives and American B-528 bombardments. At the same time the American airlift of food and all other US aid abruptly terminated. Moreover, the nation's one oil refinery was bombed during

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<sup>24</sup> Ponchavd, Francois, N. 2, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Shinde, B.E., "Outline History of Kampuchean Communism: 1930-78", China Report, Jan-Feb 1982, p. 32.

the ensuing S.S. Mayaguez incident.<sup>26</sup> The communists, by their own account suddenly took control over almost four million newly liberated people from Phnom Penh and other provincial capitals.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the Khmer Rouge did not inherit a sound, developed economy with all its sectors functioning efficiently. The experiences of most Cambodians after the end of the war have been described in a speech by president Khieu Samphan. He said that on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1975, "We came face to face with a thousand and one complicated problems which we had to solve at once".<sup>28</sup> Khmer Rouge had to begin from scratch, from the rubble to build up their economy. And economy development was most urgent and important if they had to achieve national independence and self-reliance. They were convinced that economic self-sufficiency was the only way for the country to attain national sovereignty. Naturally, they gave pride of place to problems of economic reconstruction and it was to the heavy task of economic revival that the entire population was immediately harnessed.

The fundamental economic ideas of Khmer Rouge policy were to be found in Khieu Samphan's doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Paris in 1959. In it he argued that the Cambodian economy could overcome its dependency only by initially extricating itself from the international economy and expanding agricultural production to provide a basis for industrialization.<sup>29</sup> On his analysis, over 80% of the urban population was unproductive and he recommended that they should be transferred to productive sectors.

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<sup>26</sup> Zasloff, Joseph J + MacAlister Brown. "The Passion of Kempuchea", *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 28, Jan - Feb, 1979, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Kierman, Ben. "Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia", *Australian Outlook*, Vol. 17, N. 3, 1980, p. 385.

<sup>29</sup> O'Kane, Rosemary, H.T., N. 6, p. 738.

especially agriculture. This thinking was evidently behind the policies put into immediate operation in April 1975. Khmer Rouge abolished all private property, most personal possessions, money bank accounts, loans and interest rates. Towns and cities were abandoned. Freedom of movement and communication leisure activities and personal adornment were curtailed. Ownership of land prevalent in pre-1975 revolution was abolished. According to the official ideology, the root of pre-1975 domestic problems was the dominance of the feudal landowning and capitalist classes residing mainly in the cities.<sup>30</sup> The new regime's first acts destroyed utterly the remaining Vietnamese and Chinese commercial backbone of the society by driving them out of country or by forcing them to take up residence in the agricultural cooperatives of the liberated zones.

## **AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

Before 1975, Cambodia's per hectare rice yield was considerably lower than that of her South East Asian neighbours. Centuries of intensive cultivation of the land, combined with lack of modernization, left Khmer farmers at the mercy of nature, and restricted rice production to one crop per monsoon year in most regions. Very few provinces attained average yields of one ton per hectare. Developmental neglect in conjunction with population increases and expanding consumer demand for expensive imported goods led Cambodia on the road to food deficiency. Instability and lag in the agrarian sector were fundamental causes of economic instability in the Sihanouk era, but government attempts at reforms were foiled by the structure of land ownership and rural credit.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 740.

Pol Pot envisioned the modernization of the Cambodian economy through the massive expansion of agricultural production. Cambodia derived most of its resources from agriculture. So the nation's forces were initially mobilized on this front and mainly for the cultivation of rice. Agriculture became the keynote in economic development to gain self-sufficiency in food and foreign currency from exports. The Khmer Rouge hoped to increase Cambodia's rice exports, traditionally the country's largest foreign exchange earner. Peoples were reminded that land must not be allowed to remain unproductive, and that the forest must be cleared so as to increase the amount of arable lands.

One great problem with rice production, however, was the scarcity of water. In fact, Cambodia was a country where water was in short supply. Crops could grow and thrive where water was readily available but away from the rivers and with only a limited amount of artificial irrigation, vast areas of land were unproductive.<sup>31</sup> Naturally, the resources of the state and the people were concentrated in water conservation and irrigation projects for increased rice production. Enormous efforts were undertaken all over the country to master the natural water system, the population of Kampuchea constructed a vast network of dams, canals, and dikes to ensure sufficient water for 1500000 hectares of rice fields. Irrigation ditches several hundred kilometres long were dug to blanket Cambodia with a chequerboard of rice paddies.

There was a detectable change of objectives toward the end of 1975 in the light of previous experiences. The emphasis now shifted to improved yields per hectare and high quality rice, than the multiple

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<sup>31</sup> Osborne, Milton, "Before Kampuchea" Preludes to tragedy", George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1979, p. 130.



croppings. To achieve this, use of fertilizer was emphasized. Fertilizer could at first only be of the natural variety, and an important task in all cooperatives was the collection of both animal and human excrement for application in the fields. Similarly, improved strains of rice came from China and hybrid seeds were applied to enhance productivity. The new targets were to produce three tons of paddy from each hectare in single crop areas and six tons from double crop areas.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to rice, which was seen as primordial, people were encouraged to grow many plant crops, which were curiously called 'military crops': soya, bananas, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, yams, sesame, sweet corn etc.<sup>33</sup> Fishing and livestock industries also received a fair share of attention.

## INDUSTRIAL POLICY

"In the economic policy of Kampuchea, agriculture is the foundation and industry the dominant factor", Mr. Ieng Sary told the seventh extraordinary session of UN General Assembly in 1975.<sup>34</sup> Even though less stress was laid on industry than on agriculture, the rehabilitation of industry was launched. The industrial policy of Khmer Rouge was to import machinery initially, and as the accumulation of capital progressed, to strive to build various tools and machines, to proceed from having nothing to having something, from little to plenty and from small to big.<sup>35</sup> Khmer Rouge broadcast mentioned about textile factories in Phnom Penh which were making sampots, blankets, mosquito netting, clothing, and of the manufacture

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<sup>32</sup> Vickery, Michael, N. 5, p. 156.

<sup>33</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, N. 2, p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> Shinde, B.E., N. 25, p. 33.

of bicycles, electric batteries, paint, glass, soap, paper, milk, soya oil, cigarettes, saw mill and so on. The regime restored a number of rubber processing factories which were destroyed by US bombardment so that production of soft rubber, bicycle tyres and car tyres could be resumed.

Khmer Rouge did realize that the communications network was of vital importance to the country. So it gave plentiful advice and attention to those employed in transport whether the road, river, rail or coastal. Most of the main routes were brought back in working order: beginning in June 1975 trucks and train could bring material from the seaport at Kampong Som up to Phnom Penh and the Pochet-Pursat railroad became operational.<sup>36</sup>

Industrialization emerged more clearly as a goal in 1977-78. Workers were frequently congratulated for using ingenuity in devising procedures for recycling raw materials (e.g. scrap metals) and inventing new products, minimizing the need for imports. Two hundred factories were apparently restored and several new ones were constructed. Jute production exceeded the 1978 plan and the needs of the Battambang gummy sack factory. Oil industry was being repaired and the work was scheduled to be completed in 1979. According to Pol Pot, "Our intention is to turn this country into an industrial country with a developed light industry, food industry, steel industry, mechanical equipment industry oil industry, electric power industry and coal production industry."<sup>37</sup> The increasing emphasis on industrial production was reflected in the partial repopulation of urban areas such as Phnom Penh, Kompong Som and Battambang.

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<sup>36</sup> Ponchard, Francois, N. 2, p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> Jackson, Karl, D., N. 23, p. 84.

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The year 1977 was marked by a movement away from virtually complete isolation and toward limited involvement in the world market. During the pre-war era (before 1970), Cambodia exported approximately 500000 tons of rice and 5000 tons of unprocessed rubber each year. In the immediate post revolutionary period, the government emphasized complete self reliance and neither imported nor exported goods openly in the international market. Although foreign goods entered Cambodia via Chinese and North Korean assistance programmes or through smuggling, the first major transaction was the purchase of US \$ 450000 worth of DDT in November 1976.<sup>38</sup> In 1976, the government set up the 'Ren Fung Trading Company' in Hong Kong to handle its international trade, and the first half of 1977 witnessed the purchases of nearly US \$ 9 million in chemicals, cotton products, iron and steel, petroleum transport equipment and insecticide.<sup>39</sup> Imports and exports were undertaken with Japan, Hong Kong, North Korea and of course China.

Khmer Rouge regime also imported foreign technologies and services. It shed its earlier reluctance and employed foreign personnel to avail their services and skills. Foreign technicians played an important role in reopening the post of Kompong Som as well as in bringing back into service the rail link from Cambodia's major port of Phnom Penh. Chinese technicians helped restore or repair the Cjakrei Ting cement factory, Tuu Meas phosphate fertilizer factory, Kompong Cham textile mill, the power station and automobile factory in Phnom Penh.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jackson, Karl, D., N. 17, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>40</sup> Shinde, B.E., No. 25, p. 33.

However, the absolute size of Democratic Kampuchean transactions should not be overestimated. Laos with its much smaller population at that time was much more involved in international trade. It will be safe to conclude that Democratic Kampuchea could not achieve the export levels of pre war regime.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL POLICY**

Several of the revolutionary regimes policies were designed to cause the total disintegration of the traditional Khmer socio-cultural ethos. To transform Cambodian society totally and at once, the Khmer Rouge felt they had to obliterate what was hateful to them in the society that was there. When a spokesman boasted that 'two thousand years of history' had ended on April 17<sup>th</sup> he meant that two millennia of social relations and culture had been uprooted, and saw this as a positive development.<sup>41</sup>

The hierarchical society that emerged with the arrival of Hindu influences in the fourth century and that of Kingship and folk belief had reinforced was a target for change. The language was to be purified to eliminate references to social rank and privileges in favour of egalitarian terms and offenders were criticized severely. The traditional practices of lavish weddings, funerals, and festivals were condemned and mobilization for production was the rallying cry. Titles of age, rank or profession - subtly complex and important in pre-revolutionary Cambodia - had been forbidden. A single form of address for everyone had replaced them: mit/mitt ("friend" or "comrade").<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Chandler, David, N. 4, p. 897.

<sup>42</sup> Zasloff, Joseph J and Brown, MacAlister, N.26, p. 34-35.

Even more insidious was the Khmer Rouge effort to destroy the family and to regulate sexual relations, marriage and the raising of children. Parents were no longer allowed authority over grown children. Marriages could be contracted only after securing the permission of the authorities and one of the criteria for permission to marry was that the couple should be of the same political class.

This compulsory transformation of human relations showed a determination to bring about a radical metamorphosis of a whole culture. The constitution of Democratic Kampuchea enshrines that "the culture of Democratic Cambodia is of a national, popular, forward looking and healthful character such as will serve the tasks of defending and building Cambodia into an ever more prosperous country. This new culture is absolutely opposed to the corrupt, reactionary culture of the different oppressive classes of colonialism and imperialism in Cambodia".<sup>43</sup> So like the social structure, the culture had to be purified. And this desire was enshrined in the Twelve Commandments of the Khmer Rouge, which were, but the expressions of its puritanical moral views. Commandments specifically prohibited stealing, the use of intoxicating liquor and gambling, illicit sexual activity and even flirting, some refugees reported the death penalty had been used as a sanction against these prescribed activities.<sup>44</sup> Thus, systematic and well-planned attempts were made to uproot the traditional social cultural mores and implant a new one in people's psyche.

Khmer Rouge initiated a sea change in education. Although its stated aim was first to eradicate the illiteracy, schooling was conducted in factories and cooperatives and were to remain close to

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<sup>43</sup> Panchaud, Francois, N. 2, p. 141.

<sup>44</sup> Jackson Carl, D., N. 17, p. 83.

the realities of an agricultural country.<sup>45</sup> People were made to learn the primary value of labour than the 'paper diplomas'. Pupil' studied two to three hours a day and gain experience at manual work at the same time. The Khmer Rouge neither restored any thing like the prewar schooling system nor did it reorganize higher education apart from medicine taught in the city hospitals and in the cooperative infirmaries.

The religious aspect is not the least significant and part of the cultural transformation brought about by Khmer Rouge. In its eyes, Buddhism was a reactionary religion and the bonzes were the parasites. There was no place for pagodas or temples. Even worship and prayers in the homes were banished. People were asked to not to give rice or anything to Bonzes and Clergy. The other religions were no better off. The Christians, Cham Muslims and Malays also suffered at the hand of Khmer Rouge widely and the reason is simple; it is very difficult if not impossible, to grasp comprehensively the complex interplay of varied forces and the grand realities. And in the case of Democratic Kampuchea this problem was further compounded due to its virtual alienation from international community. So no foreign scholars, journalists or missionaries were allowed to have a first hand view of Kampuchea during Khmer Rouge regime.

However, there is little dispute over the fact that Khmer Rouge did indeed perceive the problems in the ground correctly and rationally. It did understand correctly that there was inadequate food supplies in the city (particularly in Phnom Penh) and the inability of enlisting transport to bring sufficient food there. In cities, everyone aspired to luxurious life styles which neither the individual nor the society as a whole could afford, the result was a generalized

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<sup>45</sup> Jackson Carl, D., N. 17, p. 83.

corruption and a draining of wealth into unproductive investments. A sizeable number of populations were previous cultivators who had migrated during the war year. Further, there was always a fear of American bombardment on cities lurking behind and Khmer Rouge rationally interpreted that the revolutionary soldiers were very few to keep effective control of an abnormally overpopulated capital. In the economic spheres also Khmer Rouge was too well aware of the problems it inherited. Industrialization was a momentous task due to absence of inadequate raw materials. Further, in the national emergency following the war, everyone had to put into productive work for economic development. Khmer Rouge perception that Democratic Kampuchea's considerable agricultural potential led in the huge amount of water that passes through the lower Mekong Valley in the wet season was also rational and justifiable. It had also seen the socio-cultural malaise that had crept into the Cambodian society.

However, this logical and analytical perception of ground realities did not resulted into equally rational and cohesive policies as one would reasonable expect. And this proved to be ironical. It altogether did away with the government, burned the files and abolished law and courts, schools and hospitals, markets and money and liquidated all identifiable personnel of the old regime.<sup>46</sup> It evacuated the Phnom Penh and other cities; their population, were driven out to the countryside for agricultural and menial works, so that production of rice can be tripled from pre-war productions. But it ignored Cambodia's ecology, tool shortages and insufficient reserves of seed and livestock and the reluctance of city dwellers to take up agricultural works. They were incapable of working efficiently when left to shift for themselves in undeveloped areas, and not only failed to

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<sup>46</sup> Duncanson, Dennis, "Cambodia-An Elusive Nationhood", Australian Outlook, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1980, p. 261.

produce much social surplus but consumed more than what they produced.<sup>47</sup> Further, its obsession with self-reliance was simply Utopian. It refused foreign helps though it needed them badly, foreign capital was shown the door and excessive reliance was placed on 'Human Capital' for economic modernization. Moreover, one fails to comprehend the rationality behind abolishing private property and dividing the whole country in small collectivity, particularly when Pol Pot had predicted that Democratic Kampuchea would take the ranks of the advanced industrialized nations within fifteen to twenty years.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Khmer Rouge was extremely foolish to think that a new radical culture can be transplanted at one go in a basically conservative populace. Its abolition of family, religion and formal education created much social chaos and disorganization than addressing the ills of the society.

Now the question is why the irrational and Utopian policies? The answer can be searched in the ideology they espoused - Marxism-Communism. Another same of influence was Maoism and Chinese Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. In fact Khmer Rouge pursued the ideologies with the utmost seriousness to the extent that it became dogma, a lethal weapon. Had it not been for the overriding ideological concern of social leveling, everyone would not have been forced into the situation of poor peasant and excess urban population would have been reorganized in a better way. Their ideology made them down grade city, industry, proletariat and so on. To be honest, every ideology put some restrictions on policy choices. It precludes some policies even from consideration and condemns them. But in case of Khmer Rouge it rigidly followed that ideology-Marxism-

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<sup>47</sup> Vickery, Micheal, N. 5, p. 270.

<sup>48</sup> Puddington, Arch., "Pol Pot in Restrospect", Commentary, Vol. 12, N. 2, April 1987, p. 51.



Communism which excluded the policies that have been proved most rational and effective everywhere. Further, the relatively brief existence of their movement, the suddenness of their final victory, their fear of counter revolutionary forces and the relative paucity and lack of sophistication of their soldiers and cadres clouded the thinking of Khmer Rouge leaders and distorted their psyche.

### **METHODS TO IMPLEMENT THE POLICIES: AN ASSESSMENT**

With the war experiences and fear of Counter Revolution up most in their mind, the Khmer Rouge leaders were in a great hurry to implement their innovative and radical policies. However, the Khmer Communist Party never had a large membership for the above purpose. Cambodia till 1975 was basically a collection of isolated villages ruled by local military commanders.<sup>49</sup> Hence, creation of a cohesive, organised and disciplined revolutionary cadre within this rural social framework was a tough task. Moreover, the cadres were stretched thinner and thinner and central control over the revolutionary movement was difficult. And in the post revolutionary period (during Khmer Rouge regime) as Khieu Samphan admitted that the deficiency of officers /cadres had never been made good.<sup>50</sup> This deficiency of cadres resulted in half-hearted implementation of planned policies.

The other method to win the supporters for their policies and their successful implementation, which has been used most widely by all communist regimes, was of course indoctrination and training. Khmer Rouge deliberately adopted the rule of the young over the old.

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<sup>49</sup> Kierman, Ben, N. 58, p. 373.

<sup>50</sup> Duncanson, Dennis, N. 46, p. 260.

The communists were convinced that the old would never adapt to the new order they were intent on constituting except through iron repression and coercion. With the young, however, things might be different. With adequate indoctrination, seclusion from outside world they can be moulded; their thinking can be shaped in accordance with communist ideology. Little wonder that Khmer Rouge removed the children from their parents, some as young as ten or twelve years and indoctrinated them in the militant attitude, in passionate loyalty to state and party and condemnation of 'Old Ways'.<sup>51</sup>

Of course, where indoctrination alone did not bore fruits, it was supplemented with naked coercion and terror. Khmer Rouge made the widespread use of fear as a technique of implementing their policies and tactics. The young cadres were trained to develop callousness towards violence, pain and killing. A key technique was the Torture game. Animals including domestic ones were systematically dismembered or burned by its children cadres to perfect the art of killing and applying terror to achieve their purposes.<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Quinn aptly observed that "the Khmer Rouge cadres cowed people and suppressed dissent and opposition through harsh brutal punishments, then they constructed a governmental apparatus at the village and hamlet level which allowed them exercise tight control over family in the area".<sup>53</sup>

To implement their economic policies, the evacuees from Phnom Penh and rural population were organized into 'forces' of different types performing well demarcated works. Each group of families or village was to form parts of "Cooperative" (till January

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<sup>51</sup> Puddington, Arch, N. 48, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Zsloff, Joseph J and Brown, MacAlistre, N. p. 42.

1976 called 'Production Solidarity Groups') in which all means of production were pooled and the harvest belonged to the Cooperative which distributed it according to the deserves and needs of every individual<sup>54</sup>. Besides there were 'state farm' (Kasethan) which were placed directly under the authority of the District Committee (Damban) and their entire production went to the state. Khmer Rouge in fact, turned Cambodia into a huge collective farm whose workers, though nominally free had the status of military penal colony inmates. Duration of work were excessively long, peasants were made to work like slaves, like beasts of burden, with no thought for the human losses. Failure to work was treated as desertion, and punished accordingly. Peasants were forbidden to maintain a private plot for family consumption. And though Khmer Rouge in theory elevated the peasants to the exalted status of revolutionary vanguard, it nonetheless believed that they would work hard only if force and terror were employed!

## **RESULTS AND IMPLICATION ON CAMBODIA**

The Khmer Rouge policies did not achieve a single goal proudly set by it. Neither did these policies result in national self-defence, self-reliance, economic development, nor did they bring about a new Social Order. In this sense, those policies were an abject failure but their repercussions were most devastating and gruesome.

A mind-boggling number of people died in the evacuation from the cities and in the subsequent transplantation of population. A lot more perished from disease, starvation and execution. Further, there were mass purges and massacres. According to Amnesty International Report, the policies and practices of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in four years (1975-79) resulted in the deaths of between

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<sup>54</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, N. p. 113.

one to two million Kampuchean.<sup>55</sup> The worst sufferers of self-inflicted genocide were ethnic and religious minorities. Over one third of the Muslim Cham minority, about 90000 people perished at the hands of Pol Pot regime.<sup>56</sup> In 1975, the population of Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai ethnic minorities were 100000, 425000 and 20000 respectively. In 1979, their population was reduced to nil, 200000 and 8000 only.<sup>57</sup> Though there is no unanimity among the writers and scholars on the number of people died at the hands of Khmer Rouge regime, they agree are that their number was large enough to term it a "genocide", "an ethnic cleansing" and a "mass murder".

The implication of Cambodia of these policies and their results is not difficult to imagine. The consequence was simply devastating and barbaric. The Khmer Rouge's radical and unrealistic policies bereft Cambodia of her past history, values and two thousand year old civilization. Cambodia was made to reborn again. Hence it was open to all tumultuous influences an incipient nation is subject to. Almost all the members of international communities declared it as pariah state where mindless violence and scarcity stalk every walk of life. Moreover, Khmer Rouge brutalized the humble, gentle and civilized Cambodians. No doubt it produced one of the most successful and efficient guerrilla movement, its cadres were hardened ones, devoid of all human emotions, feelings and sensitivity. Cambodians were forced to not to have the finer instincts, the values and ethos, which makes human being humane. And that was the most unfortunate and tragic implication.

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<sup>55</sup> Amnesty International Report, "Kampuchea: Political Imprisonment and Torture, Amnesty International Publication, London, June 1987, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Kiernan, Ben. "The Genocide in Cambodia: 1975-79", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. 22, No. 2, April-June, 1990, p. 35.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

## *Chapter- IV*

### **FOREIGN POLICY OF KHMER ROUGE**

External environment has always exercised a decisive influence in the foreign policy formulation of any country. This influence may range from implicit and facilitatory to overwhelming and inhibitory. But a country can neglect them at its own peril. After all, foreign policy set a parameter, a framework for the 'interaction' between a country and other countries and institutions in the world. And this other countries attitudes and policies towards a country are reflected back in its foreign policy.

This external environment assumed somewhat an overwhelming importance during the cold war. During this period the whole world was divided into two “Antagonistic Blocs” headed by US and USSR espousing two contradictory ideology, “Capitalism” and “Socialism” respectively. They relentlessly pursued the competitive policy of spreading their area of influence by forming strategic allies. No doubt there was a third group – “Non Alignment Movement”, which tried to mitigate the negative impact of confrontationist policies by refusing to join any bloc and by pursuing an independent, neutral policies. But it did not stop US and USSR to lure more and more countries in their camp. And once a country became a come follower, say of USA, its every movement was looked with suspicion and hostility befitting an enemy by another camp - USSR and her allies.

Khmer Rouge came into power when cold war politics was in full swing. And it was an open secret that which block it would join in. After all, it came to power through the material and moral support received from 'communist' Vietnam and China. Even the ideology it espoused and later rigidly implemented was a radical “Marxism-

Communism". But to every one surprise, Khmer Rouge declared on the first day of the resumption of Radio Phnom Penh transmission that it would follow an international policy of non-alignment.<sup>1</sup> The concept 'non-alignment' reflected the radical nationalism of the Khmers, who believed that their sovereignty is jeopardized by alliances with major powers. Ieng Sary attended the Non aligned conference in Lima in August 1975 and he and Khieu Samphan attended the Non aligned summit conference at Colombo in September 1976, thus symbolizing the country's desire to maintain its links with the non-aligned world.<sup>2</sup>

Not only did it follow the policy of non-alignment, but also its position on various international issues was close to those of other non-aligned countries. It found expression in the speech by Ieng Sary at the UN in October 1976 and in Pol Pot's speech during his visit to Peking in September 1977. Khmer Rouge called upon Israel to recognize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to independence and sovereignty, and supported the struggle of the Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Azanian people against the regimes in Salisbury and Pretoria.<sup>3</sup> It supported the struggle for a just and equitable "New International Economic Order" and a new "Law of the Sea" based on equality and justice.<sup>4</sup>

Coming to bilateral relations, Cambodia remained essentially a diplomatic recluse, receiving few foreign delegations other than China's and sending even fewer abroad. Phnom Penh remained a virtual ghost town. Its seven embassies were confined to one street

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<sup>1</sup> Summers, Laura, "Consolidating the Cambodian Revolution", *Current History*, Vol. 97, Dec 1975, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> Pradhan, P.C., "Foreign Policy of Kampuchea", Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1985. P. 185

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 186.

sealed off at both ends by barbed wire. According to UN official Alexander Casella "Diplomats are not permitted to move beyond their street or to visit one another without a special permit. Once a day, a cooked meal is delivered to each embassy door. Even diplomatic pouches are examined by Khmer authorities before they leave the country".<sup>5</sup> Cambodia became a hermit under Khmer Rouge, shutting out the world. Its xenophobic attitude towards other countries did not encourage them to take the initiative of establishing bilateral foreign relations with it.

Cambodia began to open its protective cocoon in 1976-77. Cambodia started to expand its diplomatic activities through major state visits and through establishing foreign diplomatic relations with an increasing range of countries. In March 1977, Foreign Minister Ieng Sary made formal visits to China, Burma, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>6</sup> Cambodia, at last started accepting the importance of having a harmonious and beneficial relation with other countries to protect and promote its own 'National Interest'. However, the diplomatic missions functioning in Phnom perish remained restricted to China, North Korea, Vietnam (until Dec 1977), Laos, Cuba, Albania, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Egypt.<sup>7</sup> Due to constraining financial condition, Cambodia maintained embassies only in Peking, Pyongyang Hanoi and Vientiane. Pol Pot Ieng Sary and Vorn Vet visited Pyongyang in late September 1977. A spirit of mutuality was found in reports on the Cambodian visit to North Korea. At a banquet hosted by Kim II Sung, Pol Pot acknowledged Korean material and political aid during and since the Cambodian revolution.

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<sup>5</sup> Casella, Alexander, "Vietnam and Cambodia: Basic Incompatibility", The New York Times, Mar 31, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson, Karl D., "Cambodia 1977: Gone to Pot", Asian Survey, Vol. 17, Jan 1978, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

No relation whatsoever existed between Khmer Rouge and Western world including US. Notwithstanding the fact that reconciliation with the US and west Europe was central to a successful non-alignment policy and would have given Khmer Rouge more flexibility in dealing with socialist powers. Khmer Rouge neither forgot nor forgave US and west for their complicity during wartime and their open anti-revolutionary stand. From the day one it had a head on clash with US authorities over Mayaguez merchant ship affairs following which US marines invaded Cambodia's Koh Tang island, made air raids on Ream and Sihanoukville and sanctioned trade embargo against Cambodia.<sup>8</sup> Neither side cared much to mend the relations later on. In march 1977; the US requested that an official delegation be allowed to visit Kampuchea. But the foreign ministry of Kampuchea declared that in view of the US imperialists acts of aggression subversion, calpdeitat and interference in Cambodia during the war and continued criminal activities against the Cambodian people since April 1975, the Kampuchean government was not prepared to receive a delegation nor hold a meeting at any place.<sup>9</sup> Similarly relations with west Europe continued to be non-existent. Each side had a long list of grievances against other to permit a cordial relationship.

Khmer Rouge handled its neighbors with considerable diplomatic skill. With Laos, it had no historical enmity, rather considered both Cambodia and Laos, as the victim of Vietnamese communist's hegemony. It followed a peaceful policy vis-à-vis Laos. They even send a shipment of their own scarce rice resources to Laos. However, with Thailand, the situation was a bit more complicated.

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<sup>8</sup> Summers, Laura, N. 1, p. 222.

<sup>9</sup> Pradhan P.C., N. 2, p. 187.



Khmer Rouge looked upon Thailand as a member of SEATO Security Alliance, a party to capitalist conspiracy, a country which allowed US to use her airspace to undertake air raids on Cambodia. However, it was ready to shed the historical baggage and begin afresh with Thailand. Consequently, diplomatic relation was re-established with her in November 1975. But in January 1976, the frontier between Thailand and Cambodia was temporarily sealed. Informal commercial relations (black market trade) which had provided Cambodia with supplementary rice and fuel oil, also ceased.<sup>10</sup> There were more than hundred accidents on Thai Cambodian border. Throughout 1977 and most of 1978 a confusing but nonetheless tense situation existed which featured almost nightly attacks near Aranyaprathet and Trat. In the disputed areas that it perceived as its own, the Khmer Rouge troops made no differentiation between combatants and non-combatants, women and children appeared to be intentional target and Thai villagers with their livestock were kidnapped.<sup>11</sup> Late in 1978, Thai and Cambodia, with prodding from China, indicated increase willingness to settle their differences. Thailand sought to smooth differences by treating Cambodian attacks as initiatives of local commands in retaliation against the activities of anti-Khmer Rouge bands operating from Thailand. On the Cambodian part, foreign minister Ieng Sary met with his Thai counterpart, Upadit Pachariyangkun at the UN in New York and re-examined the development of friendly relations between two countries on the basis of the "Joint Communiqué" published on October 31, 1975.<sup>12</sup> Thus

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<sup>10</sup> Summers, Laura, "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia", *Current History*, Vol. 98, Dec 1976, 217.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, Karl, D., N. 6, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, Karl, D., N. 6, p. 84.

Cambodia established a working if not a very friendly relationship with Thailand.

In fact, Cambodia had a strategic compulsion to not to have a hostile and antagonistic Thailand. Certainly it could not have withstood a two front war when the relationship with Vietnam was at its lowest ebb, both clashing violently on border, it would be suicidal for Khmer Rouge to open and further a hostility with Thailand simultaneously. However, at a deeper level, their comfortable relationship was the outcome of the fact that there was no basic cultural division between the two countries. Whatever the difficulties of the past and present, Khmer Rouge did not think of the Thais as kind fundamentally and irretrievable 'racial enemies'.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout its four years reign, Khmer Rouge was interacting almost on daily basis, with Vietnam and China. It was obsessed with these two countries. Hence it is necessary to have an understanding of its policy towards them. Sometime, Khmer Rouge was a mere prawn in Sino-Vietnamese conflict. And sometime, it was Khmer Rouge who was playing one against the other to survive. Indeed, an interesting game of cold war politics. But before delving into details let's put the whole issue in correct perspective.

It was a historical coincidence that Khmer Rouge assumed the power when the situation in regional and international front was very fluid, unstable and tense. There was Sino-Soviet rift in 1960 and ideological tussle between the two. Many Third World radical communist parties criticized the revisionist policies of compromise of the CPUS. These parties followed Marxism-Leninism and Mao's thought which advocated agrarian revolutions in the Third World

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<sup>13</sup> Osborne, Milton, "Before Kampuchea: Preludes to Tragedy", George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1979, p. 165.

countries and a fight against imperialism headed by the US and social imperialism by the USSR.<sup>14</sup> This division within the communist bloc gave any Indo-Chinese issues an international dimension. Vietnam and Cambodia could indulge in a costly fight since they were assured of diplomatic and material assistance from USSR and China respectively. Their fight became a proxy war between USSR and China.

Besides there were differences between China and Vietnam over many issues though they claimed to be ideological allies. Though China and Vietnam cooperated with each other in fighting US intervention, their post relations were not happy. Vietnam still had the unhappy memories of Chinese overlordship and tended to suspect any Chinese move for closer relations as a scheme to restore China's traditional dominance. After Vietnam's Liberation and Unification, the ambitions of the two countries again produced conflict. China's ambition to be a big power was revealed by chairman Mao Zedong in 1963 when in his talks with the Vietnamese Workers Party delegation in Wu Han he said, "We must by all means seize South East Asia including South Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. After seizing South East Asia, we can increase our strength in this region."<sup>15</sup> In this scheme, the Chinese leaders have always considered Vietnam as one of the most important factors and sought by all possible means to gain control over Vietnam. This required that Vietnam should not be allowed to become strong and powerful in the region, but Vietnam had her own plan of establishing an Indo-Chinese federation under its supervision. This clash of interests gave rise to intense Sino-Vietnamese rivalry.

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<sup>14</sup> Naidu, G.V.C., "Vietnam and the Kampuchean Problem", *Strategic Analysis*, March 1986, p. 1207.

<sup>15</sup> Chakraborti, Iribid, "Vietnam-Kampuchea Confrontation: A Background Study", *China Report*, March-April, 1985, p. 152.

Vietnam and China had many grievances against each other. Vietnam resented Mao's efforts to impose "Maoism" on Vietnam and to attach conditions to Chinese aid to Vietnam while the war was in progress. During the Vietnam's fight against the US, Soviet military assistance to Vietnam came partly through sea and partly through Chinese territory. Vietnam accused China of not transporting huge stock of Soviet arms meant for Vietnam when it needed them badly. Further Hanoi felt betrayed when China played host to Kissinger and Nixon in 1971-72 and began to 'collaborate with the imperialists' to pursue 'selfish big nation interests' while the war in Vietnam entered its decisive phase.<sup>16</sup> The China Vietnam dispute over Spratly and Paracel archipelagoes, though pending since the 1950s, became an issue when China gained full control over Paracel islands in February 1974, followed almost immediately by the occupation of six Spratly islands by Vietnam.<sup>17</sup> These two archipelagoes consisting of one hundred fifty tiny and often barren islets are of strategic importance both because of their control over the main searoutes between the Indian ocean and the Pacific and because of some preliminary geological surveys indicate rich oil, gas and phosphate deposits.

What complicated the relation between Vietnam and China was the former's steady tilt towards the Soviet Union after 1975 through it did not necessarily represent a deliberate anti-Chinese policy. Peking wanted Hanoi to follow its (China's policy) towards the Soviet Union when Vietnam began to develop its own independent policy in the form of Neutrality in Sino Soviet dispute, or a pro-Soviet posture. China could not tolerate it. Soviet Union had provided Hanoi with military hardware to wear down the Americans and had become

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<sup>16</sup> Hung, Nguyen Manh, "Sino Vietnamese Power Play", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XIX, No. 11, Nov 1979, p. 1039.

<sup>17</sup> Naidu, G.V.C. No. 13, p. 1211.

Vietnam's number one backer. Further, when the war ended in 1975, the major share of communist aid to North Vietnam was from USSR. In the post war period when the Vietnam started reconstruction of its war ravaged economy, China did not contribute to the financing of its five year plan (1976-80) and reneged on Chou's pledge to a visiting Vietnamese delegation in 1973 to continue gratuitous aid to Vietnam at the 1973 level for five more years.<sup>18</sup> Le Duan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, then turned to Moscow, with whom he signed a five year economic agreement which was followed by an approximately \$ 1 billion per annum economic aid from the USSR and its Eastern European allies.<sup>19</sup>

Thus when the relation between China and Vietnam was deteriorating, Vietnam and USSR were coming closer. Vietnam took the Soviet side on many issues ranging from the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, to the role of the Communist Party in Portugal in 1974 and the fall of Allende in Chile in 1975. The latent conflict between China and Vietnam broke out in 1978 when Hanoi decided to clamp down on the private business which was by and large controlled by the ethnic Chinese (the Hoa people) in South Vietnam. To carry out rapid socialization of the economy, the Hanoi government raided the Cholon (Saigon's China town) area and ordered their assets frozen. It adopted various measures to eradicate private capitalist trade and introduced a new currency by which it threw the whole Chinese business community into disarray. Hanoi also abolished the special privilege, which the Chinese had so far enjoyed in Vietnam, which resulted mass Chinese exodus to Thailand and mainly to PRC. The exodus further escalated when a large number of ethnic Chinese from

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<sup>18</sup> Hung Nguyen Manh, N. 16, p. 1039.

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, Karl D., "Cambodia 1978: War Pillage and Purge in Democratic Kampuchea", Asian Survey, Vol. XIX, No. 1, Jan 1979, p. 80.

North Vietnam also apprehending ill treatment from Hanoi took shelter in China. Subsequently, China on May 1978 cancelled aid on twenty-one projects in Vietnam and two days later cancelled fifty one more projects charging Hanoi with 'continued expulsion' of Chinese residents.<sup>20</sup> Further, China ordered Vietnam to close down three Consulates General in Guagzhou, Nanning and Kunming in retaliation for Hanoi refusal to let China open a Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City. Because of this situation, on 29 June 1978, Vietnam joined the Soviet oriented economic organization council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), having been an observer for several years. Five days later, China cancelled all its economic, military and technical assistance and recalled all Chinese specialists from Vietnam.<sup>21</sup>

With the reduction of Chinese aid and with the increasing hostility of China, Vietnam had to depend more and more on the Soviet Union. Moscow welcomed this development and found in it an opportunity to counter the Chinese influence as well as to strengthen its own position in the South East Asian region. On November 3, 1978, Vietnam signed a twenty-five year Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union providing for consultation in case of being attacked. This treaty completed the rapture in Sino- Vietnamese relation. China now began to describe the Vietnamese as the 'Cubans' in South East Asia implementing a Russian Scheme of encircling China.

This whole USSR, Vietnam, China power games had a Victorian tragedy. As the more strained Sino-Vietnamese relations became, the more Vietnam turned toward China's arch rival USSR. And the more Vietnam and USSR came closer, the more tense become the relation

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<sup>20</sup> Hung, Nguyen Manh, N. 16, p. 1044.

<sup>21</sup> Chakraborti, Iribid, N. 14, p. 157.

between China and Vietnam. It was like a vicious cycle. Seemingly, impossible to break and come out. In this context of complete polarization between China and Vietnam/USSR, and that Khmer Rouge foreign policy towards Vietnam and China make sense.

### **VIETNAM: ALWAYS AN ARCH ENEMY**

For Cambodians of all political persuasions the Vietnamese have never been less than a threat and frequently have been a dangerous enemy. This intense hatred and fear of Vietnam had deep historical roots. As early as 1000 AD, the Vietnamese state began a persistent pattern of southward expansion, which ultimately led to its first confrontation with Cambodian Authority in the Mekong Delta. Centuries of unequal conflict between a strong Vietnam and a weaker Cambodia, some times aligned with the Thai kingdom - left the Khmer in their current reduced territorial boundaries which once stretched from the South China sea (territory that is now Southern Vietnam) to Thailand.<sup>22</sup> Further, the population of each country represented two fundamentally conflicting cultures, the Cambodian an "Indianized" culture and the Vietnamese a "Sinicised" culture. So whenever the Vietnamese absorbed Cambodian territory they sought to transform it into something that was standard, Vietnamese.<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising, there fore that Cambodians associate periods of powerlessness with periods of Vietnamese control and periods of nationalist unrest (Such as the 1840s, 1970-72 or 1976-78) with killing Vietnamese.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Zabloff, Joseph J. and Brown, MacAlistar, "The Passion of Kampuchea. Problems of Communism", Jan-Feb, 1979, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Osborne, Milton, N. 12, p. 165.

<sup>24</sup> Chandler, David P., "The Tragedy of Cambodian History", Pacific Affairs, Fall 1979, p. 411.

Khmer Rouge was always 'suspicious' of Hanoi's intention even when they were collaborating in their fight against American imperialism. Vietnam virtually abandoned the Cambodian revolution at the 1954 Geneva conference. The Khmer Rouge never forgot nor forgave the Vietnamese communists for this 'betrayal'. Further the Vietnamese did not provide much aid to Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP) in its formative years and supported Sihanouk's neutralism instead. Vietnam communist activity in Cambodia concentrated largely on organizing the ethnic Vietnamese. This cavalier treatment created mistrust among indigenous Cambodian communists, and the communists who had gone to North Vietnam after 1954 were viewed as a potential fifth column upon their return.<sup>25</sup> The Cambodian mistrust towards Vietnam deepened when after the Paris Accords of January 1973 Hanoi cut its aid to the Cambodians. The liberation of the South Vietnam by North Vietnam on April 30, 1975 and the incomplete and slow withdrawal of Vietnamese especially in the so called "parrot's Beak" province of Ratankiri and Mondulkiri of Cambodia made the new government of Khmer Rouge suspect Vietnamese intentions.<sup>26</sup>

Khmer Rouge feared that Vietnam was bent on incorporating Kampuchea into a new Indo-China Federation. In the eyes of Vietnamese rulers the Indo-China Federation would be a voluntary association of the people of the peninsula united common struggle and common aspirations. But in the eyes of Kampuchea, it would virtually be an empire dominated by Vietnam. Indeed, Ho chi Minh had declared during the foundation of ICP " I am all the more happy that our people have been joined by the two brother peoples. Cambodia and

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<sup>25</sup> Chakraborti, Iribid, N. 14, p. 147.

<sup>26</sup> Pradhan, P.C., N-2, p. 189



Laos.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Vietnam by virtue of its clearly superior power status among the three Indo-Chinese nations, with a historical relationship of suzerainty over Phnom Penh and having repeatedly intervened in Kampuchean affairs since the fifteenth century, it had considered it a matter of course to enjoy a special status in its relationship with Kampuchea and to expect a Khmer regime more or less amenable to her wishes. This basically paternalistic attitude of Vietnam towards Cambodia has been clearly shown in Hanoi's apparent lack of enthusiasm before 1970 to commit itself to the territorial integrity and political independence of Kampuchea and in its constantly recurring references to the "militant solidarity and fraternal friendship" between Vietnam and Kampuchea since then. But this over bearing paternalistic attitude was deeply resented by Ultra Nationalist Khmer Rouge. It wanted neither the same relationship to Vietnam as Laos nor a part to any 'special relationship', condemning it as a transparent guise for regional hegemony"<sup>28</sup>

Thus the historical baggage of fear, mistrust, suspicion and hostility guided Khmer Rouge policy towards Vietnam. A policy of open hostility and enmity towards Vietnam was the natural outcome. The Official Black Paper' of 1978 identified what was "Cambodian" with what was not Vietnamese and the Vietnamese with what was "evil in the world".<sup>29</sup> This policy of animosity and open confrontation was visible from day one Khmer Rouge came into power and grew in intensity and dimension with each passing year.

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<sup>27</sup> Chakraborti, inbid, N-14, p. 146

<sup>28</sup> Simon, Sheldon W., "New Conflict in Indochina", problems of communism, Sep-Oct, 1978, p.31.

<sup>29</sup> Chandler, David P, N-24, p.413.

Penh in April 1975. The borders drawn up by the French colonial authorities had satisfied neither side. However, in 1967 Sihanouk managed to obtain agreements with both Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in Hanoi and the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the South to accept and the existing French delineated border. However, these agreements did not deal with the ethnic minorities in each side's territory. Nor did they serve to block territorial encroachments immediately after the communist victories in 1975. The two countries started quarrelling over the offshore islands in the gulf of Thailand, which had always been a matter of dispute between them, whatever be their ideology. Hanoi caused the Cambodians of trying not only to seize the Phu Quoc and Tho Chu islands in the gulf of Thailand and kidnapping five hundred people in the process but also of having made incursions in the Ha Tien and Tay Ninh areas. Phnom Penh counter charged that the Vietnamese had sized Poulo Wai islands which had served as the base from which Cambodian forces had launched their attack) and made forays into Ratnakiri and Mondolkiri provinces.<sup>32</sup> In effect, the events of 1975 set the stage for two years of increasingly intense warfare up and down the border between eastern Cambodian vulnerable Southern region.

In May 1976, preliminary meetings between delegations of Vietnam and Cambodia were held to solve vexed boundary dispute. Both sides agreed that the land border would follow the last French map of Indochina and that the Brevie Line- a 1939 decision by French colonial administration that divided administrative responsibility for five islands in the eastern gulf of Thailand between the colonial government of Cambodia and that of Cochin China- would be the basis for determining sovereignty over the islands. But the Vietnamese would not accept the Cambodian demand that Brevie Line would also

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.1046.

be accepted as the sea boundary between the two countries. The Cambodians interpreted the Vietnamese insistence on further negotiations to determine the sea boundary as a confirmation of their fear that the Vietnamese were trying to take away part of their territorial waters. The maritime boundary question was additionally complicated by declaration from Hanoi, Phnom Penh and Bangkok each claiming a 200-mile offshore zone, all of which overlapped.<sup>33</sup>

In 1977, the border clash between Vietnam and Cambodia became more fierce and frequent. Khmer troops inflicted heavy civilian casualties near Chau Doc and attacked the two hundred forty km border of Vietnam's Nay Ninh province. In retaliation, the Vietnamese forces reached near the Mekong River a distance of fifty five km from Phnom Penh. As a result Kampuchea severed diplomatic relations with Vietnamese on 31 December 1977. In January- February 1978, Cambodia initiated new incursions in Taj Ninh and the Vietnamese undertook new operations in Takeo and Kampot provinces in southeastern Cambodia. Later, Cambodia forces attacked Ha Tien and penetrated ten-fifteen miles into Vietnam. The heaviest fighting took place around the Cambodian town of Mimot and the campaign featured a month of sustained Vietnamese bombing raids over Cambodia”<sup>34</sup>

Physically, there is little doubt that Vietnam could have occupied much of Cambodia if it had chosen to do so. In 1977, it had an army of over 60000 (compared to Cambodia's 90000) plus an armed militia of 1.5 million in reserve. Its army was the most powerful

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<sup>33</sup> Simon, Sheldon W., "Cambodia; Barbarism in a small state under seize". Current History, Dec, 1978, p.201

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, Karl D., N-19, p. 73

in southeast Asia and had been battle tested against formidable enemies. It also boasted some 900 soviet tanks (in addition to 600 US tanks and 1200 armoured personnel carriers presumably taken upon the defeat of the South Vietnamese army) and 310 combat aircrafts including those captured from South Vietnam which included a number of American A-37 fighter bombers.<sup>35</sup>

Even Cambodia was very much conscious of Vietnam's great strength. It was so wary of Vietnamese superior capability that Khmer Rouge leaders deliberately rejected amicable relations, preferring to keep a hostile distance. Cambodia responded very aggressively, act out of all proportion to early border clashes with Vietnam. This policy could be succinctly summarized as what Douglas Pike has called "the small bristly dog gambit". The rule- as it is for a small dog surrounded by bigger, stronger dogs is to bristle, assuming an aggressive posture and appearing so fearfully trouble- some, so indifferent to consequences as to convince others to leave well enough alone.<sup>36</sup>

Another policy line pursued by Khmer range vis-à-vis Vietnam was to draw world attention to Vietnamese border aggression. Thanks to this border disputes with Vietnam, Cambodia began to come out of its protected cocoon and started presenting its case to international opinion through its own media, diplomatic representation abroad and international meeting. Its policy was to gain international sympathy and support by blackening Vietnam, as "Hegemon". And its most effective gambit against Vietnam has been its allegation that the latter was hell bent on creating a Federation of three Indochinese states. Khieu Samphan, wrote to the head of states and Government of friendly countries in 1978 explaining how Vietnam was trying to force

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<sup>35</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, Jan 13, 1978, p14-15.

<sup>36</sup> Simon Sheldon W., N-28, p.29.

Kampuchea to join the Indo China Federation under Vietnamese domination with a view to swallow Kampuchea in a definite period of time. He further alleged that Vietnam wanted to take Kampuchea as a spring board in order to satisfy its regional ambition in South East Asia.”<sup>37</sup>

There are different views on whether Cambodia’s allegation had any genuine basis. In other words, opinion differs on whether Vietnam really wanted to establish an Indo-China Federation. While most of the authors on the subject answers positively, there are some dissenting voices such as of Milton Osborne. He argues that ‘while it is true that the Vietnamese communist leadership have thought of their country dominating all of Indo-China in the past, it also appears certain that policy changed on this view from time to time according to political circumstances. In terms of daunting problems of post war reconstruction that Vietnam faced once victory had been achieved in 1975, there was much to be gained by not becoming heavily involved in Kampuchea’.<sup>38</sup> Even Vietnam in 1978 officially stated that that it had discarded Ho Chi Minh’s concept of an Indo-China Federation with the dissolution of the ICP in 1951. But it did publicly insist that “the special relations” developed among the Indo-Chinese states during the wars against French and U.S should be retained in their nation building and defense efforts, in the interests of their respective independence and prosperity. Such statement hardly assured Khmer Rouge of the independence of their country.

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<sup>37</sup> Chakraborti, *Inbid*, N-14, p.146.

<sup>38</sup> Osborne, Milton, “Can Kampuchea Survive”, *Asia Pacific community*, No.16, Summer 1979, p. 52

Both the sides attempted to solve their problems through proposals and counter proposals. But Khmer range paranoia about Vietnam swallowing up Cambodia made the attempts futile. No amount of assurances could alleviate this feeling. Further, Cambodia claimed that even Hanoi's agreements cannot be trusted, that Vietnam has reneged on frontier arrangement reached in 1967 that defined territorial waters in the Gulf of Siam. So by 1978, both the countries have reached a dead end. And the proverbial last straw was the confessions of captured Vietnamese soldiers about the Vietnamese plans for the occupation of Cambodia. By April 1978, Radio Hanoi appealed to Cambodian front line troops to cross over to Vietnam for training as liberation forces to be sent back to Cambodia. At the same time, there were indications that Hanoi was providing such trainings to captured Khmer soldiers and the refugees who had fled to Vietnam after the border fighting intensified in 1977. Thus by 1978 end a final showdown between Vietnam and Cambodia was around the corner.

### **CHINA: FROM ALLY TO STRATEGIC PARTNER**

Khmer Rouge, jealous of its newly won political independence adopted an "Isolationist" policy vis-à-vis China during 1975-76. No doubt that it was the Chinese who in 1974 assumed the burden of supplying the arms that the Khmer Rouge needed to complete their struggle against Lon Nol. China had been its only political backer since 1975. It allowed Sihanouk to form an exile government (RUNUK) in Peking. At the time of Prince Sihanouk's return to Cambodia in September 1975, the press announced a five to six year thousand million-dollar interest free loan from China in addition to a non repayable subsidy of \$ 20million to cover Cambodia's foreign trade deficit.<sup>39</sup> In August 1975 Prime Minister Khieu Samphan and

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<sup>39</sup> Pochaud, Francois, 'Cambodia year zero, Allane lane, London, 1978, p. 103

Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary visited Peking. Khieu in his speech referred to the tremendous support and assistance rendered by China to them in their struggle. The Joint Communiqué referred to their determination to support each other and advance together in their common struggle against colonialism, imperialism and hegemonies. The visit resulted in the signing of an agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding all these assistance and helps, China and Khmer Rouge were not strategic allies in true sense of the term. In fact, neither wanted that kind of relationship, at least in the initial years of Khmer Rouge rule.

However, China from the very beginning stood on a separate footing than Vietnam vis-à-vis Cambodia. Geographically and historically detached from Kampuchea, China had traditionally viewed it with a degree of apparent "Indifference" and a sense of Detachment.<sup>41</sup> With a distinct political and cultural identity of its own, and having evolved as an independent nation after 1954, Kampuchea from the Chinese point of view should at least be entitled to a status equal to other two Indo-Chinese state. This basic approach of supporting Kampuchea as a separate, independent entity had been the corner stone of Beijing's Kampuchea policy. Throughout the alliance, Beijing by and large played the role of benevolent big brother and never assumed a dominating posture in her dealings with Kampuchea. Beijing from time to time even displayed a conspicuous degree of aloofness from Kampuchea's often openly pro China leadership and policies and was apparently quite satisfied with a non communist but neutral regime in Phnom Penh.<sup>42</sup> Khmer Rouge therefore, had no

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<sup>40</sup> Pradhan, P.C.,

<sup>41</sup> Chang, Pao Min, Some reflections on the Sino- Vietnamese conflict over Kampuchea", International Affairs, Summer 1983, p.381

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 381.

reason to suspect that china ever had the intention to swallow up Cambodia. Thus, China enjoyed a tremendous good will and trust among the Khmer Rouge leaders.

It was only when Vietnam started getting tough with Kampuchea in 1977 that Khmer Rouge moved closer to China. Completely disillusioned by Vietnam and ever suspect of its dubious game, Khmer Rouge had no other option but to look to China. It was aware of the fact that China is the only country in the region which is capable of protecting Kampuchea from an aggressive Vietnam and having served as the ally of the country for twenty years, considered it only natural to persist in its established policy of buttressing the economic and military bases of Kampuchea. Besides. China was fearful of Vietnam becoming a regional power challenging Chinese supremacy and a secret Vietnamese Soviet collusion. Thus, the common fear and suspicion of Vietnam, besides the ideology, brought Kampuchea and China closer. And this is clearly reflected in the banquet speech of Chinese premier Hua Guofeng in honour of visiting Pol Pot to Peking in September 1977; "The two countries had forged a profound revolutionary friendship and militant unity in their protracted struggles". Pol Pot considered the warm reception received by him a s testimony of the great, unbreakable and everlasting militant solidarity and revolutionary friendship between our two parties, our two peoples and out two government.<sup>43</sup>

The border conflicts between Vietnam and Kampuchea become more and more intense in late 1977 and 1978. Khmer Rouge increasingly started soliciting China's help- diplomatic, moral and material. Now it sought to establish a strategic partnership between the two since there were no hurdles on its path. However China tried

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<sup>43</sup> Pradhan, P.C., N-2, p. 185.



to avoid committing itself irreversibly to Cambodia. It is true that China did not want to see Vietnamese influence spread, but the alternative of warmly embracing a regime that had left out Beijing liaison (Prime Sihanouk) and was regarded as an international pariah was not very attractive either. Initially, the PRC media reported the allegations of each side (Vietnam and Cambodia) without comment. Chou En Lai's widow even journeyed to Phnom Penh in hopes of mediating the dispute, but to no avail.<sup>44</sup>

However, when the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam came to breaking point in 1978 and the Soviet Union immediately took the Vietnamese side in the dispute, China increasingly decided to commit itself to Cambodia. By its fifth National People's Congress in February 1978, Peking had abandoned all resemblance of neutrality. In his political report to the congress, chairman Hua Kuo-Feng condemned Vietnam (without actually naming it) in much the same manner that the PRC had been condemning the USSR: "No countries should seek hegemony in any region or impose its will on others. Whether a country treats others on an equal footing or seeks hegemony is a major criteria by which to tell whether it follows the five principles of Peaceful Coexistence and whether it is genuine or sham Socialist country".<sup>45</sup> China responded to Cambodia Vietnam dispute not only with stepped up propaganda support for her embattled Cambodian ally but also with increased military aid, including training for Cambodian pilots, tank crews and artillery men.<sup>46</sup> From now onwards China and Cambodia become irrevocable Strategic Partner. They linked their fate and jointly prepared to face the future together, each coming to help another in case of danger.

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<sup>44</sup> Simon, Sheldon W, N-32, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Simon, Sheldon, W, N-28, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> Leighton, Marian K, "Perspective on the Vietnamese Cambodian border conflict", Asian Survey, vol.8, No-5, March 1978, p.451.

## MULTILATERAL RELATIONS:

Khmer Rouge did not have extensive bilateral relationship with many countries of the world. Due to economic constraint, it had to confine its diplomatic missions and embassies to the seven countries abroad. So it had no alternative but to rely on Multilateral Diplomacy to make the world aware of its viewpoint. However, under the circumstances it had come to power, Khmer Rouge had a feeling of deep enmity towards U. S and so called Western World. And it was under no illusion that this hostility was very much mutual. So it participated in those multilateral institutions where the Third World / Developing Countries had majority or at least a sizeable presence. Then it could be assured of a patient hearing.

Prince Sihanouk was able to retain the seat of Democratic Kampuchea at UN. After all, it provided an excellent forum to disseminate Khmer Rouge's view on many issues- both regional and global. Ieng Sary went to the Group of 77 conferences at Mexico in September 1976, thus demonstrating interest in the problems of the developing world.<sup>47</sup> Within the region, Khmer Rouge did not have an auspicious beginning with ASEAN. Since one of the goals of ASEAN was to check the spread of communism within the region, it could not but dislike the Khmer rouge regime, which espoused the most radical brand of Marxism- communism. Further, ASEAN felt unease about the bonhomie between China and Khmer Rouge but later on Khmer Rouge and ASEAN found themselves at the same end of the spectrum. Their viewpoint coalesced at least on one issue- Vietnam. Khmer Rouge leaders began to stress the importance of Cambodia independence in a peaceful South East Asia and warn that Vietnam's plan to annex Cambodia is merely a step along the road to Vietnamese hegemony throughout the region. Cambodia also endorsed ASEAN concept of

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<sup>47</sup> Pradhan P.C., N-2, p. 186

creating a Zone of Peace and Neutrality in southeast Asia, which, according to Pol Pot would free the region 'from all forms of interference and intervention of the imperialist and expansionist powers and their supporting cliques'.<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The basic premise of Khmer Rouge foreign policy was its fear and suspicion of Vietnam. And as the Vietnamese started getting tough with Cambodia, it had no alternative but to shed off an isolationist image and indulge in diplomacy with a vengeance. Khmer Rouge, which was obsessed with Cambodia's Independence", Sovereignty, Self Help, steadfastly refused to do anything with other countries or institutions on the ground that it would demand a compromise on these goals. But it did realize, albeit later, that being a pariah state could prove to be dangerous, more so when Cambodia was facing an aggressive and powerful friend turned foe in her eastern front. However, given the geo-political realities of Indo-China, it would have been prudent if the Cambodian leaders had played off the Vietnamese against the Chinese and retained maximum manoeuvrability. One can appreciate Cambodian fears of Vietnam and their strong desire not to become a Vietnamese satellite. But instead of striving for multiple options, the Khmer leaders opted for suicidal policies in external spheres. By establishing strategic alliance with China it had encircled Vietnam in the northern and western side. Vietnam had little option but to attack Cambodia and install friendly government there. Thus Khmer Rouge dug its own graveyard by adopting anti-Vietnam policies.

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<sup>48</sup> Simon, Sheldon W. N-32, p. 201.

## CONCLUSION

The Khmer Rouge came into power with the twin objectives of proving Cambodia as ideal communist country and transforming social life in the country. But it failed to achieve either of the objectives. Rather, its policies and actions created problems both at domestic and external front. Khmer Rouge created structural problems whereby the people were trans migrated arbitrarily from one area to another which was disliked. Similarly it adopted a foreign policy which was blatantly pro-Chinese and anti-Vietnamese. Border clashes between Cambodia and Vietnam was manifested regularly since Khmer Rouge took over Phnom – Penh in 1975. The two countries started quarreling over the offshore Islands in the gulf of Thailand. Further it is estimated that about fifty thousand Vietnamese were driven out of Cambodia and people of Vietnamese Origin were dictated to vacate Cambodian territory immediately which annoyed Vietnam.

By 1978, the relationship between Hanoi and Phnom Penh had touched the lowest ebb. Hanoi considered Cambodian attacks on Vietnamese territory as indirect Chinese aggression and resorted to the only course of action available. In December 1978, Vietnamese forces attacked Cambodia and overthrew Khmer Rouge government on January 8, 1979, Vietnamese installed a Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council Government (KPRG) which was formally proclaimed in Phnom Penh as the new government of Cambodia. The head of the KPRG in his capacity as president of an eight man "Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council (KPRC) was Heng Samarin. The remnants of the regime of premier Pol Pot fled the city in order to begin waging a guerilla struggle. Pol pot's revolution had

ended as T.S. Eliot wrote in another context, “not with a bang but a whimper.”

Khmer Rouge followed some distinct strategies which helped it to seize the political power. First of all, it launched a guerilla warfare, eminently suitable in a country having vast stretches of jungle against the government. Its cadres came out from nowhere, struck the government forces and after inflicting incalculated damage retreated without leaving a trail behind them. Moreover, its cadres penetrated deeply into the society and most of the time it was difficult to distinguish them from the ordinary civilian. They mixed well with common masses and cultivated their support and friendship to escape from the long arms of government. And the success of this strategy is proved by the fact that till now the government has not defeated them completely. Even now, the Khmer Rouge has carried on its Guerilla warfare against the government. In the Paris Peace Accord of 1991, there was a provision to disarm the guerillas and they were asked to surrender their weapons voluntarily. But it was Khmer Rouge only which had protested and refused to disarm.

To launch and sustain guerilla warfare, Khmer Rouge has adopted another strategy – to occupy and control the border areas. The mountainous regions are strategically important and potentially rich with vast reserve of minerals and precious stones. Khmer Rouge has indulged in clandestinely selling and smuggling these commodities to Thai merchants in exchange for arms and ammunitions. In this way, they have been financing their struggle against the government. The Cambodian government has drawn Thai government attention to this problem of unholy nexus between Thai traders and Khmer Rouge and

both the government has vowed to take joint action to break this alliance, but they haven't succeeded in their efforts yet.

Another prominent strategy of Khmer Rouge was its most illogical and Paranoic anti-Vietnam policy. Feeling betrayed by Vietnamese during war time, Khmer Rouge after it captured power, pursued a policy to break all links with Vietnam and mercilessly killed thousands of Vietnamese living in Cambodia for long years. It tried to wipe out Vietnamese influence at all the levels of society - Cultural, social, political, religious etc., by passionately following anti Vietnam policy. Cambodia aimed at gaining the confidence and friendship of China. Indeed, Khmer Rouge found in China a saviour, ready to address the myriod problems it faced particularly at the economic front. And in Vietnam, it found a scapegoat to blame it for all the failures of its own makings.

Khmer Rouge had mixed their strategies with the policy of ultra-nationalism and chauvinism. It's strategy was to whip up the passions and address to the emotions of the people to divert their attentions from Khmr Rouge failures and their own misery. It has committed the most atrocious crime against humanity in the name of defending the sovereignty and integrity of the country. People were sacrificed at the altar of national development and well being. Their nationalism and patriotism was merely a smokescreen to hid their own fears and failures.

Some of the other strategies followed by Khmer Rouge was Sabotage, brutal terror, racism etc., and it needs no superior intelligence to guess what were their implications on Cambodia. Khmer Rouge ideology, structure and mobilization although tried to

bring about the best aspects of the ideology of Marxism and Leninism, but it proved disastrous for Cambodia. Khmer Rouge regime was projected as genocidal where people were butchered mercilessly. In fact, a whole generation of pre-revolutionary Cambodians were wiped out. Its foreign policies succeeded only in making enemies within the region (except China) and out side. Vietnam became very angry and so were the other ASEAN Countries. It was because of the provocations arising out of the Khmer Rouge actions that Vietnam intervened militarily. And it is because of Khmer Rouge Policies that Cambodia has remained involved in the internecine warfare till today which has visibly hampered the development of Cambodia as a nation.

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