

SUPER POWER POLITICS AND THE CAMBODIAN QUESTION SINCE 1975

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C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "SUPER POWER POLITICS AND THE CAMBODIAN QUESTION SINCE 1975" by Ms. R. ARUNDHATHI in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge this is a bonafide work.

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PREFACE

P R E F A C E

Contrary to the expectations world over, that peace and stability would prevail in Indochina after the three decade old upheaval that came to an end in April 1975, with victory of Communist forces in both Cambodia and Vietnam, Indochina soon plunged into another round of bloody conflicts involving Vietnam, Cambodia and the People's Republic of China. Though internecine conflicts within the Socialist Bloc were not new and had taken place earlier, the Cambodian-Vietnam-China conflict was the first instance of three Socialist nations engaging in major military operations against each other.

Although both Vietnamese and Cambodian Communists had fought together against the American and their client regimes in Saigon and Phnom Penh, soon after the end of the war hitherto submerged racial animosity and historical hostility between the two nations came to the surface and soon covered all aspects of the mutual relations between the two countries. The Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict first started as border skirmishes over certain boundary disputes and soon developed into a major military intervention by Vietnam in the internal

affairs of Cambodia in favour of elements hostile to the Pol Pot regime in December 1978- January 1979. This conflict was christened as "the Third Indo-China War" and it eventually culminated in a massive Chinese "pedagogical" invasion of the northern frontiers of Vietnam in February-March 1979.

In early January 1979, Vietnam succeeded in accomplishing its mission of overthrowing the anti-Vietnamese Pol Pot regime and establishing a friendly one headed by Heng Samrin. Khmer Rouge forces headed by Pol Pot and Ieng Sary retreated first to the jungles inside Cambodia and later into the Thai territory bordering Kampuchea and continued their war against the Vietnamese army. Soon all the anti-Vietnamese elements in Kampuchea united under the grand alliance called the "Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea" (CGDK) under the former ruler Prince Norodom Sihanouk and began successfully resisting the Vietnamese forces. Thus, began the decade old "Cambodian Question", upon which the present study is based.

In the struggle between the Vietnamese and the anti-Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, Vietnam has been consistently supported diplomatically and assisted both economically and militarily by the Soviet Union. Support to Vietnam serves the Soviet interests in the region.

Moscow needs a staunch ally in Vietnam to serve its dual purposes of encircling China, and establishing and maintaining military bases in Vietnam in order to counter the American air and naval bases across the South China Sea in the Philippines.

On the other hand the anti-Vietnamese forces in Cambodia are being supported militarily by China and the United States. Both China and the United States along with the ASEAN countries have been extending their diplomatic support to the anti-Vietnamese forces in almost all international fora including the United Nations.

The US supports the anti-Vietnamese CGDK with a view to check the expansion of Soviet influence in Indochina in particular and South East Asia in general. For the US, opposition to the pro-Soviet Vietnam serves its own interests as it claims that the most significant threat to American security interests has been the global challenges posed by the Soviet Union.

The attitude of both the US and the Soviet Union did not undergo any major shift till mid-1986. The famous Vladivostok speech of General Secretary Gorbachev in September 1986, heralded a major change in the Super Powers' attitude towards the Kampuchean issue. At the same time Vietnam realised that it was not in its interests

to remain in Kampuchea any longer and it announced that it would withdraw all its troops from Kampuchea by the end of September 1989. China on its part reacted positively and agreed to stop military assistance to the Khmer Rouge. Thus the Cambodian crisis appears to be heading for a solution.

(The present study has analysed the policies of both US and the Soviet Union towards the Cambodian Question. Diligent efforts have been made to critically evaluate the rationale behind the American support to the anti-Vietnamese forces and the Soviet support to the Vietnamese. Attempts have been made to find out how far these two Super Powers succeeded in maintaining their interests in South East Asia by supporting their respective clients.)

When the Cambodian-Vietnamese hostilities escalated, some prominent officials of the US government described it as a "proxy war", between Soviet Union and China. The present study has devoted enough scholarly attention to this aspect as well. Another aspect which has been given prominent position in the present study is the role of the US and the Soviet Union in the continuation and winding up of the Cambodian crisis.

The present study runs into four chapters. The introductory chapter deals mainly with the American and Soviet interests in Indochina and their policies towards Vietnam and Cambodia from 1945 to 1975.

The Genesis of the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict has been discussed in the initial pages of the second chapter. Later it has been developed into a detailed study of the escalated hostilities and deepening crisis between Cambodia and Vietnam and the US-Soviet reaction towards the same from 1975 to 1978.

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, and the US-Soviet reactions and policies towards this crisis has been examined in detail in the third chapter. This chapter covers developments between late 1978 and 1980.

The fourth chapter has evaluated in great detail the developments after 1980, especially the efforts to resolve the crisis, and peace negotiations. Conclusion forms the last part of the study.

An useful bibliography has been given at the end of the dissertation.

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(R. ARUNDHATHI)

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION:
US-SOVIET INTERESTS IN AND POLICY TOWARDS INDOCHINA,
1945-1975

The Indochina region is a hot bed of conflicts. Since 1942, it has been embroiled in turmoils after turmoils. It has witnessed three successive wars. In the words of David W.P. Elliott, peace and Indochina cannot co-exist for "there seems to be an iron law regulating events in Indochina, nothing is ever simple and things can always get worse".¹ Of the various regions in the world, Indochina has been the most "representative of the phenomenon of structural insecurity... ever since Western advent forced reorientation of the direction of its history to colonial ends... the 'balknisation of Indochina' had been the function of Western colonial operations."² (The first two Indochina Wars were the offshoots of the Cold War that ensued immediately after the Second World War.) "Bipolarised into the rival centres based in Washington and Moscow, power enveloped Indochina "no sooner than the war came to end."³ The

1 David, W.P. Elliott, "Third Indochina Conflict : Introduction" in self edited The Third Indochina War (Boulder, Colorado, 1981), p. 1.

2 M.N. Jha, "Structural Insecurity and the Management of Power in Southeast Asia" in P.K. Das, ed. The Troubled Region : Issues of Peace and Development in Southeast Asia (New Delhi, 1987), p. 44. Emphasis supplied.

3 Ibid., p. 45.

entire Indochina became a cockpit of Cold War. While Washington explained that its thrusts were meant to assist the "practical strides of triumphant march of human freedom to national heights", Moscow referred to the cause of the "liberation of the masses from the degenerating tentacles of capitalist exploitation."⁴ The structural insecurity lies in the fact that the countries of Indochina do not possess the required degree of political stability for generating enough 'prudence' to balance the flow of power into the region from the super power sources.⁵ Opportunities for great power mischief are innumerable for, these countries are characterised by only partially integrated societies, rival ethnic and religious groups and artificial boundaries separating similar ethnic groups on each side. The Third Indochina conflict on which the present study centres around is a classic example of the escalation of a local rivalry (between Vietnam and Cambodia) into a regional conflict advanced by the interests of the external powers.⁶

4 Ibid.

5 Refers to Balance of Prudence in South East Asia in M. Brecher, "International Relations and Asian Studies - The Subordinate State Systems of Southern Asia", World Politics, 15, 1963, pp. 213-35, Quoted in M.N. Jha, n. 2, p. 50.

6 For details see Chapter II and III.

Strategic Importance

The entire Southeast Asia, due to its strategic location between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans having vast industrial raw materials, developing economies and a large population, is very important to big powers.⁷

Among all the factors, the location of this region is of primary consideration for the big powers, as their commercial and naval vessels including aircraft carriers pass through this region throughout the year without any interference from any country of the region.

The bulk of the essential Soviet civil and military commodities are being shipped from its European half to its Far Eastern region through the Indian Ocean, the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. The US Seventh Fleet also passes through this region in order to maintain its strategic naval base in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, ships of countries of the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions use the sea lanes of this region for various purposes. "The politico-economic and strategic importance of the sea-lanes is so vital to the prosperity of the big powers that neither of these powers would tolerate exclusive domination of one power over the area."⁸

7 S.S. Bhattacharya, "Big Power's Interests in South East Asia", in P.K. Das, ed. n. 2, p.156.

8 S.S. Bhattacharya, "The Malacca Strait : A Zone of Growing Tension", ISDA Journal (New Delhi), vol. 16, no. 2, October-December, 1983, pp. 171-81.

This region also possesses raw materials which are vital for the growth and development of industries of the big powers.⁹ This region produces nearly two third of the world's tin and over four fifth of its natural rubber. While its output of oil is not so large in terms of its total world production, it is nevertheless of great strategic significance because so little oil is produced elsewhere in South or East Asia. Added to this, it is also possessed with bauxite, tungsten, iron ore, sugar, coffee, spices, copra and coconut oil. Consequently this economic factor attracts more interests of external powers to the region.¹⁰

US-SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS INDOCHINA DURING THE FIRST
INDOCHINA WAR, 1945-1954

The United States and the Soviet Union did not confront one another directly over Indochina as they did over Korea. They did not extend the Yalta System to Indochina and they did not delineate spheres of influence in Southeast Asia.¹¹ Moreover, neither power had what could appropriately be termed a "policy" towards the

9 S.S. Bhattacharya, "Economic Interests of Big Powers in the Indian Ocean Region", IDSA Journal (New Delhi) vol. 10, no. 3, January-March, 1978 pp. 275-76.

10 R. Negi, Big Powers and Southeast Asian Security, (New Delhi, 1986), p. 47.

11 Russel D. Buhite, Soviet-American Relations in Asia, 1945-54 (Norman, USA, 1981), p. 186.

French colony when World War II terminated.

Background

The entire Indochina region was a French colony prior to the Second World War. The Japanese, encouraged by the fall of France to the German onslaught during the Second World War, began to penetrate into the French colony of Indochina in the summer of 1940. They took over the administration from the French after five years, on March 9, 1945. The Japanese made Emperor Bao Dai in Vietnam and King Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia to issue independence proclamation on 11 March and 13 March respectively. However, Japan's defeat in August 1945 brought the French to the forefront once again. However, the path to return for the French was not smooth. The nationalist movements which were basically anti-French has grown beyond their control especially under Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. This eventually led to the formation of two governments one in Northern Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh and the other in Southern Vietnam consisting of Annam and Cochinchina under the French. Ho Chi Minh began to demand for the unification of the country. This nationalistic movement began to be reflected all over Indochina. The Elysee Accord of 8 November 1949, which contemplated dominion status to Vietnam and Cambodia was rejected by the nationalists and the national movement took a violent

turn and insurgencies began. On 3 March 1951, a Vietnam Khmer-Lao alliance was set up and it appealed to the people of all the three countries to co-ordinate their efforts to defeat colonialism. On 11 March 1951, Vietnamese volunteers entered Cambodia and Laos to fight side by side with the Khmer Issarak forces - by then the Khmer National Liberation Army - and the Pathat Lao forces. This inaugurated an era of terrorism and sabotage and by the end of 1951, the war between the nationalist forces and the French was in its full crescendo.

American Attitude

When hostilities erupted between French and the Indochinese, nationalists President Harry S. Truman of the United States was sympathetic to the latter. His predecessor Franklin D. Roosevelt had proposed that a trusteeship should be established under the auspices of the United Nations to look after the affairs of Indochina.¹² But this plan did not receive enough backing from the Allies. President Truman regarded the Indochina crisis as a French problem. Though he was sympathetic to Ho Chi Minh he was not ready to assist him either materially or diplomatically. At the time, he turned down French appeals for material assistance to fight the Viet Minh

12 It was quite evident that in the last month of President Roosevelt's life a World body would be established after the war.

forces. It appears that during the period between 1945 to 1950, Indochina had very low priority for the United States. It was primarily preoccupied with Western Europe.

This American perception began to change after 1948. But this change in its stance was not based on developments in Indochina but ^{on}_A developments in other parts of the world especially Europe and China. The US believed that the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union could pose a major threat to its economic and strategic interests in Indochina. The US realised that if the vast economic resources and the strategic sea lanes of South-east Asia were to fall under the Communist regime of China or the Soviet Union then the US interests in other parts of the world particularly the Far East and South Asia would also be affected in a similar way.¹³

American involvement in Indochina devolves into two periods, 1945 to 1954 and 1954 to 1973. In the first period the United States sought to promote Vietnamese national aspirations while accommodating French interests, which, as events transpired, proved an impossible task.¹⁴ Despite American aversion to colonialism there were two reasons for this approach. Europe was the primary concern

13 S.S. Bhattacharya, "Big Powers's Interests in Southeast Asia", in P.K. Das, ed. n. 2, p. 159.

14 Buhite, n. 11, p. 191.

of the US and with a view to promote stability there, it would refrain from pressing French government into positions perceived as unpopular with the French people.

The US hoped to promote Indochinese nationalism as well; yet it feared that the indigenous leaders would eventually align their government with Moscow.¹⁵ There were also revelations about the Communist nature of Ho Chi Minh government.¹⁶ Developments in Indochina led the American officials to consider mediation in late 1946. Secretary Dean Acheson put it well in a message to the consul at Saigon : "Least desirable eventuality would be the establishment of a Communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state in Indochina" and Abbot Moffat, Chief of the Southeast Asia division said that "American policy would henceforth focus on the preservation of French influence, which was important , not only as an antidote to Soviet influence but to protect Vietnam and Southeast Asia from future Chinese Imperialism."¹⁷

In the Fall of 1947, United States officials were

15 Ibid., p. 192.

16 Ibid.

17 Quoted in Buhite, n. 11, p. 194.

torn between two views pushing a pro-nationalist settlement in Vietnam that as matter stood would probably result in a Communist regime on one hand and on the other allowing France to deal with the former colony in her own way.

The shifting American perception of its interest in the Far East generally, and in Southeast Asia specifically, took a definite turn in the year 1950. In October 1949, the Chinese Communists under Mao Tse Tung emerged victorious in the civil war and established Communist regime in Peking. In February 1950, Mao Tse Tung visited Moscow and concluded a defence treaty with the Soviet Union. This prompted the Truman Administration to conclude that the US would henceforth have to face a Sino-Soviet bloc whose main objective in Asia was to drive the Americans out of East and Southeast Asia and establish its own hegemony. In January 1950, both Moscow and Peking recognized Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Then Secretary of State Dean Acheson first "identified" America's "ultimate opponent".¹⁸

This development marked a clear shift in American perception of the Indochinese crisis and the US put its first step in the Indochina quagmire, only to be caught

18 Henry Brandon, Anatomy of Error : The Secret History of the Vietnam War (London, 1970), p. 11

in it completely and then survive helplessly to come out of it. Washington accorded its recognition on 1 February 1950 to Bao Dai's government established by the French in Saigon in 1949. The main objectives of US policy remained to eliminate Communist influence to promote the establishment of a self governing nationalist state friendly to the United States and to assure that Vietnam became Western-oriented in its international posture.

But the problem was that the French did not possess sufficient military capability. By February 1950, the Truman Administration completely changed its perspective on the Indochinese crisis. Contrary to its earlier policy, it now decided to supply France with military and economic aid. The United States found itself unintentionally supporting a French colonial war. The reasons for this unhappy state of affairs are not difficult to discern. French support for NATO was vital to the alliance's success, just as French economic stability, achieved through Marshall Plan aid, was essential to the United States programme for European recovery; both were deemed crucial to contain communism in Europe.

The Korean war was a 'benchmark' in the United States perception of the Indochina question.¹⁹ Chinese Communist intervention in Korea convinced American offi-

19 Buhite, n. 11, p. 205.

cialists that China itself posed an immediate threat to Southeast Asia. Henceforth, American policy in addition to dealing with the Soviets, would be devoted to contain Chinese expansionism as well.

Despite massive American aid, French position continued to deteriorate in the entire Indochina region. On 5 March 1953, King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia sent a note to the Government of France warning that if France did not immediately revise its policy, the whole of Cambodia would rally round the rebels.²⁰ By rebels he meant the guerillas. However, his suggestion was rejected.

In Vietnam the situation had assumed enormous proportions. All United States agencies agreed at the same time that Indochina was of "great strategic importance" and could not be allowed to fall to the Communists. As a National Security Council statement of policy expressed it in January 1954:

"The loss of the struggle in Indochina, in addition to its impact in Southeast Asia and in South Asia, would have the most serious repercussions on US and free world interests in Europe and elsewhere." (21)

The National Security Council averred in August 1953:

20 W.G. Burchett, Mekong Upstream (Hanoi, 1957), p. 121.

21 Pentagon Papers, I: 362, Quoted in Buhite, n. 11, p. 206.

"The loss of Indochina, would be critical to the security of the U.S.. Communist control of Indochina would endanger vital raw material sources : it would weaken the confidence of other Southeast Asian states in Western leadership; it would make more difficult and more expensive the defence of Japan, Formosa and the Philippines; and complicate the creation of a viable Japanese economy." (22)

Other NSC reports cited the specific value of tin, petroleum, natural rubber and rice available in Indochina.

When the French began to retreat, the American officials began to think of intervention²³ but with apprehension because, in the first place, the French were still active in early 1954 and although the possibility was rapidly diminishing, hope remained that they could yet prevail. At any rate, for the United States to intervene militarily would openly associate the nation with French imperialism and would risk evoking a negative response in other Asian countries. Secondly, the unpopularity of Korean War was too fresh in the memory of United States policy makers. As Dean Acheson said to a British official while opposing the commitment of ground forces to Indochina, "we could not have another Korea." Moreover, they also feared that such an intervention might lead to Chinese interference as such^{an} action was

22 Ibid., p. 207.

23 For details, see Buhite, n. 11, p. 213.

needed to prevent a Communist defeat. Thirdly, as long as the war remained a part of French war of imperialism, the United States could avoid a crisis over its own credibility.

As matters came to a head in mid-April 1954, the American officials once again debated intervention. In mid-April, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles tried to get British cooperation in a united military venture. The British refused and the French were also not keen on collective action either. This ultimately led the United States in mid-June, to abandon the idea of military intervention. Thereafter, it began manoeuvring for the least unsatisfactory resolution at the Conference Table in Geneva in July 1954.

Secretary Dulles' dilemma was a painful one; he had promised that the US would not again become bogged down in local wars, but he had also pledged to hold the line against the Communists. It was in this setting that Dulles proclaimed his "instant, massive retaliation" threat which frightened and alienated America's friends and provided its enemies with propoganda weapon. When the military situation worsened and the French at last decided to get out of the war in Indochina at once, the ^{Eisenhower} Administration apparently seriously considered the idea of sending American troops into the war, conditional upon allied support and the approval of

the Congress.²⁴

In a statement with regard to the 1954 Geneva Conference, President Eisenhower declared that he was glad that an agreement was going to be reached to stop the bloodshed in Indochina and the role of US at Geneva was to try to help to achieve the desired goals and to aid France and Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam to obtain a just and memorable settlement.²⁵

Soviet Attitude

Unlike the other great powers - China, Britain, France and United States - the Soviet Union had very little historical contact with Southeast Asia in general and Indochina in particular and thus its interests were also very nominal. The dominant character of Soviet behaviour in Asia during the past fifty years (i.e. after World War II) however has not been action but reaction.²⁶ The USSR is something of a counter puncher. Rather than pursuing some clearly defined predetermined course, it has moved opportunistically to meet unfolding events. However, in case of Indochina, the Soviets were the

24 Amry Vandebosch and Richard Butwell, The Changing Face of Southeast Asia (Lexington, 1967), p. 171.

25 Ibid., p. 173.

26 Douglas Pike, "The USSR and Vietnam : Into the Swamp", Asian Survey (Berkeley), vol. 19, no. 12, December, 1979, p. 1160.

first to hail the struggle that was going on in Indochina as an example of national liberation movement in colonial areas.²⁷ The Soviet Union from the beginning took an active interest in popular stirrings of revolutionary movements. This approach of the Soviet Union was based on the dialectics of social class and national liberation struggle and the Leninist conception of a single world revolutionary process which is primarily directed against imperialism and eventually against Capitalism.²⁸ Extending support to the national liberation movements and concern for strengthening the economic and political independence of the newly liberated countries formed the main direction of Soviet Foreign Policy i.e., its basic thrust. When Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence in late 1949, Moscow extended diplomatic recognition in January 1950. However, preoccupation with European Affairs and with support for the Chinese Revolution prevented Moscow from taking an active

27 Andrei Zhdanov, leading Communist party member and heir apparent to Stalin, in his famous address in Poland, on 22 September 1947, had propounded two camps thesis - division of the world into two camps - the war camp led by US and peace camp led by USSR. In the same speech he said, "Indonesia Vietnam, and India have joined anti-imperialist camp. For details see, Devendra Kaushik, "Soviet Policy Towards Southeast Asia : An Overview", in P.K. Das, ed., n. 2, p.169, and also Buhite, n. 11, p. 210.

28 Ibid., n. 2, p. 171.

interest in the developments in Southeast Asia during the last years of Stalin. Lack of historical contacts with the region resulting in inadequate first hand information further came in the way of pursuing an active policy towards it.²⁹ So in early 1950s, Southeast Asia was largely left to the care of the People's Republic of China by the Soviet Union with the consideration that the former could play a better role in advancing the interests of the International Communist Movement in the region.

In the early part of 1950s, Stalin began to realize that from the stand point of the Soviet Union, the Korean War had become a disaster,³⁰ and began to move away from Asia. After his death the new Soviet leadership moved further from Zhadanovism and in the fall of 1953, urged Ho Chi Minh to negotiate a settlement in Vietnam. Apart from the fear of a clash with the United States, the Soviet Union had other reasons for effecting a resolution in Indochina. The Soviets were much more concerned about Europe than about Asia and were particularly anxious in 1954 to prevent the French acceptance of the European Defence Community (EDC), through which Germany was to be rearmed. The Soviets assumed that a reduction of pressure on France and a more cooperative

29 Ibid., n. 2, p. 170.

30. Ibid., n. 2, p. 170.

Soviet spirit would increase the chances of a French Assembly veto of EDC. An additional factor in Soviet thinking was that a settlement in Indochina would lend credibility to the Soviet World wide peace offensive and to "moderate" the international position of the Soviet Union. A temporary delay in the achievement of maximum Viet Minh objectives was a small price to pay in view of larger Russian interests.³¹

Geneva Conference on Indochina : May-July 1954

On the afternoon of 7 May 1954, Dien Bien Phu fell and Viet Minh's red flag fluttered in the air over the French command bunkers ending the First Indochina War.³² The very next morning delegates from nine countries assembled at the old League of Nations building in Geneva to open their discussion on the Indochina problem. Apart from US and USSR, the other important participants of the Geneva Conference were the UK, France, the People's Republic of China and the Viet Minh. During the course of the Conference the US disassociated itself from the agreement when its attempts to bring the Indochina issue to the floors of the United Nations failed.

Excluding America, the other countries agreed on

31 Ibid.

32 For details of the battle of Dien Bien Phu, see Bernard B. Fall, Hell in a small place : The Seize of Dien Bien Phu (Philadelphia, 1966).

many things and finally a ceasefire agreement on Indochina was signed on 21 July 1954.³³ Some of the main features of the agreement were as follows:

1. Four new nations came into being - Cambodia, Laos, South Vietnam and North Vietnam.
2. Vietnam was to be divided temporarily and the seventeenth parallel was to be the provisional line of demarcation.
3. The elections by secret ballot, under the supervision of an International Control Commission, were to be held in July 1956 for reunification of the country.
4. Introduction into Vietnam of foreign troops, arms and ammunitions as well as establishment of foreign bases were prohibited. An International Armistice Commission consisting of India (Chairman), Poland and Canada was to be responsible to see whether this condition is respected in both zones of Vietnam.

The US did not sign the agreement. Its delegate Bidell Smith, however, stated at the end of the Conference that his country would refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb the agreement. He also said that it would view any violation of the agreement with grave concern.

33 For details on Geneva Conference, see Susheela Kaushik, The Agony of Vietnam (New Delhi, 1972), Chapter Seven.

The Cambodians were also able to obtain international guarantees for their country's independence, peace and territorial integrity.³⁴

With the signing of the Geneva Agreement, the French colonial rule in Indochina came to an end. Vietnam was divided into two with a promise of elections for reunification two years later. This proposed elections were never held and the Vietnamese had to wait for twenty two long years for the reunification of their motherland.

US-SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS INDOCHINA, 1954-1965

Establishment of SEATO

The euphoria of triumph with signing the Geneva Agreement was short-lived. Even before the ink on the Geneva Agreement could dry up, the United States introduced the ^{dominated} Western/alliance in the form of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) into the 'regional balance'.³⁵ SEATO was launched even before the Geneva Conference had completed its task of bringing French colonialism in Indochina to a respectable end and to fill up the vacuum in the mechanism of the Western power operations created by the French defeat thinking that it

34 P.C. Pradhan, Foreign Policy of Kampuchea, (New Delhi, 1985), p. 18.

35 M.N. Jha, "Structural insecurity in Southeast Asia", in P.K. Das, ed. n. 2, p. 47.

would be an 'answer to the problem of structural insecurity of Southeast Asia'.³⁶ It also hoped to contain the Communist influence in Southeast Asia. It came into being on September 1954, consisting of two genuine Southeast Asian countries - Thailand and the Philippines - and six extra-regional states of Australia, Great Britain, France, New Zealand, Pakistan and United States. Unfortunately the attempt made to enlist more Asian States in the alliance and to give it an Asian character was not successful. And this very fact became the target of criticism. "There was little about SEATO which was truly Asian, whatever power the pact had necessarily came from the Western members, primarily the United States."³⁷ It was also regarded the "violation of the Geneva Agreement."³⁸ In reality it was "designed in the West, controlled by the West, and inspired by the Western and not the Asian view of basic values."³⁹ The Soviet Union reacted sharply to the formation of SEATO. It was branded as a "stooge of imperialism."⁴⁰

36 Ibid.,

37 Vandebosch and Butwell, n. 25, p. 373.

38 Ibid.

39 Quoted in Pradhan, n. 35, p. 38.

40 G.V.C. Naidu, "The Soviet Union and Southeast Asia", Strategic Analysis (New Delhi), vol. 9, no. 9, December 1986, p. 1088.

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After the Geneva Conference, the American policy in Indochina underwent a transformation from a "major to a quasi-vital."⁴¹ However, the US policy began to undergo a change in 1956. It was undoubtedly influenced by the "new look" in Soviet Foreign policy, which followed the Geneva Conference of July 1954. The Soviet shift involved more than a change of manner from 'growing to purring'; it was accompanied by an announcement of a willingness to provide technical assistance and agricultural and industrial equipments to under developed countries, which later came to be known as its 'Third World Policy'. American Vice-President Nixon took the initiative and visited Southeast Asian countries. The shift in American policy became evident when it recognised the right of neutrality and began to aid countries even if they did not align with the West. The American objective was to contain the Communists particularly China and the Soviet Union as far as Southeast Asia was concerned. It also aimed to assist the nations of the latter region to become strong and stable so as to be able to survive the pressure of Communism.

The US began to take an active interest in the affairs of Indochina, especially in South Vietnam. Another act of violation of the Geneva agreement was committed when it began to strengthen Diem Government's military

41 Buhite, n. 11., p. 215.

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establishments. It started providing economic and military aid directly to Diem's government without sending it through France.

According to the Geneva agreement, elections were to be held in Vietnam in 1956. It was widely believed that if they were held Viet Minh would win the election. President Eisenhower himself so believed. He writes: "Had elections been held as at the time of the fighting possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai."⁴² The Eisenhower administration therefore advised Diem not to hold the elections. By that time Diem had become a client of the US, heavily depended upon the latter for political, military, and economic support. Diem declared in July 1955 that his government was not prepared to hold the election, since South Vietnam was not a signatory to the Geneva Agreement. As a result, July 1956, the time scheduled for elections, passed without any elections being held. Thus the Geneva Agreement was violated for the third time.

By mid-1955, Diem had brought all power and authority in the hands of his Ngo family. This led to increase of dissatisfaction among various elements of South

42 Chalmers, M. Roberts, "The Day We didn't go to War", The Reporter (New York), 14 September 1954, p. 32, Quoted in Susheela Kaushik, n. 34, p. 372.

Vietnam and this dissatisfaction began to be expressed in the form of guerilla activities in South Vietnam in 1956. When South Vietnam began to reel under political turmoil, North Vietnam (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) had begun to restructure its war torn society and economy. The Communist government embarked on bringing Socialist Revolution. It mobilised people both for this purpose and fighting for the peaceful re-unification of Vietnam.

After the Geneva Agreement, Sihanouk, the Cambodian ruler, had embarked upon the policy of neutrality. His acceptance of American aid in 1955 was due to his fear of encroachment by the Communist Viet Minh and this kept him close to US. He also realized that American military and economic assistance would be of great value for his newly independent country. Hence he tried his level best to maintain good relations with the United States.

But the motive behind US economic and military aid to Cambodia was in reality to draw Sihanouk into the Southeast Asia defence System. The United States knew that Cambodia was of great "strategic importance" in the contest of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. However, contrary to the expectations of the Americans, Sihanouk chose to remain neutral instead of joining the SEATO.)

In 1958, when the territorial integrity of the country was threatened, Sihanouk contemplated to utilise

all the possible resources at his command. But the US warned him against the use of US-supplied equipments against South Vietnam, as it was to be used only against some 'hypothetical Communist attack'.⁴³ To Sihanouk this advice appeared "cynic and terribly machiavellian."⁴⁴ He alleged that the Americans exerted pressure on Cambodia to make it give up its neutrality and join the SEATO. The US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, however, denied the allegation that his country was trying to coerce Cambodia into joining the SEATO and that it had threatened to withhold economic aid.

When the Dap Chhuon plot to assassinate Sihanouk was discovered in 1959, Sihanouk alleged that the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States was the spirit behind it.⁴⁵ He also claimed to have proof of it.

In 1960 Sihanouk started expressing himself critically of the US government. This was because of many developments such as the intensification of the antagonism between Cambodia and its neighbours, increased US aid to South Vietnam and Thailand, Sihanouk's friendship with the Communist bloc, anti Sihanouk orientation of the American press and US disapproval and rejection of

43 Keith Kuchanan, "Cambodia between Peking and Paris", Monthly Review (New York), December 1964, p. 481.

44 Ibid.

45 See P.C. Pradhan, n. 35, pp. 80-81.

Sihanouk's proposal for a guarantee of Cambodian neutrality by the Big Powers. Sihanouk was annoyed with the United States for its increasing military aid to his country's neighbours. The Americans realised this well enough. The joint findings of the Senate Committee headed by Mike Mansfield stated : "Our military aid to these countries is undoubtedly a factor in exacerbating Cambodian fears and hence has intensified the difficulties which have characterised US-Cambodian relations."⁴⁶

The immediate issue which brought matters to a head was US support for the increasing anti-national activities of the Khmer Serei. The assassination of Diem in South Vietnam during November 1963, gave a fillip to Sihanouk. He was apparently convinced that the same fate lay in store for him. He renounced US economic aid on 20 November 1963. Even as he told the United States to terminate all military, economic, and cultural aid to Cambodia, he asked the nation : "must we accept aid from this government which gives us with one hand and stabs in the back with another."⁴⁷ This decision to do without American aid, further aggravated the relation between the two. Finally, the diplomatic relation between the two was formally broken off by Sihanouk in May 1965.

46 Congressional Record, 20 November 1963, p. 22420, Quoted in Pradhan, n. 35, p. 81.

47 The Guardian (Rangoon), 22 November 1963.

Prince Sihanouk was also very much concerned about Communism. Though he felt that Communism was not suited to his country, he maintained very good relations with the Communist bloc. He knew that the essential condition for his country's survival as a free and independent nation depended upon the maintenance of an equilibrium between the Eastern and Western blocs. His wooing of China and the Soviet Union was conditioned largely by Cambodia's ancient enmity towards South Vietnam and Thailand. He wanted the support of China and the Soviet Union "as a regional counterweight and he hopes to be adroit enough to prevent their warm embrace from becoming a strangle hold."⁴⁸

Among the Communist countries, it was China that Sihanouk chose especially to befriend. In fact, it was hardly possible for him to ignore that country. The geographical nearness and a large percentage of Chinese minority⁴⁹ did not let him to brush them aside. He felt that after the French withdrawal in 1954, China would become a regional super power and this was also one of the reasons for him to develop close relationship with it.

48 For details see Ibid., p. 84.

49 The Chinese Minority was estimated to be eight per cent of the total population of Cambodia in 1958.

In July 1958, the two countries established normal diplomatic relations. Cambodia extended de jure recognition to China. A month later, in August 1958, Sihanouk went to Peking not only to signify the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries but also to persuade China to guarantee Cambodia's independence and territorial integrity.

/When Prince Sihanouk proposed on 20 August 1962 an International Conference on Cambodia to give official recognition to Cambodia and guarantee its neutrality and territorial integrity, he received full support for his proposal from China. And when the US rejected the proposal, China vociferously condemned the "US imperialism in the Indochina region."⁵⁰

Sihanouk's policy towards the Soviet Union also was a notable success. The Soviet Union did not play in South-East Asia during this period a role as significant as that of China owing to its preoccupations elsewhere and also because of the long distance separating it from that region. Soviet diplomacy in Asia consisted by and large the extension of economic aid to a select group of countries which qualified either as countries which refused to ally themselves with the US or which

50 Peking Review, 14 September 1962.

were in some sense "neutralist."⁵¹ The Soviets regarded Cambodia as a neutral state which refrained from all military or ideological alliance with foreign states. In 1960, Sihanouk visited Moscow. President Brezhnev appreciated his personal efforts to establish peace in Indochina. Politically, Sihanouk received full support from the Soviet leaders for his proposal for an international guarantee.

On 18 January 1964, the Soviet Union proposed to Great Britain that a 14-nation conference should be held in the following April for a discussion on the question of guaranteeing Cambodian neutrality. It also said that the United States should be one of the countries participating in the conference. Great Britain did not accept this Soviet proposal. Instead it suggested to Sihanouk a meeting between Cambodia, Thailand, and South Vietnam. Sihanouk did not think that a meeting between these countries would serve the purpose. He called for the need to convene "unconditionally and without delay", a new Geneva conference on Indochina "to save world peace." He opened direct correspondence with the US government suggesting a four power conference - Cambodia, South Vietnam, Thailand and the US. He finally concluded,

51 Charles Wolf, Jr., "Soviet Economic Aid in Southeast Asia : Threat or Windfall", World Politics (New Jersey), October 1957, p. 01.

that if these proposals were rejected, the world would have to blame the US, Thailand and South Vietnam. The US and South Vietnam, were favourable to hold such a Conference but Thailand turned down the proposal.

The sporadic guerilla activities which began in South Vietnam in 1956 turned into a full scale war by 1959. On 20 December 1960, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was formally constituted to carry out the Communist revolution effectively within South Vietnam. With the formation of NLF or Viet Cong, DRV (North Vietnam) took control of directing the insurgency in the south. It started training the Vietcong guerillas. Trained guerillas in large number began to infiltrate from the North to the South. As a result Vietcong insurgency in the South increased substantially.⁵²

By the time, John F. Kennedy took over the Presidency in January 1961, the situation in Vietnam had become extremely depressing for both Diem and the US as the Vietcong guerillas aided by North Vietnam and engaged in a bid to overthrow the pro-American regime of Saigon were gradually succeeding in attaining their target.

President Kennedy's response to the increasing Vietcong guerilla activities was the creation of the

52 For detailed information on the Vietcong insurgency, see Douglas Pike, Viet Cong : The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (Cambridge, 1966).

Special Forces. Kennedy's decision in 1961-62 to send these military personnel to Vietnam "marked a real and crucial watershed" in the history of American involvement in the Vietnam crisis.⁵³ Until 1961, an honourable disengagement for the US was possible. But with the commitment of these military personnel, it became increasingly difficult for it to withdraw from Vietnam.⁵⁴ President Kennedy himself was very much sceptical about the possibility of a decisive American victory in Vietnam. Once he said; "In the last analysis, it is their war, it is they who must win it or lose it."⁵⁵ Top personalities in the White House pressed him relentlessly to commit American combat troops in Vietnam, but he refused. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, did it.

Lyndon B. Johnson who succeeded the assassinated President Kennedy in November 1963 was more committed to Vietnam than his predecessor. On February 17, 1965 he declared:

"As I have said so many, many times and other Presidents ahead of me have said, our purpose and our objective there is

53 Paul M. Kattenburg, "The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1949-75" (New Brunswick & London, 1982), p. 113.

54 Ibid:

55 John G. Stoessinger, Why Nations go to War? (New York, 1982), p. 94.

clear. That purpose and objective is to join in the defence and protection of the freedom of a brave people who are under attack that is controlled and that is directed from outside their country."(56)

In a news conference on 29 July 1965 the President declared that:

"thus ... war... is guided by North Vietnam. Its goal is to conquer the South to defeat the American power and to extend the 'Asiatic dominion of Communism'. The US goals are firstly, to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms or by superior power, secondly, once the Communists know, as we know that a violent situation is impossible, then a peaceful solution is inevitable. We are ready now as we have always been, to move from the battlefield to the conference table."(57)

He had a firm idea about one thing - saving Vietnam from Communism. He was ready even to commit American combat troops for that purpose. And that is what he did in 1965. Thus, the US was caught in the vortex of the whirlpool of Vietnam war.

US-SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS INDOCHINA, 1965-70

One of the significant developments in the second half of the 60s has been the estrangement of Sino-Soviet

56 For detailed study of Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam policy, see Vietnam and South East Asia, Report of Senator Mike Mansfield, Senator J. Cale Boggs, Senator Calborne Pell and Senator Benjamin, A. Smith to the Committee of Foreign Relations. US Senate, 1963, Quoted in Vandenbosch and Butwell, n. 25, pp. 386 - 397.

57 Ibid.

relations. By 1965, three objectives had begun to define the Soviet strategy in Southeast Asia,⁵⁸ and these remained the same up to the coming of Gorbachev, though their order of priority was changed. The principal Soviet objective until 1969 - when Nixon's Vietnamization policy signalled the beginning of the US withdrawal and when serious border clashes between China and the USSR occurred - was to see its global rival weakened in the region by being forced to pull out of Vietnam. The principal objective was limited by two secondary ones. One of these was the desire to maintain detente with the US, viz., the whole post-war arrangement of spheres of influence. This kept the Soviet support for Vietnam to a level where detente did not have to be abandoned. The other objective in this period, still a secondary one, was to contain China's regional and global influence. The Kremlin was anxious to ensure that the Vietnam War should not enhance the political prestige of the Chinese Communist Party. This consideration put strict limits on the pressure that the Soviet Union could exert on the Vietnamese leadership to moderate their position and bring it into line with the Soviet pursuit of detente. Soviet leaders nevertheless repeatedly demonstrated that

58 For a detailed study of the Soviet policy during the 60s and the early part of 70s, see, Paul Keleman, "Soviet Strategy in Southeast Asia : The Vietnam Factor", Asian Survey (Berkeley), vol. 24, no. 3, March 1984, pp. 335-340.

they did not regard detente conditional on US withdrawal from Vietnam or even as a cessation of bombing of North Vietnam. A startling example of this was the subdued Soviet reaction to the US bombing of North Vietnam during Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. "Soviet papers even appeared to be making a conscious effort to treat Kosygin's visit to the DRV and the American bombing of that country as two separately independent events."⁵⁹

With China emerging as an ideological challenger and a hostile neighbour by the mid sixties, the Soviet Union was compelled to have second thoughts about its relations with the countries of Southeast Asia. While it was contemplating such a move, the ASEAN came into being in 1967 and this obviously had the blessing of the US. The Soviet Union reacted sharply to the formation of ASEAN and condemned it as "transparent efforts" by imperialism led by the United States to include more and more states in its anti-Communist alliance.⁶⁰ The Soviet Union contended that there was a grand military design by the United States, and that economic and cultural cooperation was only a facade and there was no possibility of achieving economic goals given the nature

59 D.S. Papp, Vietnam :The View from Moscow, Peking, Washington (North Carolina, 1981), p. 59.

60 G.V.C. Naidu, n. 41, p. 1088.

of socio-economic systems in these countries. It also contended:

"Experience has shown that the success of regional organisation depends largely on the extent to which the countries involved are unified on an anti-imperialist basis, resist the pressure of foreign monopolies and on the extent to which their struggle for economic independence is supported by socialist countries."(61)

In 1969, the Soviet Union specifically pronounced its Asian policy. Leonid Brezhnev put forward "a system of collective Security in Asia". This was the first time the Soviet Union adopted an exclusive plan for Asia on the agenda of its foreign policy. This Asian Security Plan,⁶² if had been accepted for adherence by members of the ASEAN (as well as other Asian countries), would have given Southeast Asia the much needed structural sufficiency. While it drew the right regional chord by pointing to the political instabilities within the region calling for a raising of guards, it also carried a fly by mentioning China as the likeliest of the adventures which the regional state system needed to be on guard against.

61 Paulvosky, "Problems of Regionalism in Asia", International Affairs (Moscow), April 1969, p. 46.

62 For a detailed analysis of the Soviet Collective Security Proposal, see Victor Zorza, "Collective Security", Survival, August 1969; Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Soviet Thinking on Asian Collective Security", IDSJ Journal, April 1973.

Given the Sino-Soviet animosity together with the developing Sino-US rapprochement, the Russian case appeared to be a shrewd move on the cold war chess board to throw the regional capacity of Southeast Asia into the balance against China. But it was really fanciful on Moscow's part to have expected acceptance of her plan in view of China's positional relationship with Southeast Asia and the large numbers of Chinese settlers in the region making a powerful minority on the one hand and the force of the US influence in the region on the other. The Chinese condemned the collective Asian Security concept as a move to encircle China and warned the other Asian countries of Soviet designs. The response from the other Asian countries to the Soviet proposal was either negative or lukewarm.

When the Soviet Union was busy with all these ideological exercises, the war in Vietnam was in full swing. By 1966, the American commitment to Vietnam grew strong day by day. By the end of 1965, the strength of American troops in Vietnam had reached 193,000. The bombing of North Vietnam and Viet Cong hideouts which began in early 1955 continued till early 1968. Initially bombings were directed against the lines of communication, and later, against its industrial centres, provincial capitals, hospitals and schools. Finally, it spread to the capital Hanoi and the Chief Harbour Haiphong. Chemical

warfare had become common. It was a war against humanity but men at the helm of power in Washington did not realise this naked truth. These American bombing, however, failed to break the morale of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Congs. It resulted only in giving them a psychological stimulus for increasing their resistance power. Thus by constant readjustments the North Vietnamese managed to resist effectively the American onslaught.⁶³ President Johnson, eventually realized that the spirit of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong could not be curbed through the escalations of the war. This war had damaged his popularity within the US and was drawing wide-spread criticism from both home and abroad. Moreover, this war proved to be a huge drain on American military resources. Taking into consideration all these developments President Johnson announced on 31 March 1968 that the US would stop the bombing partially with a view to bring peace in Indochina. Thus this marked the beginning of the end of American involvement in Indochina.

The North Vietnamese had earlier stated several times that they were ready for talks. When President Johnson also decided to halt bombing and begin talks, they responded positively.

63 For details, see, John M. Van Dyke, North Vietnam's Strategy for Survival (Palo Alto, 1972).

On 10 May 1968 preliminary talks began in Paris. On 1 January 1969, the Paris talks were started formally. In these talks besides the US and North Vietnam, South Vietnam and NLF also participated. As the position taken by the US and North Vietnam were opposed to each other the talks continued for full four years. North Vietnam insisted on preconditions like total stoppage of bombing by the Americans and participation of NLF in any full scale negotiations regarding South Vietnam. On the other hand the US insisted that the American sponsored puppet regime in South Vietnam must dominate the future of South Vietnam.

Richard Nixon, who succeeded Lyndon Johnson to the Presidency in January 1969 favoured simultaneous withdrawal from South Vietnam of both American and North Vietnamese forces thus implying that the North Vietnamese were also aggressors like the Americans. North Vietnam, obviously was not ready to accept this stand.

President Nixon favoured gradual withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam and "Vietnamization" of the war. In July 1969, he announced at the Western Pacific Island of Guam, the Nixon Doctrine (also called Guam Doctrine) saying that in the future, the US would avoid involvement like the one in Vietnam by limiting its role only to military aid rather than commissioning her own combat troops.

When Vietnam was neck deep in its war with the US, Cambodia was beginning to shape itself to face the crisis of a civil war. Sihanouk's shunning away of American aid had led to deteriorating economic conditions in Cambodia thus leading to the unpopularity of the Prince. There were even uprisings - the serious one being the uprising that occurred in the Province of Battambang and a similar one in the Province of Kompong Cham.⁶⁴ These uprisings were suppressed and when the Prince visited these places accused that it was engineered by certain foreign countries.⁶⁵ Sihanouk has publicly termed those activities part of an American plot⁶⁶ against his government and there can be no denying that there is more than a little justification for his suspicions.⁶⁷ The dissidents were given sanctuaries in Thailand and South Vietnam by the Bangkok and Saigon governments and both of these were close allies of the US.

After 1965, the war in Vietnam was intensified and there were repeated incursions by the US and South Vietnamese forces on Cambodian territory. American and

64 Wilfred Burchett, The Second Indochina War (New York, 1970), p. 56.

65 Ibid.

66 For details see, Vandenbosch and Butwell, n. 25, pp. 226-238.

67 Ibid.

South Vietnamese spokesmen justified these acts of aggression by saying that they had been undertaken to punish the Viet Cong operating from bases in Cambodia.⁶⁸ Sihanouk however, denied that there were any Viet Cong bases in his country. These incursions were intensified in 1967 and Sihanouk stepped up his campaign for international recognition of Cambodian neutrality and territorial integrity. He got positive response from China, NLF, North-Vietnam and Soviet Union. In contrast to this US and its allies remained obdurate.⁶⁹)

The Soviet Union warned the US against extending its military activities in Cambodia.⁷⁰ The Cambodian-American rapprochement was further damaged by these activities. However, on June 1969 after a hectic diplomatic activity, diplomatic relations were formally resumed at the Charge d'Affairs level between Cambodia and the US. But this rapprochement did not put a finality to US and South Vietnamese incursions on Cambodian territory. It continued throughout the year, albeit on a smaller scale.

The year 1970, became a year of crisis for Norodom Sihanouk and a year of watershed in the history of

68 New York Times, 14 October 1965.

69 Pradhan, n. 35, p. 107.

70 Ibid., p. 131.

Cambodia, as the events that were unfolded changed the course of Cambodian history. The stage for the overthrow of Sihanouk had been completed by the end of 1969. The catalytic ingredient used to bring the downfall of Sihanouk was the presence of 50,000 Vietnamese Communists.

This entire episode⁷¹ was performed by Sihanouk's General Lon Nol and Sirik Matak, allegedly⁷² under the sponsorship of United States. On 24 February 1970, the government issued a promulgation regarding the use of currency, which rendered the Cambodian currency held by the Vietnamese Communists worthless, thus making it impossible for them to purchase anything.⁷³ Added to this on 8 March 1970, the army organised an anti-communist demonstration in the province of Svay Rieng and a similar demonstration was organised by the soldiers in mufti against the Communists in Phnom Penh, and this turned into violence as the soldiers in civilian clothes ransacked the North Vietnamese embassy and it was widely rumoured that Sihanouk was behind all these happenings. Sihanouk, on 13 March 1970, who was on a foreign tour to Paris, denounced it as the manoeuvres conducted by an

71 For a detailed study of the coup, see Pradhan, n. 35, pp. 142-148.

72 The alleged involvement of US has been discussed in the coming pages of the same chapter.

73 David P. Chandler, "Changing Cambodia", Current History (Philadelphia), December 1970, p. 376.

imperialist capitalist power."⁷⁴ Lon Nol took another step. He issued an ultimatum to the Vietnamese, saying that all Vietnamese and NLF troops should leave Cambodian soil by 15 March 1970.

18 March 1970, became the fateful day for Sihanouk. On that day, the National Assembly met to formalize the end of an era in Cambodian history. A note for his deposition was moved by one of the leading plotters, Trianh Hanh, the Secretary General of the Sangkum. The result of the vote was unanimous, and Sihanouk was removed from the post of head of State of Cambodia. The Phnom Penh Radio announced:

In view of the political crisis created in recent days by the Chief of State Prince Sihanouk and in conformity with the Constitution of Cambodia, the National Assembly and the Council of Kingdom, during a plenary session held on 18 March at 13.00 hours, have unanimously agreed to withdraw confidence in Sihanouk. As of 1300 hours, 18 March, Prince Sihanouk shall cease his function as Chief of State of Cambodia.(75)

Though Cheng Heng, the National Assembly Chairman, became the Head of State, the power lay in the hands of Lon Nol and Sirik Matak, who had together masterminded the coup. Thus, a tiny Cambodian elite, hoping to win for itself a large share of control in the economy and political life of Cambodia and resentful of Sihanouk's

74 See Pradhan, n. 35, pp. 142-148.

75 US News and World Report (Washington, D.C.), 30 March 1970, p. 20.

personal authority and prestige, plunged the country into a civil war and set the stage for American invasion.

The important issue debated was the extent of involvement of the US in the Cambodian coup. The "identity of interest between the US and the coup leaders raised the question of a possible US role in the coup."⁷⁶ The Dap Chhuan plot of 1959, when investigated had clearly pointed out CIA as the main culprit. It was also reported that as early as 1968, the CIA had been employed in anti-Sihanouk subversions in Cambodia.⁷⁷ Finally, when Sihanouk was overthrown in a coup, it became evident that the Central Intelligence Agency^{cf} the US "had a finger and ... a hand in the 18 March coup." The demonstration that took place prior to the coup was seen by Hanoi and "more mutely by Moscow" as "part of a rightist plot presumably stimulated by the C.I.A."⁷⁸ Stressing the role of the US, Sihanouk claimed to have possessed enough evidence when he said:

"Enough evident is available, however, to prove the increasing and determined intervention of the United States in the internal affairs of my country and particularly the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in

76 In order to get an insight of the American involvement in the plot, see Pradhan, n. 35, pp. 146-147.

77 The Times (London), 29 March 1970.

78 International Herald Tribune (Paris), 17 March 1970.

a series of plots which culminated in the military coup of 18 March 1970."⁷⁹

US officials however rejected the charge. Senator Mike Mansfield said that the American Government was in no way involved in the reported coup against the neutralist leader. "I give my word on this," he said.⁸⁰

Reactions to Sihanouk's overthrow was varied. Hanoi announced, the Lon Nol - Sirik Matak group, henchmen of US, has staged a Coup d'etat which was a hostile action committed against the Cambodian people and the patriotic struggle of Vietnamese people. The reaction of China was very favourable towards Sihanouk. The Soviet Union announced that it would as ever respect the neutrality and independence of Cambodia and its territorial integrity with present border. Curiously enough it made no reference to the overthrow of Sihanouk.

US SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS INDOCHINA, 1970-75

On 23 March 1970, Sihanouk called for the creation of National Liberation Army to fight against the US imperialism and its agents inside the country. He also called for the creation of a National United Front for the liberation of the country and to handle the task of reconstruction after the victory was won. Thus the crea-

79 Norodom Sihanouk, My War with CIA (London, 1973) p. 20.

80 Daily Telegraph (London), 19 March 1970.

tion of the National United Front of Kampuchea (Cambodia) popularly known as FUNK was announced. Its main function was as Sihanouk declared to liberate Cambodia from the dictatorship and oppression of the reactionary and pro-imperialist Lon Nol-Sirik Matak-Cheng Heng clique and also to struggle against the US imperialists and to rebuild the country after the victory over these enemies.

Meanwhile the armed forces of the Vietnamese Communists widened their military operations. For the first time they conducted military operations against Cambodian troops. Under Sihanouk, areas in the control of the Viet Cong used to be measured in terms of square kilometres, even square metres but after his ouster they began to be measured in terms of districts and even whole provinces. Thus the guerilla activities assumed the shape of a civil war. This acquired a new vigour when the rebel leaders of North Vietnam, the PRG of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia held a conference in the last week of April 1970 in an area bordering Laos, Vietnam, and China. They decided to form an axis of the revolutionary people of Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, China and North Korea against the pro-US Phnom Penh - Saigon - Bangkok - Vietiane axis. This lent special force to the struggle of the Indochinese peoples and produced better results also. Within six weeks after the ouster of Sihanouk, the Lon Nol government lost effective control over at least one-fourth of the country.

On 14 April 1970, the Lon Nol government publicly appealed to all countries for help to defend the country against the Viet Cong aggression. On 21 April 1970, he wrote a letter to Nixon, asking for material help. Thus the equi-distance between the super powers which was maintained by Sihanouk was broken as the Lon Nol government placed itself at the mercy of United States. Cambodia, which had managed for many years to avoid being sucked into the military conflict in Indochina, was unable to withstand the blasts of war when United States and South Vietnamese forces intervened directly on 30 April 1970.

While talking about withdrawing American troops from Vietnam, President Nixon ordered for bombing of Viet Cong supply routes and sanctuaries in North Vietnam as well as in Cambodia. Secretary Rogers described President Nixon's decision to extend the war to Cambodia as a limited decision - "limited in extent purpose and duration."⁸¹ After a short period of direct action, the last of US troops left Cambodia on 30 June 1970, but the war had clearly spread to the whole of Cambodia.

The Communist forces fighting against the 'US imperialists' in Indochina severely criticised the intervention of US. The North Vietnamese government criticised it as Washington's naked aggression against

81 Department of State Bulletin, vol. 70, 25 May 1970, p. 618.

Cambodia, a gross violation of her independence and sovereignty, an utter disregard of the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Indochina.

The Soviet Union was also provoked by the entry of US troops into Cambodia. The Soviet Premier, Alexie Kosygin said:

"The Soviet Union has always respected the neutrality and independence of Cambodia, its sovereignty and territorial integrity of its frontiers. This is what determines our resolute condemnation of the American intervention in Cambodia." (82)

Interestingly enough the Soviet Premier had not condemned the Phnom Penh government. Nor had he offered any assistance to Prince Sihanouk in his struggle against the Lon Nol regime. Even after the establishment of the Royal Government of Sihanouk (in exile), the Soviet Union continued to recognize the Lon Nol government. The Soviets were sceptical about Sihanouk's chances of victory. It is only in 1973, when Sihanouk's forces began to gain upper hand, the official Soviet newspapers Pravda and Izvestia began to refer him as "Chief of State" for the "first time."⁸³

82 New Times (Moscow), 9 May 1970, p. 20.

83 Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (Boston, 1982), p. 362.

On 27 January 1973, the US and North Vietnam signed the Paris Agreement in which the United States recognised the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam. This agreement also allowed the North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam to stay in their place. On the other hand, it demanded the total withdrawal of American troops. Though this agreement recognized the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia, it did not provide for a settlement in Cambodia. In spite of the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam on 29 March 1973, the fighting did not stop. The Thieu government of South Vietnam began to attack the NLF, which finally resulted in the fall of Saigon. (In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge denounced the North Vietnam for signing the Paris Agreements because it apprehended that, this would enable the United States to shift its operations to Cambodia. Moreover, the Paris agreement did not provide a settlement to Cambodia. So, the Khmer Rouge continued its fighting against the Lon Nol government, in spite of the declaration of ceasefire on 27 January 1973 by the Lon Nol government.) In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge ousted Lon Nol government from power. The victory of the Communists seemed inevitable and the people viewed the prospect with stoicism hoping for a return of normalcy and stability.

With the fall of Saigon, American influence in Vietnam and Indochina was completely liquidated. That is what the US got after twenty five years of involvement and eight years of active engagement in Vietnam. What it got ultimately was quite opposite to what it had hoped for. Both Cambodia and the whole of Vietnam came under the Communist rule in April 1975, and Laos followed suit within a few months.

Although the signals of Sino-American rapprochement had already appeared on the surface when Henry Kissinger visited Beijing in 1971, and had become even clearer by the Shanghai Communique of February 1972, the complete withdrawal of American troops from Indochina in 1975 provided a real momentum for Sino-American normalization. Proving no intention to threaten China's security by the withdrawal, the US was released from being the prime enemy of China. Instead, China came to define the Soviet Union as the most dangerous rival. As a result the US won a better position to manoeuvre in the US-China-Soviet relations. In this regard the US did not solely lose in the Vietnam debacle but did gain to some extent some advantages that perhaps is bigger than the loss.

(The newly created power vacuum after the American withdrawal from Indochina provided unusual opportunities

for Russians to fill it up.) The USSR launched a formidable diplomatic offensive by offering extensive economic aid to Vietnam, which desperately needed economic support from outside in order to rehabilitate the war ravaged economy. The Soviet Union came in a big way to the rescue of Vietnam in its colossal reconstruction plan. Moscow was also desperately looking for an ally and foothold in that part of the world in the light of "new permutations of power relations,"⁸⁴ between the US and China. Under these circumstances, the Chinese came to regard the increase of the Vietnamese influence in Indochina after the Vietnam war not simply as Vietnam's own but also as the growth of the Soviet power.⁸⁵

The Americans after their withdrawal and up to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979, gave a low priority to this region, as this region had twice wounded their pride. The Soviet Union began to improve its position, of course through Vietnam as the most fundamental goal of Soviet Union in Southeast Asia was to be regarded as "a power which must be recognised in any decision affecting the region."⁸⁶

84 See G.V.C. Naidu, n. 41, p. 1092.

85 R. Nagi, n. 10, p. 45.

86 See Robert C. Horn, "Soviet Vietnamese Relations and the Future of Southeast Asia", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver), vol. 56, no. 4, Winter, 1978-79, p. 592.

When the United States withdrew its troops from Indochina in 1975 resulting in the victory of Communist forces, Vietnam became united and a new era was ushered in. Everybody hoped that it would be an era of peace and stability in the entire Indochina region.

CHAPTER - II

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CAMBODIA-VIETNAM ANIMOSITY AND US-SOVIET REACTION, 1975-1978

Following the end of three decade old upheaval in Indochina, with the victories of Communist forces in both Vietnam and Cambodia in April 1975, it was hoped generally that peace and stability would prevail. In the following years, contrary to these expectations, Indochina soon plunged into another round of bitter conflicts involving an Asian Super Power i.e. China. In the words of David W.P. Elliott, it appears that peace and Indochina cannot co-exist or that events in Indochina are being "regulated" by an "iron law" that "nothing is ever simple, and things can always get worse."¹

(The Cambodian-Vietnamese crisis first started as border skirmishes between the two countries, developed into a major military intervention by Vietnam in the internal affairs of Cambodia against the Pol Pot regime in December 1978 and January 1979.) Later, the People's Republic of China (PRC) also entered the stage by launching a massive invasion of the northern frontiers of Vietnam in February-March 1979, prompting the world

1 David W.P. Elliott, "Third Indochina Conflict: Introduction" in self edited The Third Indochina War (Boulder, Colorado; 1981), p. 1.

to christen these series of conflicts as the "Third Indochina war." Though internecine conflicts within the Socialist Bloc were not new and had taken place earlier,² this Third Indochina War was the first instance of three Socialist countries engaging in major military operations against each other.

CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE CONFLICT

(The Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict was the result of deep rooted racial animosity and historical rivalry between the Cambodian and Vietnamese people.) It is a fact that both these people had fought hand in hand against American intervention in Indochina. Notwithstanding these friendship and cooperation against the common enemy, soon after the end of the Second Vietnam War and victory of the Communist forces in both Cambodia and Vietnam, hitherto submerged antagonism between the allies came to the surface³ and resulted in military intervention and invasion.

The Border Dispute

The Cambodian-Vietnamese enmity and rivalry is deep rooted and both have fought a series of wars since

2 Few examples of such conflicts are the Yugoslav-Soviet controversy during the Stalin era, and Sino-Soviet clashes (Both ideological and military).

3 Elliott, n. 1, p. 1.

the thirteenth century to achieve mastery over the delta of the Mekong river in the southern part of the geographical area which has been named as "Indochina" by the French colonialists in the nineteenth century. This was, however, an unequal conflict between a strong Vietnam and a weak Cambodia and over the centuries Cambodian boundaries were considerably reduced. The Cambodians regard the Vietnamese as "alien, domineering and determined to absorb their nation."⁴ The reason for the strong hostility between these two people lies in their respective culture. Culturally, Cambodia is closer to India and Vietnam to China. The border between these two nations "serves as the frontier between Indian and Sinic cultures - one of the world's sharpest cultural divisions."⁵

The total annihilation of Cambodia by Vietnam was prevented by the French who brought under their control both Vietnam and Kampuchea along with Laos and established their colonial rule in Indochina during the later half of the nineteenth century.⁶ The colonial

4 William S. Turley and Jeffrey Race, "Third Indo-China War", Foreign Policy (Washington D.C.) Spring 1980, p. 96.

5 Ibid.

6 Stanley Karnov, "East Asia in 1978: The Great Transformation", Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y) vol. 57, no. 3, p. 604.

administration, however, gave the Vietnamese a dominant position in the Cambodian economy and administration.⁷

The process of loss of Cambodian territory to Vietnam was not halted by the French. When the French delineated the border between Vietnam and Cambodia they gave scant regard to the population - their culture and history. Cochinchina or Southern Vietnam was historically a part of Cambodia and it was inhabited mostly by Cambodians. The Cambodians refer to this region as Kampuchea Krom (Lower Cambodia) and the inhabitants as Khmer Krom (Cambodians of Lower Cambodia). Overlooking these facts, the French unilaterally gave this region to Vietnam - administration convenience was the sole reason, factor behind it.

The merger of the Lower Cambodia with South Vietnam was officially protested by the Norodom Sihanouk regime following the independence of Cambodia from French rule in 1954. The Sihanouk regime maintained that Cambodia continued to have sovereignty over these territories.⁸

7 For details on French rule in Cambodia and Vietnam, See John Cody, The Roots of French Imperialism in Asia (Ithaca, 1954); Thomas E. Ennis, French Policy and Developments in Indochina (Chicago, 1956); and Milton E. Osborne, The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia : Rule and Response, 1859-1905 (Ithaca, NY), 1969.

8 Roger Smith, Cambodian Foreign Policy (Ithaca, N.Y) 1965), pp. 154-55.

However, it gradually gave up this stand when its relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, North Vietnam) and the National Liberation Front (NLF, Viet Cong) of South Vietnam became increasingly cordial in late 1950s. However in the early part of the 1960s, Cambodia began to be alienated from both South Vietnam and Thailand when these two countries revived their territorial claims on it. As a result tension was created on the borders and Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with Thailand⁹ and South Vietnam¹⁰ in 1961 and 1963 respectively.

During the same period, the United States was also engaged in anti-Sihanouk activities by organising and aiding a private army from the rightist group called Khmer Serai to oppose Sihanouk. The Sihanouk regime expressed its strong displeasure at this American policy. As a retaliatory measure it declined further American economic aid and broke off diplomatic ties with Washington in 1965.¹¹

After 1965, the Sihanouk regime began making it

9 For details on Thai-Cambodian Conflict see P.C. Pradhan, Foreign Policy of Kampuchea (New Delhi, 1985), pp.70-74.

10 For details of Cambodian-South Vietnamese tussel see *ibid.*, pp.70-71 and 74-78.

11 For US-Cambodian Relations see *ibid.*, pp 79-83, and 119-120.

increasingly clear that Cambodia's diplomatic support for Vietnam against the United States and the presence of Vietnamese communist troops in Cambodia were dependent on a Vietnamese acceptance of "some kind of border settlement."¹² In 1967, Prince Sihanouk put pressure upon the DRV and NLF to issue unilateral declarations stating that they respect the existing borders of Cambodia and he interpreted their statements as complete acceptance by Vietnam of his stand on borders. Though both the DRV and NLF publicly supported Sihanouk's stand, privately they did not.¹³

The gulf between the Vietnamese and Cambodian Communists went on increasing during the rightist Lon Nol regime in Cambodia. It resulted in small scale armed clashes also. The Cambodian Communists were opposed to the existence of Vietnamese base camps and military supply lines on Cambodian soil. By the time both of them emerged victorious in April 1975, the gulf between them had become so wide that it could not be easily bridged.

Ideological and Political Dispute

The Vietnamese and the Cambodian Communists had

12 Heder E. Stephen., "The Kampuchean-Vietnamese Conflict", in Elliott, ed., n. 1, p. 25.

13 Ibid., pp 26-27.

put up a united front to fight, first against the French and later the Americans and their puppet regimes both in Cambodia and South Vietnam. They fought shoulder to shoulder throughout the first and second Indochina wars. The eruption of hostilities between the war-time allies after April 1975 came as a surprise to the world. Some of the informations which have come to light after 1977, however, show that mutual suspicions and hostilities between the Cambodian and Vietnamese Communists have existed since early 1950s.

Though the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) which was found in 1930 had some Cambodian and Laotian members, it was dominated mainly by the Vietnamese. As a result it stood for an "Indochinese Revolution" and did not contemplate independent and separate revolutionary movements for Cambodia and Laos.

The Khmer Issarak movement was formed in Cambodia in 1941 with the task of carrying out armed struggle for the liberation of Cambodia from the French. It was the Cambodian counterpart of Vietnamese Viet Minh and Laotian Itsala. By early 1950s the Issarak had established considerable influence over a larger part of Cambodia.

The eventual recognition of the development in 1951 that all the three nations of Indochina - Vietnam

Cambodia and Laos - had grown into three separate states prompted the leaders of the ICP to realise the necessity of establishing separate parties in the three respective countries. Such a move was contemplated a requisite in order to carry out anti-French struggle effectively. As a result Pracheachon or the Cambodian People's Revolutionary party came into existence in Cambodia. In Vietnam, Lao Dong or Vietnamese Workers' Party and in Laos Pathet Lao came into being.

The former members of the ICP constituted a sizeable portion of the newly established Pracheachon. It is through these people the Vietnamese continued to dominate the activities of the Pracheachon even after Cambodia got independence from the French in 1954. Prince Sihanouk followed anti-American policy and gave diplomatic support to DRV. The Vietnamese in return insisted the Cambodian Communists to extend their support to Sihanouk. This aroused strong resentment among the Cambodian Communists when Sihanouk launched in early 1960s an anti-Communist campaign in which about ninety per cent of the Cambodian Communists were eliminated.¹⁴

Since mid-fifties a small group led by Saloth Sar (who later came to be known under the pseudonym Pol Pot)

14 Gereth Porter, "The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict in South East Asia", Current History (Philadelphia) vol. 75, December 1978, p. 194.

and Teng Sary was becoming more and more powerful within the Pracheachon. They had studied Marxism in Paris rather than in ICP. They returned to Cambodia and joined the party soon after the country became independent. The lack of interaction between them and the ICP made them formulate and follow certain anti-ICP policies. Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev's theory of "peaceful transition to Socialism"¹⁵ was rejected by them and they even opposed the Vietnamese policy of supporting Sihanouk and termed it as "revisionist."¹⁶

When most of the Vietnamese trained Cambodian Communists were eliminated during Sihanouk's anti-Communist campaign, Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan and Son Sen and some other companions got control over the party and supplied new blood to it.

A change in the old pattern of relations between the Cambodian and the Vietnamese Communists became evident with Pol Pot becoming the first Secretary of Pracheachon in 1963. The differences became more apparent when Pol Pot visited Hanoi in 1965. He rejected Vietnamese insistence on supporting Sihanouk's external policy and even advocated armed struggle against the Sihanouk

15 Interview with Ieng Sary, The Call (Chicago), 28 August 1978; in Porter, n. 14, p. 194.

16 Ibid.

regime. This showed a clear indication of the widening gulf between the Cambodian and Vietnamese Communist party.

Dissatisfied with his Hanoi visit, Pol Pot went to Peking and had his first ever meeting with the Chinese leaders. The Chinese and the Cambodians did not see eye to eye on many issues including opposition to Sihanouk. They, however, virtually agreed upon one point - importance of the elimination of "revisionists", though the term "revisionist" gave divergent meaning to both sides. For the Cambodians it meant Vietnamese Communists and the remaining Cambodian Communists who had ICP background, and for the Chinese, it meant Soviet Communists.

Both the DRV and the Soviet Union opposed Pol Pot when he launched an armed struggle against the Sihanouk's regime.¹⁷ To the disappointment of Pol Pot, China also expressed its disapproval. Throughout the 1960s Pol Pot did not get any significant material or propaganda support either from DRV or the Soviet Union or China. On the contrary, they extended their support to Sihanouk.¹⁸

17 Heder, n. 12, p. 39

18 Ibid.

In 1970, Sihanouk was deposed and replaced by a pro-American rightist regime led by Lon Nol. This paved the way for an uneasy collaboration between the Cambodian and Vietnamese Communists. Considering the continued popularity of Sihanouk, Pol Pot accepted the former's leadership of an anti-imperialist and anti-Lon Nol United Front. This change in Pol Pot's policy with regard to Sihanouk was viewed by the Vietnamese as his acceptance, that his earlier policy in the 1950s and 1960s with regard to Sihanouk was wrong.¹⁹

Initially Pol Pot showed reluctance to collaborate with the Vietnamese against the Lon Nol regime. He and his supporters feared that such a collaboration would strengthen the anti-Pol Pot elements inside the Party. He, however, ultimately agreed to cooperate with the Vietnamese when the Chinese also extended their support to the Vietnamese military participation in Cambodia. Still the relations between Cambodia and Vietnam was far from cordial. The submerged tensions assumed a serious dimension in 1972 regarding the ceasefire in Indochina.²⁰ In January 1973, the Vietnamese concluded a peace agreement with the United States, thereby ending the American

19 R.P. Kaushik and Susheela Kaushik, Back to the Front: The Unfinished Story in Vietnam (New Delhi, 1979), p. 71.

20 Heder, n. 12, p. 40.

military intervention in Vietnam. Then the Cambodians found themselves fighting against the Americans alone.²¹

Another development which enhanced Pol Pot's fear of his opponents getting strengthened, was the return to Cambodia in 1970-71 of some 4000 "Khmer Viet Minh" or Cambodian Communists who had joined the Viet Minh and fought against the French before 1954 and fled to North Vietnam following the Geneva Agreement of July 1954. With a view to nip in the bud any threat to his mastery within the Party, Pol Pot started removing them from the Party.

Both the Cambodians and the Vietnamese fought shoulder to shoulder against the Lon Nol regime despite these differences. In fact, Vietnamese assistance was mainly responsible for most of the Cambodian victory. They fought together till the very last day of the war in Cambodia i.e. 17 April 1975.

ESCALATION OF HOSTILITIES, 1975-1977

The Vietnamese troops which had entrenched to most parts of Cambodia during the war were still there when the war ended in April 1975. Their withdrawal was neither quick nor complete especially in the so called "parrot's Beak", a piece of Cambodian territory surrounded by

²¹ Ibid.

Vietnam on three sides on the South Eastern borders of Cambodia, in the province of Svoy Rieng. This particular stretch of territory was considered to be strategically very important. Even the Americans had acknowledged the significance of this territory.²² At the same time, Vietnamese withdrawal from the north-eastern province of Mondul Kiri and Ratana Kiri was also slow and incomplete.²³ This attitude of the Vietnamese evoked suspicion in the mind of the Khmer Rouge regime in Phnom-Penh headed by Pol Pot.²⁴ The slow evacuation of the Vietnamese troops had resulted in some minor skirmishes between the Cambodian and Vietnamese forces²⁵ and in some cases the Cambodian troops crossed into Vietnamese territories. The Vietnamese felt that some of such crossings were probably deliberate, done with the intention of testing the Vietnamese defences.²⁶

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- 22 Marian Kirsch Leighton, "Prospects on the Vietnam-Cambodia Border Conflicts", Asian Survey (Berkeley), vol. 18, May 1978, p. 448.
- 23 Nayan Chanda, "Guessing Game on a Border War", Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), 20 January 1978, p. 13.
- 24 Pradhan, n. 9, p. 188.
- 25 Milton Osborne, "Kampuchea and Vietnam : A Historical Perspective", Pacific Community (Tokyo), vol. 9, no. 3, April 1978, pp. 210-61.
- 26 Facts About Vietnam-Kampuchea Border Question, Document issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 7 April 1978, p. 7, Cited in Heder, n. 12, p. 28.

Far more significant than the land skirmishes were the marine battles, which were larger and more immediate and fought on both sea and offshore islands. Patrol vessels of both the countries exchanged fire off the coast of the island of Phu Quac²⁷ in early May 1975. Shortly after this the Khmer forces attempted in vain to land on the island of Tho Chou, situated south of Brevue line and claimed by the Cambodians. In retaliation the Vietnamese naval units attacked the Cambodian naval base on the island of Poulo Wei and occupied the island by early June 1975. Meanwhile, attempts to ease the tension had also begun. On 11 June 1975, Pol Pot and two other top leaders of Communist Party of Kampuchea arrived in Hanoi for talks. Surprisingly, they downplayed Vietnamese occupation of the island of Poulo Wei and instead suggested a treaty of friendship that would deal with the settlement of boundary disputes, trade and free movements across the border. On their part, the Vietnamese demanded the Cambodian leader for a "special relationship" between the two countries based on their history of common struggle against the foreign aggressions. But this demand was rejected by the Cambodians. The long standing and deep rooted differences between the two countries made such a special relationship very difficult. The positive

27 Phu Quac is the largest island lying South of Cambodian coast. Though it was lying north of the Brevue line, Brevue has placed it under Vietnamese administration in 1939.

results of this meeting was the resolve to end the military clashes. The island of Poulo Wei^{was} returned to Cambodia, during the visit of Vietnamese Communist Party leader Lo Duan to Phnom Penh in August 1975.

While the Cambodian-Vietnamese relations were worsening day by day on one hand, the Sino-Cambodian relations were getting strengthened on the other. In August 1975, Cambodia concluded an agreement with the People's Republic of China. After this agreement it showed no interest in a friendship treaty with Vietnam and began a massive build up of its armed forces with the Chinese assistance in equipment and training.

Meanwhile, internal opposition to the Pol Pot regime was intensifying and the elements hostile to Pol Pot planned a coup in early 1976, which was discovered in September 1976.²⁸ The Cambodian authorities later blamed the Vietnamese for this coup bid and charged them with a conspiracy to overthrow the Khmer Rouge regime through "agents they recruited long ago". By "agents" they meant former Cambodian members of the ICP and cadre trained by the Vietnamese.²⁹ This resulted in the

28 For details of the coup plan see Anthony Paul, "Plot Details Filter Through", Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong) 19 May 1978.

29 Phnom Penh Radio, 15 January 1978 and 24 January 1978 in Porter, n. 14, p. 196.

organised elimination by the Pol Pot regime of all those suspected of being pro-Vietnamese from both Party and army.

Border skirmishes increased in 1977. Most of them were provoked by Cambodians.³⁰ Several attempts by Vietnam to end the hostilities were met with failure because of the negative attitude of Cambodia. Frustrated, Vietnam launched a multi-divisional offensive on Cambodian border on October 1977 with a view to convince the Pol Pot regime that it had to put an end to the attacks on Vietnamese borders.³¹ As the Vietnamese offensive intensified in December 1977. Cambodia in retaliation broke off diplomatic relations with Vietnam on 31 December 1977.³² At the same time adding one more dimension to the ongoing conflict Cambodia accused Vietnam of having a design to create an Indochinese federation including Cambodia and Laos. The Vietnamese leaders and officials categorically rejected this allegation. In reply to a query by Nikhil Chakrawarthy, editor of Mainstream, an Indian news weekly in mid-November 1978, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of Vietnam said:

30 Leighton, n. 22, p. 448.

31 Porter, n. 14, p. 196.

32 Sunday Times (London), 1 January 1978.

...it should be pointed out that the alleged "Vietnam's desire to set up an Indochina Federation" is a sheer fabrication and slander by Peking and its agents. The French coloists (sic) total defeat in this region ended once and for all the existence of the "Indochinese federation." (33)

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA IN 1978 AND US-SOVIET REACTIONS

The escalation of hostilities between Cambodia and Vietnam in December 1977 evoked considerable attention more in Washington and relatively less in Moscow. Though there was no official reaction from Moscow, the Soviet media criticised China and Cambodia. (The Soviet Communist Party newspaper Pravda wrote on 8 January 1978, that China was responsible for the conflict in Indochina.)³⁴

(American reaction to this conflict came for the first time on 8 January 1978 through Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser. Answering a question in an interview he referred to the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam as the first case of a "proxy war" between China and the Soviet Union.)³⁵

33 "Premier Pham Van Dong Interviewed by Indian Press", Vietnam, vol. 19, December 1978, p. 10.

34 New York Times, 9 January 1978.

35 James N. Wallace, "Hanoi's Uneasy Conquest", US News and World Report (Washington, D.C.), 23 January 1978, p. 39.

When queried, what did he mean by that, he replied: "The Vietnamese are clearly supported by the Soviets, politically and militarily, and the Cambodians are supported politically and, perhaps militarily by the Chinese."³⁶ Asked further whether he possessed any intelligence report regarding the presence of Soviet and Chinese advisers in Vietnam and Cambodia his reply was in negative.³⁷

There was no official reaction from Moscow for this allegation of Brzezinski. Reports, however, as appeared in the Tass, the official Soviet News Agency, denied the presence of Soviet advisers in Vietnam. In a commentary on 9 January 1978, it said that "it was Peking which is giving Cambodia both political and military support."³⁸ It also declared that:

"... by putting into circulation the false story about, 'a proxy war between China and Soviet Union' certain circles in United States demonstrate their desire to see that Soviet-Chinese relations remained spoiled and still bitter, tense, and count on poisoning the international atmosphere." (39)

36 American Foreign Policy : Basic Documents, 1977-80, (Washington, D.C., 1983), p. 1104.

37 Ibid.

38. New York Times, 10 January 1978.

39 New York Times, 10 January 1978.

Though Vietnam was backed by the Soviet Union and Cambodia by China it is difficult to accept Brzezinski's characterisation of the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict as a proxy war between China and the Soviet Union. Available facts do not suggest that Vietnam and Cambodia were fighting somebody else's war. Though the Soviet Union and China had some role in this conflict, it was limited. The Vietnamese-Cambodian conflict was the result of historical rivalry and racial animosity. In the words of Stanley Karnov, a noted scholar on South East Asia, "the roots were homogrown; the Vietnamese and Cambodians had been fighting since the days of Angkor."⁴⁰ Though the two countries had fought together, shared a strong collaboration against American intervention, this factor never acted as a catalyst forging the two nations - for nationalism and national interest in Indochina were still stronger than the common ideology shared by the two countries.⁴¹ It was a well known fact that "a Communist regime with a strongly nationalist character will resist attempts by another Communist state to encroach on its interests."⁴² Mutual relations between

40 Karnov, n. 6, p. 604

41 Tai Sung An, "Turmoil in Indochina : The Vietnam-Cambodia Conflict", Asian Affairs (New York), vol. 5, March-April 1978, p. 245.

42 John Patan Davis, "America- and East Asia", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol. 55, January 1977, p. 393.

Cambodia and Vietnam deteriorated when they suspected each other of encroaching upon their respective interests. Moreover, their historical rivalry and racial animosity further added fuel to the fire and made them suspect each other and struggle hard at their best to maintain their respective interests. (Thus, these two countries were fighting their own war and not of Soviet Union and China.) The Cambodian and the Vietnamese were not killing each other to help two external powers to maintain their own interest in their region. It is only when the war had progressed, then these two countries were supported by the Soviet Union and China. Thus, it is difficult to accept Brzezinski's characterisation of the Cambodian-Vietnamese war as a "Proxy war".

China started supporting Cambodia increasingly from early 1978. It increased its supply of military equipments in January 1978. This enabled the Cambodians to make some strong counter attacks against the Vietnamese army.

The Vietnamese, on their part, tried to de-escalate the tension. On 5 February 1978, they proposed the establishment of an internationally supervised demilitarised zone between Cambodia and Vietnam. This proposal, however, was turned down by the Cambodians. The Cambodian attitude was criticised by the official Soviet Communist Party news-paper Pravda. In an article on

8 February 1978, it alleged that the position adopted by the Cambodian leadership met the "secret plans of ... heightening international tension and those who dislike the Vietnamese victories, their reunification, its advances in building socialism and its growing international prestige."⁴³ This allegation was apparently directed against China.

Thus, the Vietnamese faced with intensified military counter-attacks and increasing Chinese support to Cambodia turned more to political struggle. It started propaganda war against Cambodia, and its leaders began referring to Cambodian leaders as "reactionaries."⁴⁴

In late January 1978, Hanoi Radio began broadcasting statements from Cambodian refugees and prisoners of war calling for replacing the Pol Pot regime by one friendly to Vietnam.⁴⁵ On 5 February 1978, the Politbureau of the Vietnamese Communist Party at its Fourth Plenum reportedly took a decision to replace the Pol Pot regime with dissident Cambodian element by deploying Vietnamese armed forces, if necessary.⁴⁶

Meanwhile thousands of Cambodians had started

43 New York Times, 9 February 1978.

44 Heder, n. 12, p. 46.

45 Ibid.

46 Nayan Chand, "The Time Table for a Takeover", Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), 23 February 1978; Turley & Race, n. 4, p. 98.

fleeing to Vietnam and Laos because of the appalling course of genocide embarked upon by the Pol Pot regime inside Cambodia.⁴⁷ This genocidal regime of Pol Pot was condemned by many quarters. The United States expressed its concern at this "most flagrant and massive abuses of human rights" through its Deputy Secretary of State, Warren Christopher on 18 January 1978. Talking before the National Foreign Policy conference for Editors and Broadcasters at the Department of State, Christopher stated:

... We condemn what has been taking place there (in Kampuchea) and will take every suitable opportunity to speak out, lest by our silence we seem to acquiesce in the unspeakable human rights abuses that are occurring there. Moreover, we will be supporting international efforts to call attention to this egregious situation.(48)

On 21 April 1978, President Carter condemned the Pol Pot regime as "the worst violator of human rights in the world today."⁴⁹

The United States was held responsible by some

47 For a better understanding of the Khmer Rouge's rule in Cambodia, see Ben Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power, A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975 (London, 1985); Craig Etcheson, The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea (Boulder, Col., and London, 1984); Michael Vickery, Cambodia, 1975-1982 (North Sydney, 1984).

48 Warren Christopher, "Human Rights : Cambodia", Department of State Bulletin (Washington D.C.) vol. 78, February 1978, p. 32.

49 New York Times, 22 April 1978.

people including the former Cambodian ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk for the emergence of this genocidal regime Pol Pot. According to William Showcross, Prince Sihanouk describes the roots of Pol Pot regime thus:

There are only two men responsible for the tragedy in Cambodia today, Mr. Nixon and Dr. Kissinger... By expanding the war into Cambodia (in 1969 and 1970) Nixon and Kissinger killed a lot of Americans and many other people, they spent enormous sums of money... and the result was the opposite of what they wanted. They demoralized America, they lost all of Indochina to the Communists, and they created a Khmer Rouge. (50)

There is some truth in Prince Sihanouk's allegation. The regime headed by him was more civilized and more or less neutral. But the United States supported a right wing coup which replaced Sihanouk. The new American backed Lon Nol regime turned out to be weaker and more vulnerable to the Khmer Rouge than Sihanouk's regime would have been. So, in a real sense, as the Wisconsin State Journal wrote in its editorial, the United States brought Pol Pot to power.⁵¹

When the Vietnamese leader decided to remove the genocidal and anti-Vietnamese Pol Pot regime in February 1978, they were fully aware of the risks they were

50 Refers to Showcross, quoted in James Finn, "Vietnam in America", World View (New York, N.Y), June 1978, p. 236.

51 See editorial, Wisconsin States Journal (Madison), 12 January 1979, in Editorials on File (New York, N.Y) vol 10, 1-15 January 1979.

taking.⁵² They anticipated a retaliatory move, possibly military action, from China, as by that time Peking had become a staunch supporter of the Pol Pot regime and at the same time Sino-Vietnamese relations were strained due to the issue of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam.

In order to make their position strong, the Vietnamese leaders began to mobilize diplomatic support from various quarters. They declared that they were ready to normalize relations with the United States without any pre-conditions of American reconstruction aid. At the same time, Hanoi's attitude toward the ASEAN countries underwent sharp changes. Recognition to ASEAN, as an organisation for economic cooperation, was given for the first time.⁵³ Top Vietnamese leaders visited the capitals of the ASEAN countries, Japan and Australia.

Unfortunately, these Vietnamese diplomatic moves evoked cold response. The ASEAN countries turned down Premier Pham Van Dong's proposal of mutual non-aggression treaties. The Vietnamese willingness for an unconditional normalisation of relations with the United States went unheeded as the Carter Administration was busy with its efforts for a rapprochement with China.

In contrast, Vietnam achieved a major diplomatic victory in Moscow. On 3 November 1978, the Soviet Union and Vietnam signed in Moscow a Treaty of Friendship and

52 Turley and Race, n. 4, p. 100.

53 Bangkok Post, 7 July 1978.

co-operation after a brief negotiation. The treaty contained a clause stating the obligations of the two signatories in case of external aggression. Article VI of the Treaty says:

... in case either party is attacked or threatened with an attack, the two parties signatory to the treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating that threat and taking appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and security of the two countries. (54)

In late 1978, both Vietnam and Soviet Union needed such a treaty. This was the first such treaty Vietnam concluded. Even during its war of independence against France and war of survival against the United States, it had not thought such a treaty was necessary. But in 1978, unprecedented circumstances forced it to sign treaty with Moscow. The Soviet Union on its part had its own reasons to have an ally in South East Asia bound by a treaty. Soviet leaders were very much concerned about the growing co-operation between the United States, Japan and China, and all these three countries shared common interests in countering the expansion of the Soviet influence into East and Southeast Asia. Their apprehension was described by a top ranking official of the United States as : "The Russians are haunted by the nightmare of a hostile China, the world's most populous

54 "The full text of the Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation between the SRV and the USSR", Vietnam (New Delhi), vol. 19, December 1978, p. 5. For the full text of the treaty see *ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

nation, allied with world's most powerful industrial nations, the United States and Japan.⁵⁵ The Carter Administration's efforts at establishing diplomatic relations with China, naturally made the Soviet Union feel that its interests in East and Southeast Asia were likely to be threatened. As a result Moscow endeavoured to obtain a strong ally in the region so that it could safeguard its interests against a Washington-Tokyo-Peking axis.

The American reaction to the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty obviously expressed Washington's displeasure. The Carter Administration suspected Vietnam's adherence to non-alignment. A spokesman for the Department of State on 5 December said in a statement that if "the Vietnamese truly wanted to be a non-aligned, independent member of the South East Asian community, the treaty with the Soviet Union was a step in the wrong direction."⁵⁶ The American concern regarding the treaty centred around the future of Cam Ranh Bay, a large naval anchorage on the coast of South Vietnam built by the United States during the Vietnam war. Their apprehension appeared to be genuine since the Soviet naval forces operating from the Cam Ranh Bay could be a counter-weight to American

55 Joseph Fromm, "Battle of Red Giants in Asia", US News and World Report (New York, N.Y), 27 November 1978, p. 31.

56 New York Times, 6 December 1978.

naval forces based at Subic Bay naval base and air forces based at Clark air force base in the Philippines.⁵⁷ The Carter Administration conveyed to the Vietnamese its apprehension over the treaty. The latter assured it that the treaty was not against any third nation and the Vietnamese people's attachment to their national independence and sovereignty did not allow any Soviet base on their territory.⁵⁸

In fact, the United States itself was responsible for the signing of this Soviet-Vietnamese treaty. It was the negative attitude of the Carter Administration to Vietnamese readiness for an unconditional normalization which forced Vietnam to sign the treaty. Criticizing the Carter Administration's policy, Peter Weins, former Chairman of the Board of the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, asked a pertinent question:

Would Vietnam, whose fierce dedication to independence is the hallmark of its 4000 years of history, have been driven into the arms of the Soviet Union... if the United States had not stubbornly refused to normalise relations and lift its trade embargo for three and half years following the end of the war, in the face of conces-

57 Drew Middleton, "Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty May Alter Sea Strategies", New York Times, 8 November 1978.

58 "East Asia : Vietnam and 'Indochina'", Statement by Assistant Secretary of State Richard C. Holbrooke before the Sub Committee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on June 13, 1979, Department of State Bulletin, vol. 79, October 1979, p. 35.

sions after concessions by a ravaged country desperately in need of peace and reconstructions.(59)

At the same time, American view of Vietnam 'becoming a puppet or client of the Soviet Union' was an inaccurate understanding of the reality. Vietnam was neither a client nor a puppet of the Soviet Union. Even while it received massive economic and military aid from China and the Soviet Union during the war in South-East Asia, it did not become a puppet. Forced by situation in 1978, it signed a treaty with the Soviet Union. A correct assessment of the treaty was made by the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mokhtar Kusumatmadja, when he stated:

I prefer not to use any term denotes subservience of Vietnam to any country or intimates that Vietnam is the proxy of any country. I have had many conversations with their leaders, and I am aware of their pride and their fears since independence. So the fact that they have signed a treaty and have been obliged to receive aid, is, I think a result of circumstances. They have tried to obtain assistance from other sources, they have encouraged investment and trade but not much was forthcoming. (60).

Thus by the end of November 1978, Vietnam had strengthened its position by a friendly treaty with the

59 Peter Weins, "Contributory negligence in Foreign Policy", New York Times, 12 March 1979.

60 Quoted in Ashoka Mehta, Changing Alliances in Asia (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 61-62.

Soviet Union. China had to think twice before taking a military action against Vietnam in support of the Pol Pot regime. The United States did not have a clear cut policy regarding the conflict in Indochina, as they were busy with their rapprochement with China and its repercussions over its relations with Moscow and the completion of SALT II negotiations with it. President Carter was busy with bringing about an understanding between Egypt and Israel. As a result there was no proper coordination among the foreign policy makers and until mid-December Washington could not formulate a clear-cut policy towards the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict and increasing Sino-Vietnamese hostilities. In this setting Vietnam got ready for the final show down.

CHAPTER - III

CHAPTER - III

VIETNAM'S INVASION OF CAMBODIA AND US-SOVIET POLICY, 1978-80

There was a striking differences between American and Soviet perspectives of and policies towards the developments in Indochina in late 1978. There appeared to be no consensus among the foreign policy makers in Washington regarding the developments in various parts of the world. The Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was more interested in the improvement of US-Soviet relations and successfully completing the SALT-II negotiations with Moscow. He did not favour normalization of Sino-American relations as he feared that the Soviets might be annoyed by Washington's dealings with Peking. Contrary to this Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Adviser was giving priority to rapprochement with China. On the other hand, Richard C. Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State, was in favour of an early normalization of US-Vietnam relations and he was negotiating with the Vietnamese authorities to reach an understanding with Hanoi. Instead of acting as the co-ordinator among all these divergent positions, President Carter had himself kept busy with the Middle-East problem working for an understanding between Egypt and Israel. As a result Washington could not formulate a clear-cut policy towards the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict and the increasing Sino-Vietnamese hostilities.

On the contrary, the Soviet Union had strengthened its relations with Vietnam with a friendship treaty.¹ It gave utmost importance to Soviet-Vietnamese relations. During the time of the signing of the treaty Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, expressed his Party's solidarity with the Vietnamese Communist Party by hugging its General Secretary Le Duan. That impressive meeting was attended by notables like Prime Minister Nikolai Kosygin, his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Van Dong, Soviet military leader Ustinov and his counterpart from Vietnam Van Tien Dung.² With this treaty the Soviet Union achieved a major success... "because for more than twenty years the Soviet Union had sought a direct presence in Southeast Asia."³ In the words of Brezhnev, by strengthening its ties with Vietnam, the Soviet Union had achieved "an important outpost for peace and Socialism in Southeast Asia."⁴

1 For details, See Chapter II

2 Bernard K. Gordon, "Southeast Asia", in K.L. London, ed., The Soviet Union in World Politics (Boulder, Co., 1980), p. 175.

3 Bernard K. Gordon, "Indochina Still the Cockpit", in Ilpyong T. Kim, ed., The Strategic Triangle : China United States and the Soviet Union (New York, NY, 1987), p. 154.

4 Radio Moscow, 25 June 1978, in FBIS, 25 June 1978, in Ibid.

Thus with this treaty "Moscow seemed to have gained a major strategic foothold in the region, for the first time in Asian History."⁵

VIETNAMESE INTERVENTION IN AND INVASION OF CAMBODIA

Formation of KNUFNS

Till November 1978, several thousand Cambodians had crossed over to Vietnam in the wake of repressive rule of the Pol Pot regime. These Cambodian dissidents formed the Kampuchean National United Front for National Salvation (KNUFNS) on 2 December 1978 in an area consisting of nearly six hundred square miles of Krek, Memot and Snoul districts held by the Vietnamese troops.⁶ Vietnam was reported to be the organiser and patron of this KNUFNS. It has also been suggested that Vietnam created it under its supervision as a "fig-leaf" to cover its initial invasion with a Khmer identity and provide it with a formal invitation.⁷ The possible reason for this Vietnamese move was to "minimise" the possibility of a major Chinese attack on Vietnam in response to a Vietnamese "invasion

5 Paul Dibb, "The interests of the Soviet Union in the Region : Implications for Regional Security" in T.B. Miller, ed., International Security in the Southeast Asian and Southwest Pacific Region, (New York, 1983), p. 50.

6 Bangkok Post, 4 December 1978.

7 William S. Turley and Jeffrey Race, "The Third Indochina War", Foreign Policy (Washington D.C.) Spring, 1980, p. 100.

of Cambodia.⁸ The Pol Pot regime branded KNUFNS as 'a Vietnamese political organization with a Khmer name' and 'a tool of the Soviet expansionists'.⁹

The KNUFNS expressed complete solidarity with Vietnam and it even endorsed the Vietnamese stand regarding the conflict. It approved the Vietnamese stand on the border question and declared that the Cambodian-Vietnamese border conflict was provoked by the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique to serve Chinese strategic aim.¹⁰ It also declared that its major policy and aims would be to unite the Cambodian to remove the genocidal Pol Pot regime.¹¹

Invasion

The much talked about and expected Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia began on the Christmas day of the year 1978, i.e. on 25 December. On that day the armed forces of KNUFNS supported by fourteen divisions of the Vietnamese army numbering about 100,000 troops aided by the Vietnamese air force launched a major offensive on Cambodian eastern borders. In a blitzkrieg

8 Gareth Porter, "Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis", in David W.P. Elliott, ed., The Third Indochina War (Boulder, Co., 1981), pp. 108-9.

9 Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War (London, 1984), p. 123.

10 P.C. Pradhan, Foreign Policy of Kampuchea (New Delhi, 1985), p. 150.

11 Ibid., pp. 190-1.

move, this United Front forces took just fifteen days to enter the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh. They pulverized the Cambodian defence machinery and entered Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979, and by 12 of the same month they brought the whole of Cambodia under their control and reached the Thai border.¹²

On 8 January, a day after their take over of Phnom Penh these forces set up a People's Revolutionary Council with Heng Samrin as Chairman and Hun Sen as foreign minister.¹³ The new government proclaimed the establishment of the "People's Republic of Kampuchea" on 11 January 1979.¹⁴

The Chinese ambassador and nearly 650 Chinese officials and advisers in Cambodia fled the country and crossed into Thailand in order to escape from the United Front troops. Along with these Chinese there were nearly fifty diplomats and officials of other countries fled to Thailand. The presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia was openly acknowledged by Hanoi. It attributed the military success in Cambodia to the United Front of which

12 For details of the war see Nayan Chanda, "Fifteen Days that Shook Asia", Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), 19 January 1979, p.1013. Richard Nations, "A Frantic Drive for Victory", *Ibid.*, 26 January 1979, pp. 11-13.

13 Pradhan, n. 10, p. 191.

14 *Ibid.*

both KNUFNS troops and the Vietnamese army air forces were components. In diplomatic terminology this Vietnamese military action in Cambodia can be termed "intervention." But the strength of Vietnamese troops engaged in this "intervention" prompted most of the outside world to term it as "invasion".

US-SOVIET REACTION

On January 7, a day after the fall of Phnom Penh, the United States accused Vietnam of being "guilty of aggression against Kampuchea."¹⁵ Outlining American reaction to the conflict a State Department Spokesman declared that "it is not our fight" implying that the United States would not get involved in the conflict but called for the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.¹⁶

Vance-Dobrynin Meeting

Throughout the world, it was felt that without the Soviet backing Vietnam wouldn't have undertaken this sort of military intervention in Cambodia. Taking serious note of the Vietnamese drive in Cambodia, the Carter Administration conveyed its concern over the conflict to the Soviet Union. On 5 January 1979, two days before

15 New York Times, 9 January 1979.

16 Ibid.

the United Front troops entered Phnom Penh, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance met with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador in the United States, expressed his government's concern at the developments in Indochina.¹⁷ Ambassador Dobrynin reportedly told Vance that Moscow urged the Vietnamese to be cautious in Cambodia but they (Vietnamese) replied they were their own masters.¹⁸

Soviet View of the Conflict

While China, the ASEAN and the United States were engaged in sharply criticizing Hanoi and the new Cambodian regime led by Heng Samrin, the Soviet Union on the contrary stood firmly by them. It fully supported the new Cambodian regime. Official Soviet Communist Party newspaper Pravda argued:

"... the Kampuchean people have made their choice and are confidently following the road of Socialist economic revival. No one will be able to push them off this path. The Soviet Union firmly sides with the just cause of the Kampuchean people, renders and will continue to render assistance to building the peaceful, independent and sovereign People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK)."(19)

Leonid L. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, upheld the right of the Cambodian people

17 New York Times, 6 January 1979.

18 Ibid.

19 Quoted in Soviet News (Singapore) 4 August 1981, p. 11.

to rise against a hatred regime and expressed his country's firm support to the new regime in Phnom Penh. Talking to the editors of the American Magazine Time on 9 January, he said:

"... the Kampuchean people have risen in struggle against a hatred regime and against a tyranny that was imposed upon the people of Kampuchea from outside. This is their right and the Soviet public supports the just struggle of the people of Kampuchea under the leadership of the United Front for National Salvation. The Soviet Union also supports People's Revolutionary Council of Kampuchea i.e. the government backed by the broadest strata of the population." (20)

The Soviet Union also refuted the charges of Vietnamese involvement in Cambodia. It instead maintained that China had been interfering in the internal affairs of Cambodia. Denying the Vietnamese interference and accusing China in strong words for its alleged involvement in Cambodia, the Pravda wrote:

"If there is... outside interference in the internal affairs of Kampuchea it has been and is being carried out by the Peking hegemomists. They are the ones who sent tens of thousands of advisers there and supplied their puppets with weapons. They are the ones on whose instructions, monstrous "socialist experiments" were conducted in the country... They are the ones who bear the responsibility for the attempt to kindle a new hot bed of

20 Pravda (Moscow), 10 January 1979 in Current Digest of Soviet Press (Columbus, Ohio), vol. 31, 7 February 1979, p. 2.

tension in Indochina and to bring about an armed conflict between Kampuchea and socialist Vietnam."(21).

Thus, Moscow held Peking responsible for the Indo-chinese conflict. It was apparently an attempt to counter the Chinese allegation of Soviet role in Vietnamese interference in Cambodia.

Security Council Meeting

\\Cambodian Deputy Premier Ieng Sary twice asked the United Nations Security Council on 31 January 1978 and 2 January 1979 to condemn the "aggression" against Cambodia by Vietnam and the Soviet Union.²² Ieng Sary called for an "emergency" meeting of the Security Council. This Phnom Penh's bid for the emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council was backed by the United States. But the Soviet Union remained silent on the issue. For the United States, John Cannon, a State Department spokesman, announced Washington's support for Phnom Penh's call and said that while his government "takes great exceptions to the human rights record" of Cambodia, as "a matter of principle", it did not feel that "unilateral intervention" by Vietnam against the genocidal Pol Pot regime was justified.²³

21 Ibid., p. 1.

22 New York Times, 3 January 1979; Yearbook of the United Nations 1979 (New York, N.Y., 1980), p. 272.

23 New York Times, 4 January 1979 and Newsweek (New York, N.Y.), 15 January 1979, pp. 8-9.

Curiously enough the Soviet Union maintained discreet silence throughout these days. There was no statements or opinion by prominent Soviet leaders or governmental spokesmen. But Vietnam criticized Cambodian request for the Security Council meeting. A spokesman for the Vietnamese mission in the United Nations said that Cambodian government was trying to cover up its serious military debacles at the hands of the rebel forces. He alleged that the Pol Pot regime was serving the expansionist policies of China.²⁴ The State Department issued a follow up statement on 4 January saying that the American stand on the Security Council meeting "did not prejudice the position" that the United States might take up in the meeting.²⁵ This was apparently with a view to remove the suspicion that might have arisen in Vietnam regarding American backing for Ieng Sary's call for the Security Council meeting.

Meanwhile, the Pol Pot regime released former Cambodian ruler Norodom Sihanouk from house arrest on 5 January and sent him to New York to represent it in the proposed Security Council meeting. Prince Sihanouk had expressed his total support for the Pol Pot regime's stand on the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict a day before

24 Ibid., 5 January 1979.

25 Ibid.

his release.²⁶ In a news conference in Peking on 8 January, he "thanked" the United States for its stand on Vietnamese 'invasion' of Cambodia.²⁷ In what appeared to be a major policy change he said that Phnom Penh was ready to have friendly relations with the United States forgetting American military role in Cambodia in 1970.²⁸

The UN Security Council met on 11 January to discuss the Indochina crisis. The Soviet Union along with Czechoslovakia attempted to prevent Sihanouk from presenting the case of the Pol Pot regime. Its arguments were based on its consideration that the KNUFNS to be "genuine and sole representative" of the people of Cambodia and situation in that country was an internal matter.²⁹ But the United States and all the other members of the Security Council opposed this joint Soviet-Czech motion. As a result, it was defeated by 13 to 2 vote. Supporting the participation of the delegation led by Prince Sihanouk, the American representative asserted that the Security Council should not be prevented "from considering a request from a recognized member of the

26 Bangkok Post, 5 January 1979.

27 New York Times, 9 January 1979.

28 For details on American Military role in Cambodia see Chapter I.

29 Yearbook of the United Nations, n. 27, p. 273.

United Nations to hear a grievance."³⁰

When the discussion began, Sihanouk who had earlier condemned Vietnam, now chose not to ask the Security Council to formally condemn it. In clear words, he urged the Council not to recognize the new regime at Phnom Penh headed by Heng Samrin. As expected, the Chinese representative supported Sihanouk's call, but he by and large repeated what Sihanouk said. Refuting all the allegations levelled at Hanoi, the Vietnamese representative asserted that the "border war" between Vietnam and Pol Pot regime, and "civil war" inside Cambodia are two different things.³¹ This Vietnamese stand was strongly condemned by the United States representative. He declared that border disputes and violation of human rights did not give one nation to impose government on another nation. He called on all the member states to press for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodian soil and find ways to avert any possibility of the expansion of the conflict.³²

On the contrary the Soviet representative supported the Vietnamese representative and maintained that Vietnamese stand on the conflict was right.³³ The Pravda

30 Ibid.

31 New York Times, 12 January 1979.

32 Yearbook of the United Nations, n. 27, p. 274.

33 Ibid.

summed up the rationale behind the Soviet veto in the following words:

"... the Security Council discussion... without the participation of the sole legitimate representative of Kampuchea amounted to interference in the internal affairs of that Sovereign state. Therefore, in order to protect Kampuchea against the possibility of imperialist and hegemonistic interference in its internal affairs, the Soviet Union...voted against ... the draft resolution of this nature that has been proposed by certain delegates.(34)

Apart from these allegations and refusals nothing came out of this Security Council meeting and the meeting did not turn out to be a significant one.

Soviet Role in the Conflict

The Soviet role in Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia is a subject of debate among Indochina specialists. If what Ambassador Dobrynin of the Soviet Union told Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in a meeting³⁵ on 5 January 1979 is true, then one will have to conclude that the Vietnamese were intervening in Cambodia on their own without Moscow's endorsement of their action. But it is difficult to accept Dobrynin's words. It was well-known that Moscow was supporting each and every move of Vietnam regarding Cambodia. At the same time it was

34 Pravda (Moscow), 17 January 1979 in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press (Columbus, Ohio), vol. 31, 7 February 1979, p. 5.

35 See page. 85-86.

supplying large quantities of arms and ammunitions to Vietnam. The number of Soviet "advisers" in Vietnam in late 1978 increased considerably numbering "in the thousands" and these "advisers" were reportedly playing key role in Vietnamese move.³⁶ As the Newsweek magazine reported that there was "no evidence that the Russians actually commanded troops, flew planes, or entered Cambodia at all, but they were deeply involved strategically, tactically, militarily and economically."³⁷ Douglas Pike, a noted scholar on Indochina writes:

Such hard evidence as exists tends to suggest that the invasion was planned jointly after the signing of the SRV-USSR Treaty of Friendship and cooperation and that Soviet advisers accompanied the invasion giving tactical advice. This thesis is supported by an examination of the tactics employed. The PAVN attack was a kind never before seen on the Indochina battlefield - that is, tanks across the border in blitzkrieg style, fanning out and occupying the entire country within a few days - in short, classic Soviet warfare.(38)

Some prominent persons including Prince Norodom Sihanouk held that the Soviet Union was clearly associated with the Vietnamese move. Evaluating the Soviet role in

36 Newsweek (New York, N.Y.) 22 January 1979, p. 11.

37 Ibid.

38 Douglas Pike, Vietnam and the Soviet Union : Anatomy of an Alliance (Boulder and London, 1987), p. 207.

this conflict he said in an interview to the News Week magazine, thus:

Before launching a Hitlerian Blitzkrieg against us, they (Vietnamese Republican Army) had a military planning in Moscow. They signed the so called treaty of peace, which in fact a military pact. This is one proof that the Russians are closely associated with the invasion. Another proof you see in the Security Council. The Russians and their satellites attack the Chinese and support the Vietnamese invasion. (39)

The Chinese leaders strongly blamed the Soviet Union for the conflict. They repeatedly said that without Soviet support Vietnam would not have attempted to invade Cambodia. Though surprisingly there was no statement by any American leader directly holding the Soviet Union responsible for the conflict, the Carter Administration now found that the two month old Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty providing "an important measure of security to Hanoi" for its "invasion" of Cambodia.⁴⁰

Public Reaction in the United States

Almost the entire press in the United States attacked Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia

39 News Week, n. 36, p. 54.

40 "East Asia : Vietnam and Indochina", Statement by Assistant Secretary of State of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Richard C. Holbrooke, before the Sub-committee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on June 13, 1979, Department of State Bulletin, vol. 79, Oct. 1979. n. 36.

in strong words. It termed Vietnam's action as "invasion." No newspaper accepted Vietnamese explanation and severely criticized it. The Chicago Tribune ridiculed the Vietnamese by saying that "those peace-loving, anti-imperialist Vietnamese Communists, those Champions of the oppressed and enemies of the powerful, have just run roughshod over neighbouring Cambodia." The paper also taunted the Soviets by saying that "those who self-righteously denounced U.S. imperialism in Indochina might well take note of what is happening there now." The Chattanooga Times called the changes in Indochina as an "ominous development". The Christian Science Monitor of Boston condemned Vietnam's act as a "naked breach of a nation's territorial integrity."⁴¹

Some newspapers, like the Detriot News, Charleston Evening Post, The Worcester Telegraph, The San Jose News expressed the fear that the "Domino Theory" held in great esteem in the fifties and sixties, according to which the fall of one country in Southeast Asia to the Communists would be followed by the fall of other countries of the region, has become true. The Detriot News even branded Laos as the "puppet" of Vietnam and

41 Chicago Tribune, 9 January 1979; Chattanooga Times, 11 January 1979; Christian Science Monitor (Boston), 11 January 1979, in Editorials on File (New York, N.Y.) vol. 10, 1-15, January 1979, pp- 2-15.

the latter as the "willing surrogate" of the Soviet Union.⁴²

The Impact of the Cambodian Crisis on the Issue of US-Vietnamese Normalization of Relations

The military intervention of Vietnam in Cambodia totally ruptured all the contacts that had been established between the United States and Vietnam with a view to explore the possibility of normalization of relations and establishment of diplomatic ties. By mid-1978 certain marked shifts had been appeared in respective stances of both sides on the issue of normalization of relations. Vietnam was no longer insisting on American economic aid for the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country and the United States on its part was willing to come to negotiating table without any preconditions like the supply of information about the American soldiers missing in action during the Vietnam war. Some sections of the Western press even reported that the United States would establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam by the end of 1978.⁴³

42 The Detroit News, 10 January 1979; The Worcester Telegraph, 10 January 1979; Charleston Evening Post, 9 January 1979; San Jose News, 9 January 1979 in Ibid.

43 International Herald Tribune (Paris), 2 November 1978.

The Carter Administration, however, was giving primacy to the normalization of Sino-American relations. President Jimmy Carter considered that issue to be of "paramount importance."⁴⁴ So he decided to postpone the normalization of relations with Vietnam till rapprochement with China was achieved. But the Vietnamese action in Cambodia completely changed his perspectives. He writes in his memoirs that "when the government in Hanoi decided to invade Kampuchea (Cambodia) and also began to take on the trappings of a Soviet-puppet, we did not want to pursue the idea"(of normalization of relation with Vietnam).⁴⁵ The Carter Administration suspended all negotiations with Vietnam. It was announced by a spokesman of the Department of State, John Cannon on 10 January 1979. The announcement declared that "there is no question of a move towards normalization of relations under the present circumstances."⁴⁶ Thus, the Vietnamese action in Cambodia put an end to the dormant process of normalization of relations between Vietnam and the United States. Since then and till

44 Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President (New York, N.Y. 1982), pp. 194-5 and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principles : Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981 (New York, NY 1983), p. 278.

45 Ibid., p. 195.

46 Text refers to New Strait Times (Kuala Lumpur) 11 January 1979.

recently the United States had been maintaining that the normalization of relations between itself and Vietnam was impossible until and unless the latter withdrew its forces from Cambodia. Vietnam, on the contrary, kept on insisting that withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia was not possible until and unless the security of the Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh is assured from the threats of Khmer Rouge forces operating from Thai territory and assisted by China and the United States.

No constructive move was taken by either side to cease the hostilities and hold negotiations in 1979 and 1980 (and even after). Both sides remained firmly stuck to their respective stands. Consequently, no talks were held. But in mid-1979 Vietnamese Vice-Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach was reported to have stated that "talks" for normalization were under way. Thach's statement, however, was denied by Washington. A State Department Statement on 9 August 1979, declared that "there have been no talks, secret or otherwise... since last fall." This indicates without any ambiguity that American stand on the talks remained unchanged.⁴⁷ Washington maintained the same rigid stand in early 1980 also. It was stated by the Secretary of State Cyrus C. Vance in

47 "Issues of US-SRV Relations", Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.) n. 40, p. 37.

Chicago on 3 March 1980.⁴⁸ But in the month of July of the same year the Vietnamese expressed their readiness for a rapprochement through the Indonesian Ambassador in Vietnam, Sudarsono. Briefing the Indonesian President Suharto in Jakarta on 23 July Ambassador Sudarsono said that Vietnam presently "receives big aid from the Soviet Union but would also welcome American aid and was willing to open diplomatic relations with Washington."⁴⁹ To the utter disappointment of Vietnam, the United States took no note of this new proposal.

Analysis of Cambodian-Vietnamese Conflict : "Proxy War"

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Adviser in the Carter Administration labelled Vietnam as a "Soviet Proxy."⁵⁰ Answering a question in an interview on 8 January 1978 he referred to the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam as the "first case of a 'proxy war' between China and the Soviet Union."⁵¹ When the Vietnamese troops marched into Cambodia and ousted the

48 "Question and Answer Session following Vance's Chicago Address", Ibid., vol. 80, April 1980, p. 36.

49 Bangkok Post, 24 July 1980.

50 Brzezinski, n. 44, p. 278.

51 New York Times, 9 January 1978, also in James N. Wallace, "Hanoi's Uneasy Conquest", US News and World Report (Washington, D.C.) 23 January, 1978, p. 39.

Pol Pot regime several newspapers in the United States promptly recalled what Brzezinski had said an year ago and branded the conflict in Indochina as a "proxy war" between the Soviet Union and China. Citing Brzezinski's description, the Chicago Tribune wrote that both the Soviet and Chinese imperialisms were equally involved in the Cambodian-Vietnamese crisis. The San Jose News editorialized that the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict was "in the loosest sense a proxy war" between China and the Soviet Union. In the same tone San Diego Union said that this conflict was "an internecine Communist conflict casting the Soviet Union against China in a dangerous proxy clash that is far from resolved."⁵²

It was a fact that Vietnam was backed by the Soviet Union and Cambodia was supported by China in their respective claims. But a close analysis into the roots of the conflict suggests that Vietnam and Cambodia were not fighting somebody else's war. It is highly ridiculous to accept that the Vietnamese and the Cambodians were killing each other to help two external rival powers to maintain their interests in that region. The reason for the conflict were numerous and the Soviet Union and China had nothing to do with

52 Chicago Tribune, 9 January 1979; San Jose News, 9 January 1979; San Diego Union, 9 January 1979 in Editorials in File, n. 41, pp. 2-15.

most of them. This conflict was the result of historical rivalry and racial animosity. The roots of this conflict "were home grown". Vietnamese and the Cambodians had been fighting since the days of the Angkor.⁵³ Though they had collaborated for nearly three decades against American intervention in Indochina nationalism and national interest in Indochina were still stronger than the common ideology shared by Vietnam and Cambodia.⁵⁴ Moreover, when both Vietnam and Cambodian suspected each other of encroaching upon their respective interests, their mutual relations deteriorated and forced them to struggle hard to maintain their respective interests. Only in the later stage of the conflict the Soviet Union and China began taking sides as they discovered that the Vietnamese-Cambodian struggle was serving their interests and policies in Southeast Asia.

The Soviet interests and goals on one hand and Chinese interest and goals on the other hand, in Asia, in particular, were fundamentally opposed to each other. In Asia, the major Soviet goal was the contain-

53 Stanley Karnov, "East Asia in 1978", Foreign Affairs (New York NY), vol. 57, 1979, p. 604.

54 Tai Sung An, "Turmoil in Indochina : The Vietnam-Cambodia Conflict", Asian Affairs, (New York, NY), vol. 5, March-April, 1978, p. 245.

ment of China,⁵⁵ and winning the two small Asian Communist countries of North Korea and Vietnam to its side.⁵⁶ Vietnam being the strongest military power in Southeast Asia,⁵⁷ and second most populous nation could very well serve the Soviet policy of encircling China. At the same time, the Chinese opposition towards the united and stronger Vietnam created serious cracks in the Sino-Vietnamese bonds. Thus, the shared aim to oppose China in the region resulted in significant cooperation between the Soviet Union and Vietnam.⁵⁸ Moreover, as the "most-fundamental goal" of the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia was "to be recognized as a power which must be included in any decision affecting that region,"⁵⁹ the Soviet Union sided with Vietnam the most powerful nation in Southeast Asia.

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- 55 Robert U. Pfattzgraff, Jr. and Jacquellyn Davis, "The Asian/Pacific Region-Implications for US Global Strategy", in Lloyd R Vasey, ed. Pacific Asia and US Policies : A Political-Economic Strategic Assessment (Honolulu, Hawaii, 1978), p. 17.
- 56 Donald S. Zagoria, "The Soviet Quandary in Asia", Foreign Affairs (New York, NY), vol. 56, Jan. 1978, p.307.
- 57 The strength of the armed forces of all states of Southeast Asia in 1977 were as follows: Vietnam, 615,000; Cambodia, 90,000; Laos, 40000; Thailand, 211000; Burma, 170000; Malaysia, 64000; Singapore, 36000; Indonesia, 247000 and the Philippines, 99000. Data collected from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance, 1977-78 (London, 1977).
- 58 Robert C. Horn, "Soviet-Vietnamese Relations and Future of Southeast Asia", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver) vol. 57, Winter, 1978-79, p. 597.
- 59 Ibid., p. 592.

On the contrary, the Chinese interest in Southeast Asia was lying in checking the expansion of Soviet influence in the region. So initially China tried to prevent Vietnam from slipping into the Soviet fold. With this view China even sent messages to President Carter saying that it would "welcome American moves towards Vietnam "in order to moderate that country's policies and keep it out of the Soviet camp."⁶⁰ But when China realized fully well that the Vietnamese were moving firmly into the Soviet camp, then it took a clear anti-Vietnamese posture. It branded Vietnamese as the "Cubans in Southeast Asia implementing a Russian scheme of encircling China."⁶¹ Moreover, "the emergence of a unified and independent socialist Vietnam did not at all suit" China.⁶² Thus, it began competing with Vietnam for power and influence in Southeast Asia.⁶³ As a part of this policy it began supporting the genocidal Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, and

60 Carter, n. 44, p. 184.

61 Nguyen Manh Hung, "The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict: Power Play Among the Communist Neighbours", Asian Survey (Berkeley), vol. 19, p. 1047, also Robert A. Scalapino, "America and the World", Foreign Affairs, (New York, N.Y.) vol. 58, 1980, p. 220-21.

62 Pravda (Moscow), 20 February 1979, in Current Digest of the Soviet Press (Columbus, Ohio), 14 March 1979, p. 1.

63 Vasey, n. 5^c, p. xxviii.

also tried to allege the fear of the ASEAN countries and win their friendship. It extended its "blessings" to these countries and also favoured Japan's economic assistance to them.⁶⁴

Thus, the Soviet Union and China took sides in the Indochinese crisis only after the conflict reached an advanced stage. Cambodia and Vietnam were fighting their own war which was deeply rooted in mutual suspicion and only when the war had progressed then the Soviet Union and China entered the field as the conflict served their "interests and policies."

CHINESE INVASION OF VIETNAM

The Sino-Vietnamese relations deteriorated after 1976 on the issue of ethnic Chinese and Vietnam's tilt towards the Soviet Union. It reached the nadir when Vietnam intervened militarily in Cambodia. The fall of the Pol Pot regime which was strongly backed by China, its replacement by the pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin regime meant "a loss of prestige, influence and 'face' to China."⁶⁵ With the objective of avenging this humiliation and teaching Vietnam a "lesson" and force it to withdraw

64 Gaston Siour, "The Strategic Triangle: The US, USSR, and the PRC", in Vasey, n. 55, p. 33.

65 See the editorial in the Albuquerque Journal, 10 January 1979 in Editorial on File, n. 41, p. 2-15.

from Cambodia, China undertook an invasion of the northern frontiers of Vietnam in February-March 1979. Richard C. Thornton sums up the reasons behind the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in the following words:

Chinese strategy in Southeast Asia for generations was to promote fragmentation in order to preserve domination of the region. Given the imminent prospect of the utter failure of that strategy in the Soviet supported Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, the last remaining area of significant Chinese influence, the only type of 'lesson' which would have been consistent with long term Chinese strategy was one which forced Vietnam to withdraw from Kampuchia. (66)

But China failed in its mission. The Chinese invasion did not come "remotely close" to accomplishing the objective of forcing Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia.⁶⁷ After seventeen days of fighting China withdrew its troops from Vietnamese soil with "soiled reputation and a bloody nose."⁶⁸

United State Reaction

The United States knew about this Chinese invasion beforehand. The Chinese Vice-Premier Teng Hsiao Ping had

66 Richard C. Thornton, "Strategic Change and the American Foreign Policy Perception of the Sino-Soviet Conflict", in Kim, n. 3, p. 68.

67 Ibid.

68 Text refers to Wall Street Journal in Izvetsia (Moscow), 2 March in Current Digest of the Soviet Press (Columbus, Ohio), 29 March, 1979, p. 1.

told President Carter and other American leaders in a private meeting in Washington D.C. on 30 January 1979 about his country's tentative plan to make a punitive strike against Vietnam.⁶⁹ He told that the Chinese leaders "consider it necessary to put a restraint on the wild ambition of the Vietnamese and to give them an appropriate limited lesson."⁷⁰ President Carter tried to discourage him.⁷¹ But Teng did not take it seriously.

On 15 February 1979 two days before the invasion, the Chinese leaders again informed the Americans that they were undertaking the military action against Vietnam.⁷² The Carter Administration decided in a National Security Council meeting that the United States should call for the withdrawal of not only the Chinese forces from Vietnam but also the Vietnamese forces from Cambodia as well. A decision was also taken to send a message to the Soviet Union urging the Soviets to maintain restraint.⁷³ When the invasion actually began the US Administration decided not to "become directly involved

69 Carter, n. 44, p. 206 and Brzezinski, n. 44, p. 409.

70 Brzezinski, n. 44, p. 409.

71 Carter, n. 44, p. 206.

72 Brzezinski, n. 44, pp. 411-12.

73 Ibid., p. 412.

in the conflict* and to use whatever means... to encourage restraint and *discourage a wider war.*⁷⁴

The States Department on 17 February called for the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Vietnam and Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.⁷⁵ On 20 February President Carter declared that United States would not get involved in the conflict repeating earlier American stand.⁷⁶ In the United Nations Security Council meeting held between 24 to 27 February the United States maintained the same stand.⁷⁷

The Soviet Reaction

The Soviet reaction to this Sino-Vietnamese conflict was *consistently conservative in terms of thinking.*⁷⁸ Only in the decisive movement in the conflict, it undertook extensive military movements along its borders with China.⁷⁹ It also supplied military hardware to Vietnam.

74 New York Times, 18 February 1979.

75 Ibid., 19 February 1979.

76 President Carter, America's Role in Turbulent World, Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), vol. 79, March 1979, p. 7.

77 *Southeast Asia : Statement made in the Security Council by Andrew Young, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Department of State Bulletin, vol. 79, June 1979, p. 63.

78 Pike, n. 38, p. 203.

79 Thomas Robinson, *What Policies should the United States Adopt to Counter the Soviet Military Threat to Northeast Asia*, Asian Perspective, Spring-Summer, 1983, p. 77.

Except this and a few warnings to the Chinese the Soviet Union did not do anything to relieve Vietnam from the Chinese slaughter. They did not take any decisive action in favour of Vietnam. Though the Soviet Union did not threaten to intervene, China was forced to limit its action with the Russian threat in mind.⁸⁰

The Soviet Union charged the United States with being directly responsible for the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. An article in the official Soviet Communist Party newspaper said that Teng's "American Friends" might have encouraged him to punish Vietnam for the sufferings the United States had at the hands of the Vietnamese.⁸¹ But this allegation was refuted by the United States.⁸²

THE CAMBODIAN CRISIS TILL 1980

The ASEAN countries strongly opposed the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. They refused to recognise the Heng Samrin regime. They argued that Heng Samrin did not represent a popular government. This ASEAN stand was supported by China and the United States. The Soviet Union on the contrary warned the ASEAN countries that their stand on the issue was dangerous and self-defeating.⁸³

80 Scalapino, n. 61, p. 721.

81 New York Times, 21 February 1979

82 Statement by Andrew Young, n. 77, p. 63.

83 New York Times, 6 July 1979.

ASEAN, however, refused to change its stance. Instead it has successfully mobilized world opinion on the issue. It expressed its serious concern for the security of Thailand, as there were fears of the Vietnamese troops crossing the Thai-Cambodian border. Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev assured President Carter in Vienna in December 1979 that the Vietnamese forces would not cross the border into Thailand.⁸⁴

The ASEAN countries see Moscow's direct responsibility for the Cambodian crisis.⁸⁵ The Soviet Union tried again and again to dampen the criticism. In July 1980, the Soviet Ambassador in Thailand Yuri Kuznetsov assured the Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Arun Phanuphong that his country had stopped all arms and ammunition shipments to the Heng Samrin regime.⁸⁶ Throughout this period the United States stood firmly with the ASEAN.

Even when the decade of the 1980s dawned there was no shift in the stance of the parties concerned and their external supporters. Vietnam was maintaining that the Cambodian situation was "irreversible". ASEAN was

84 Pike, n. 38, p. 208.

85 Bulveer Singh, "ASEAN, Soviet Union and the Kampuchean Imbroglia" in Asian Affairs (Dacca), July-September, 1983, p. 264.

86 Pike, n. 38, p. 208.

not ready for any compromise. The Khmer Rouge which the Vietnamese had hoped to eliminate within six months were getting stronger day by day and waging the guerilla war effectively. China and the United States continuously supplied the Khmer Rouge with military assistance. As a result, Vietnam which had hoped to win the war in a few months was bogged down in a prolonged armed war on the Cambodian soil, and diplomatic war in various international fora.

CHAPTER - IV

CHAPTER - IV

ROAD TO NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT : DEVELOPMENTS FROM 1980 ONWARDS

In the recent history of Southeast Asia, no problem has been so complex and so difficult to solve as the Cambodian imbroglio. For more than a decade, the regional and extra-regional powers i.e., the super powers involved in the conflict have taken the torturous path of diplomacy, proposals, rejections and yet again fresh initiatives.

The road to negotiated settlement has not been a smooth one. The Cambodian crisis has proved to be a complexed taugled knot. It has become an arena of conflict of interests between the Soviet Union backing Vietnam and the US backing ASEAN and China which in turn support the Khmer Rouge. The United States, has been content to follow the Chinese lead. It has preferred to leave the initiative to the ASEAN and remain in the background. (It is keen to be seen as non-hegemonistic in the region. Whereas the Soviet factor in the Cambodian Question in the 1980s has come to be gauged in terms of its relations with China.)

(When the new detente ushered in, the prospects of peace to the Cambodian Question brightened and it began to receive serious attention.) The rapprochement between the Super Powers in the second half of the 80s has led to a world wide easing of tensions and initiated a process of resolving prevailing regional conflicts. The movement began with the Afghanistan Accord on May 9, 1988, was followed by the end of Iran-Iraq war and then solution to the question of Namibian independence. Each international crisis is no doubt unique, but in the present inter-dependent world, easing of tension in one region often has a beneficiary cumulative effect on developments far away and may even give a lead to their resolution. In some respects it is the 'Domino theory' in reverse.¹ Therefore the Cambodian Question simultaneously received serious attention. The entire structure of the problem began to be transformed not only in terms of interaction between the contending parties but also from a wider regional perspective concerning the major powers.

DEVELOPMENTS UPTO 1986

The United States realising its strategic interest very low in terms of its global priorities in Southeast

1 Banerjee, D., "The Kampuchean Question : Nearer to a Solution?," Strategic Analysis (New Delhi), vol. 12, no. 11, February 1989, p. 1283.

Asia had preferred to leave the initiatives of peace process to ASEAN.² Washington claimed that it would follow ASEAN initiatives with respect to the Cambodian conflicts.³ Thus the entire fray was left open to the manoeuvring skills of ASEAN.

ASEAN has opposed the pro-Hanoi regime and has tried to mobilize international opinion to condemn Hanoi as well as its main backer Soviet Union.

Since the problem first came up, ASEAN has demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cambodia, the holding of UN supervised free elections, the retention of the Democratic Kampuchea's (DK) seat in the UN until a new Cambodian government was elected and the sending of a UN peace keeping force to the country.⁴

The ASEAN member states have successfully mobilized world opinion on the Cambodian Question by invoking the principles of non-intervention and respect for sovereignty

2 Ibid., p. 1294.

3 Sheldon, W. Simon, "Explaining American Security Interests in Southeast Asia," in T.B. Miller, ed., International Security in the Southeast Asian and Southwest Pacific Region (New York, N.Y., 1983), p. 38.

4 Bilveer Singh, "Soviet Union, ASEAN and the Kampuchean Imbroglia," Asian Affairs (Dacca), vol. 23, no. 7, Jul-Sep., 83, p. 263.

and territorial integrity.⁵ What was most disquieting and intolerable to ASEAN was that by its action in DK, Vietnam shattered the regional balance of power that had precariously existed since 1975. It also brought the Sino-Soviet struggle into the doorsteps of ASEAN. Apart from Censuring Hanoi, ASEAN has never stopped pointing a finger at Moscow. The Kremlin is accused of bank rolling the Vietnamese, and the ASEAN countries see a direct Moscow responsibility for the Cambodian quagmire. Moscow has, however, stood by Vietnam all the way.

International Conference on Kampuchea, 1981

The ASEAN played a primary role in the convening of the above conference. It was held under the auspicious of the United Nations in New York from 13 to 17 July 1981, "with the aim of finding a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian problem."⁶ Seventy nine member states took part in the conference. The Soviet Union and its East European allies, Vietnam, and the People's Republic of Kampuchea abstained. China succeeded in blocking the Conference from inviting the Heng Samrin government though that government itself had decided to boycott it.⁷

5 Enrique, P. Syquia, "Communist Powers and ASEAN", Korean Journal of International Studies, vol. 12, no. 3, Summer 1981, p. 151.

6 See, Pradhan, Foreign Policy of Kampuchea (New Delhi, 1985), p. 195.

7 Times of India (New Delhi), 19 July 1981.

The ASEAN countries wanted it to be invited as the General Assembly resolution envisaged a participation of all "Conflicting parties" and "others concerned." The ICK failed to effect an immediate change in the Cambodian situation, partly due to the absence of both the Soviet Union and Vietnam. It, however, brought additional international pressure to bear on Hanoi and Moscow.

The Conference issued a Declaration on Cambodia and also adopted a resolution which demanded for:

- (a) Total withdrawal of foreign troops from Cambodia within a specific time frame;
- (b) Measures to ensure law and order and the observance of the fundamental principles of human rights in Cambodia;
- (c) Measures to ensure non-interference by outside powers in the internal affairs of Cambodia;
- (d) Establishing a United Nations Peace-Keeping Force in Cambodia for these purposes;
- (e) United Nations supervised free elections in Cambodia;
- (f) Guarantees against the introduction of any foreign forces in Cambodia;
- (g) Guarantees to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Cambodia;
- (h) Guarantees that an independent and sovereign Cambodia will not be a threat to its neighbours.⁸

8 Bilver Singh, n. 4, p. 265.

As expected, Moscow labelled the ICK as a "political farse staged by Peking and Washington." It was said to be, "an attempt at gross interference in the domestic affairs of the sovereign state. PRK, as an obvious desire to put new obstacks in the way of the normalization of relations between the countries of Indochina and ASEAN, to aggrevate the already thnse situation in Southeast Asia."⁹

In contrast to the ICK, both Moscow and Hanoi called for a regional conference between the Indochina states and the ASEAN. The Vietnamese called for such a conference on 28 January 1981. On 22 February 1981, all the ambassadors of the Soviet Union in ASEAN countries handed to the corresponding governments an address which stated that, "the Soviet leadership had studied with attention the call for a regional conference... to ensure peace, stability friendship and cooperation in Southeast Asia..."¹⁰

ASEAN rejected such a narrowly based conference.¹¹ Such a conference, it was claimed would contribute little, if any, to peace and stability in the region. Nor would such a regional conference address to the prevailing reality and the root cause of the instability in the region, namely, the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Moreover, ASEAN was interested in highlighting the inter-

9 Soviet News (Singapore), August 4, 1981.

10 Ibid., 23 February 1981.

11 The Straits Times (Singapore), 25 February 1981.

national aspects of the Cambodian problem, which a regional conference would tend to play down. Since neither side was willing to give way, the deadlock persisted.

Formation of CGDK

The ASEAN realised that there should be a viable opposition to the Heng Samrin regime of PRK. So, it decided to set up a "United Front." This process of setting up a viable opposition was slow and cumbersome. It involved the difficult task of bringing together the three Khmer resistance forces of Khmer Rouge now led by Khieu Samphan, the Khmer People's Liberation Front led by Son Sann and Sihanouk's Moulinaka faction.¹² To a large extent, it was brought about through ASEAN's 'good offices.' The idea of a coalition was first mooted by Peking in September 1979.

The first meeting of the three factions was scheduled to be held in Pyongyang on 1 March 1981, but Son Sann failed to turn up. In the ensuing bipartite meeting Sihanouk demanded as a precondition, the agreement to disarm the Khmer Rouge once the Vietnamese had pulled out of Cambodia but Khieu Samphan refused to give in. In May 1981 meeting in Beijing, largely through Chinese pressure, the Khmer Rouge accepted Sihanouk's demand and the 'United Front' was well on its way.

12 Movement de Liberation Nationale du Kampuchea.

The next breakthrough was the tripartite meeting in Singapore in September 1981, where agreement was reached on the desire to set up a Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). Disagreements, however, were still rife. The meeting also set up an adhoc committee to discuss future developments. The adhoc committee met on eight occasions in Bangkok, but no headway was made. Differences became so irreconcilable that Son Sann withdrew from the meetings in late October and the Coalition was floundering. The disagreements stemmed largely from the quibblings over allocation of portfolios in the CGDK. Singapore came to the rescue and in November, Rajarathnam, Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister, proposed a 'loose coalition' in order to keep the three factions together and talking. Both Son Sann and Sihanouk accepted the suggestion but the Khmer Rouge was reluctant and requested two months to study the proposal. On December 10, 1981, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, endorsed the concept of a 'loose coalition.' By January 1982, the Khmer Rouge indicated its disapproval of the Singapore proposal, even though on February 21, at Beijing, both Samphan and Sihanouk agreed to set up a CGDK as soon as possible.

The Khmer Rouge intransigence provoked ASEAN's leaders and pressure was placed on Samphan. Both Mahatir Mohammad, the Malaysian Prime Minister and Mokhtar Kusumaadja, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, publicly

threatened to withdraw recognition of DK if the coalition was to falter.¹³ This directly led to the 22 June 1982 Kuala Lumpur meeting, where an agreement was finally reached to form a CGDK with Sihanouk as President, Samphan as its Vice--President in charge of Foreign Affairs and Son Sann, its Prime Minister. On 9 July 1982, Sihanouk proclaimed the CGDK and the 'United Front' became a reality.

A number of factors influenced ASEAN's decision to go ahead with the 'United Front' strategy. Firstly, it was to purge the blemish of Pol Pot's genocidal rule. By supporting DK in the UN, ASEAN was indirectly condoning the brutal and inhuman policies of Pol Pot between April 1975 and January 1979. By a coalition ASEAN hoped to remove this 'bloody taint.' Secondly, ASEAN hoped to widen the support base of DK through the inclusion of Son Sann and Sihanouk, two individuals who were widely respected in the Third World. Thirdly, by the coalition ASEAN's chances of maintaining the DK seat in the UN would have seen greatly strengthened. Fourthly, a coalition would also serve as a legal basis to provide aid to the two non-communist factions. Here, in the name of providing aid to the de-jure DK Communist factions could also be strengthened. Finally, the coalition was

13 FBIS, vol. 4, no. 028, 10 February 1982, p. J1, Quoted in Bilveer Singh, n. 4, p. 269.

part and parcel of ASEAN's pressure tactic to wean Vietnam away from the Soviet Union and to make Hanoi more responsive to ASEAN's demands. Here the ASEAN and the Chinese diverged. While the PRC hoped to use the coalition as part of its strategy to 'bleed' Vietnam, ASEAN hoped to use it to seek a political solution.

The Soviet Union has resolutely condemned ASEAN's efforts to set up a viable opposition to PRK. This has been viewed as ASEAN's meddling in the internal affairs of the PRK. The Singapore meeting was labelled a 'provocative farce' and the coalition said to be 'made in China.' The June 1982 Kuala Lumpur meeting was described as "nothing short of heavy retouching to Camouflage the self same Pol Pot-Ieng Sary Clique."¹⁴

The Izvestia put the Soviet position into proper perspective:

The people in Peking probably believe that the rumpus around the United Front may create difficulties for the PRK in the international arena and will possibly hinder in some way, the development of the process of national revival and consolidation of people's power. These are futile attempts. The domestic policy changes in the new Kampuchea are irreversible. Allowing themselves to be involved in the Peking stage play around Kampuchea, the ASEAN member countries assume a serious responsibility for its possible consequence. The most possible

14 SWB Part 1: The Soviet Union, SU/6684/A3/1, 27 March 1981.

of this may be the further heightening of tension in Southeast Asia.(15)

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The Soviet opposition can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, it was only natural to condemn it for her fraternal Indochinese allies were being threatened. Secondly, the coalition was gaining support internationally and the United front strategy was to some extent bearing fruit, as seen in the increased support for it in the UN. This to the Soviet Union was an anathema. Not only did it hurt her international prestige but her biggest nightmare was the formation of a credible opposition to Heng Samrin regime, which would undo the changes of January 1979. Not only would that be a blow to Soviet standing in the Communist camp but worse still, it could lead to the loosening of Vietnam's dependence on her and possibly her eviction from Indochina, a gain which Moscow was quite reluctant to give up that easily and without a fight and this remained as the basic thrust of Soviet policy upto 1986.

The Credential Struggle at the United Nations

The Cambodian issue and the question of representation of Cambodia continued to come up at the United Nations. At the United Nations General Assembly in September 1979,

the continued representation of Democratic Kampuchea received 71 votes in favour, 35 against and 34 abstentions. In October 1980 Democratic Kampuchea's credentials found support of 74 countries with 35 against and 32 abstentions. In 1981, the same position continued with 77 countries in favour, 37 against and 31 abstentions. In October 1982, voting was 90 in favour of Democratic Kampuchea, 29 against and 26 abstentions. In October 1983, the credentials of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, were accepted without any vote. The Heng Samrin government, however, kept its "diplomatic target" to get admitted into the United Nations. Hun Sen, the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of Kampuchea reacted by saying:

"We shall use one card of recognition and return of our UN seat when the Chinese, the US and the reactionary card is no longer used against us... non-recognition by the UN does affect us, but it will not kill us or reverse the situation in Kampuchea." (16)

Both the Soviet Union and Vietnam tirelessly reaffirmed that the People's Revolutionary Council is the only legal and legitimate Government of Kampuchea and have jointly condemned the combined manoeuvring of US, China and ASEAN at the UN as gross interference in Cambodian domestic affairs.

Troyanovski, the Soviet Ambassador to the UN has argued that:

"the draft resolution of which the co-sponsors are the member states of ASEAN is by no means consistent with the goal of improving the situation in the Southeast Asian region. In essence, its purpose is to reverse the historical course of events which have occurred in Kampuchea. Formally, calling on states to refrain from intervention in the internal affairs of Kampuchea, this draft in actual fact provides for the direct violation of the sovereign rights of this independent state."(17)

The US gave a staunch support to the resolutions moved by the ASEAN. It was mainly concerned with the global Soviet policy and it was also concerned with tightening its relations with ASEAN and the PRC. Thus, they successfully lobbied for the DK in the UN.

After the UN vote, the ASEAN and Russian as well as Vietnamese relations seemed to have sunk to a new low and a solution to or any compromise on the Cambodian Question seemed further away than ever. Any likelihood of new US diplomatic initiatives in the conflict also appeared non-existent. Three retired US State Department officials, among them former US Ambassador to Cambodia, Emory Swank, after a journey to Cambodia and Vietnam cautioned that US policy was only leading to strengthened

17 See Troyanovsky's speech at the UN General Assembly on November 12, 1979. UN General Assembly Provisional Verbatim Record, A/34/PV, 62, 14/11/79, pp. 28-30.

Soviet influence and was ignoring Hanoi's desire for independence.¹⁸ But Washington's official posture remained unyielding. Secretary of State George Schultz had already declared in Hong Kong during his Asian journey in early February 1983, that as long as Vietnam continued its presence in Cambodia and backed the Heng Samrin regime, the US considered Hanoi to be "outside the pale."¹⁹ Thus, the two way super power confrontation over the Cambodian Question became rigid.

In the meantime, a number of European countries, notably Belgium, France and Romania made unsuccessful mediating efforts.²⁰

China's Peace Plan

On the eve of Non-Aligned Summit in New Delhi, China for the first time, on 1 March 1983, offered in detail a peace package for the Cambodian problem.

China, it was believed, to have included portions of this plan in the first round of Sino-Soviet consultations in Peking in October, 1982 and the Second round

18 The Asian Record (New Delhi), April 1983, p. 5.

19 For details see, Van Der Kroof, "Kampuchea : Protracted Conflict, suspended compromise," Asian Survey (Berkeley), vol. 24, no. 3, March 1984, p. 319.

20 Ibid.

had just begun in Moscow in March 1983. This peace package, was essentially directed towards the Soviets. Surprisingly, this peace package did not make the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops a necessity to start the negotiating process.

The five points of the Chinese plan were:²¹

1. Vietnam must first declare an unconditional withdrawal of all its troops from Cambodia.
2. The Soviet Union should cease supporting "Vietnam's aggression against Cambodia" and urge Hanoi to "withdraw all its troops".
3. If the Vietnamese government announce a withdrawal of all its troops, then the Chinese side would be willing to resume negotiations with Vietnam.
4. After the withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops, it should be upto the Cambodian people themselves to settle all their internal issues. China "wishes to see an independent, peaceful, neutral and non-aligned Cambodia."
5. China is willing to make a joint commitment with other countries to refrain from interference in the internal affairs of Cambodia, to respect its independence, neutrality and non-aligned status

21 Christian Science Monitor (Boston), 7 March 1983.

and to respect the result of the Cambodian people's choice made through a genuinely free elections to be held under United Nations supervision.

The Soviet sources, were reported,²² to have reacted by saying that China should talk directly with Hanoi about Cambodia, rather than making this a topic of Sino-Soviet discussions. Curiously enough, there was no reference to the actual peace proposals. Though there was no reaction from the Americans, their approval to the Chinese proposal was a tacit one.

Though the Non-Aligned Summit of 1983 called for²³ the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the region, termination of external intervention and the establishment of a zone of peace, friendship and cooperation in South-east Asia, it failed to take any positive initiative towards the entanglement of the Cambodian crisis and the deadlock continued.

On 21 September 1983, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers issued an appeal calling upon the international community, particularly, Vietnam and the five permanent members of the Security Council as well as other states concerned, to join them to achieve a just solution of the Cambodian problem. The Indochina Foreign Ministers conference of

22 Ibid.

23 The Times of India (New Delhi), 13 March 1983;
The Hindu (Madras), 13 March 1983.

July 1984, also endorsed the ASEAN proposals and proposed dialogue between ASEAN and Indochina states. But no progress was made and stalemate continued. Vietnam launched an intense offensive in November 1984. The Soviet interest in its success was amply demonstrated by the heavy equipment it supplied to the Vietnamese forces. Pravda claimed²⁴ that as a result of the offensive, the "new order" in Cambodia had gained viability.

Moscow's strategy upto 1986 had been to gain puppet Heng Samrin regime in Cambodia and it also time and again called for an International Conference on Cambodia to provide this stamp of approval.²⁶

(The Vietnamese have been announcing their intention to withdraw forces from Cambodia since 1984. In Bangkok on October 1, 1984, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach announced that a withdrawal of forces would be effected "within five to ten years" though a Vietnamese move in this direction was still largely dependent upon the elimination of the Khmer Rouge as a political force within Cambodia.²⁶ In April 1985 the

24 Pravda (Moscow), April 6, 1985.

25 Ibid., August 20, 1985.

26 Bangkok Post, 2 October 1984.

the Vietnamese Foreign Minister set the deadline for withdrawal at 1995 while two-third of the Vietnamese force was to be withdrawn by 1987.²⁷

Vietnam, again after the August 1985 Indochina Foreign Ministers meeting announced that it would withdraw its troops from Cambodia by 1990, or sooner if a political solution could be found. A Pravda commentary expressed Soviet support for these steps. The commentary called for an International Conference on the Cambodian issue, a Soviet proposal first mooted in February 1981, which has since been raised in various forums by Nguyen Co Thach and the Soviets to provide the stamp of international approval for the Heng Samrin regime.²⁸

Proximity Talks

The ASEAN yet again came out with a new initiative. The 'proximity talks' were proposed by the Foreign Minister of Malaysia, Tengku Ahmed Rithauddeen in April 1985. The original idea behind this was to arrange 'proximate talks' or 'indirect talks' between the coalition partners of Democratic Kampuchea and Heng Samrin not at the same place but in separate rooms with a mediator to carry

27 International Herald Tribune (Paris), 25 April 1985.

28 Pravda, 20 August 1985.

views from one group to the other. While Vietnam welcomed this idea, the rebel factions objected contending that it would tantamount to a de facto recognition of the Heng Samrin government. To overcome the rebel's objections, Thailand proposed in July 1985 that the representatives of the CGDK would hold negotiations with Vietnam and Heng Samrin could form part of the Vietnamese delegation. This plan became the ASEAN proposal which was approved in the foreign ministers meeting of ASEAN in July 1985. Vietnam brushed aside this idea as Beijing-Bangkok inspired. Vietnam announced that it would accept ASEAN's proposal provided the Khmer Rouge would not be a party to the negotiations. Even the news of replacement of Pol Pot as the Chief of the Khmer Rouge faction did not encourage Vietnam. On the other hand, Vietnam stuck to its earlier stand that it would withdraw all its troops by 1990. Though the proximity talks amounted to what Vietnam had earlier proposed as a regional conference, it failed to produce any results. The contending parties, especially Vietnam stuck to its stance. Surprisingly, there was no official reaction from either Moscow or Washington. It appeared as if they approved the stand taken by their respective clients. As the efforts to remove the tangle failed the Cambodian problem remained unsolved and the deadlock continued once again.

DEVELOPMENTS: 1986 ONWARDS

As 1986 began to unfold, the entire gamut of international relations began to transform. The emergence of Gorbachev as the leader of the Soviet Union made all the difference. He began to give a new direction to the Soviet Foreign policy.

Gorbachev's Peace Initiation and the Cambodian Question

In his Central Committee's political report at the 27th CPSU Congress on February 25, 1986, he called for interaction and cooperation between all countries. His 'new approach' to the world problems was reflected with a clear, definite precision in his speech at Vladivostek in July 1986. He embarked upon a series of peace initiatives to solve various regional conflicts.

At Vladivostok, he announced the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Then he also played a positive role in the UN efforts to wind up the Iran-Iraq war. He showed a flexible attitude towards the tangled knot of West Asian conflict by opening up a dialogue with Israel and PLO which raised hopes of an enduring peace process in various regions and it removed various key obstacles in improving Soviet relations with the US, China, the ASEAN and the Gulf and Arab states.²⁹

29 The Hindu (Madras), 12 December 1988.

The changes in the Cambodian situation seem to have their roots also in the altering relationship among the bigger i.e. Super Powers. The steady improvement in the Sino-Soviet economic cooperation and Moscow's seemingly determined effort to court the ASEAN, have altered the international environment surrounding the Cambodian conflict. Beijing continues to make the ending of Soviet support for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia one of the three conditions for the normalization of relations between China and the Soviet Union. After the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, the Soviet Union wished a speedy resolution of the conflict in Cambodia also,³⁰ in order to enable it to play a greater role in Asia. The USSR from here onwards began to put pressure on Vietnam for a solution of the conflict and to improve its relations with China as well.³¹ Gorbachev's peace initiatives have made the Americans to adopt a flexible attitude towards the Soviets and they, though are very much sceptical about these developments have decided to "wait and see"³² further developments.

30 B. Ghoshal, "Sihanouk's Role : Confusion, Indecision", World Focus (New Delhi), vol. 9, no. 6, June 1988, p. 6.

31 Ibid.

32 C. Rajamohan, "On a Global Mission", The Hindu, (Madras), 6 December 1988, p. 9.

CGDK's Peace Proposal

The softening of attitude on the part of the conflicting parties began to manifest more or less from mid-86 onwards. The CGDK offered a peace package,³³ showing unusual flexibility toward Vietnam. It expressed its acceptance in theory of a coalition government with the Heng Samrin group, whom the coalition had adamantly rejected in the past as "traitors." This softening of approach was further reflected in the CGDK's agreement to a phased rather than a total withdrawal, and its failure to insist on a top Khmer Rouge name in the new government. By the end of the year in 1986, Vietnam came up with a proposal for talks between the three factions of the CGDK and the Vietnamese backed regime in Phnom Penh. This was the first time that Vietnam had agreed to let the Heng Samrin Government to negotiate with the CGDK.

Sino-Soviet Rapprochement and the Cambodian Question, at the end of 1986

Though the efforts for a Sino-Soviet rapprochement had begun in early 1980s Gorbachev made positive efforts to remove the hurdles. A substantial portion of his

33 Robert C. Hom, "Vietnam and Sino-Soviet Relations: What Price Rapprochement?," Asian Survey, vol. 27, no. 7, July 1987, p. 742.

Vladivostock speech calls for "additional measures for creating an atmosphere of good neighbourliness."³⁴ Moreover in order to improve the relations he offered concessions on two of the three obstacles which China had cited. Firstly, he announced that the Soviet Union would withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by the end of the year and he stated that the Kremlin was "prepared to discuss with the PRC concrete steps aimed at a balanced lowering of the level of armed forces" and that talks were already underway with Mongolia about withdrawing a substantial part of Soviet troops." Secondly, the Soviet leader implied that Moscow might be ready to accept Beijing's definition of their mutual border along the Amur River. But no Soviet concessions were hinted here towards the Cambodian tangle. Gorbachev explicitly endorsed Hanoi's stance that "it is impermissible" to try to reverse the current political situation in Cambodia. He also indicated that the Kremlin was not going to pressurise Vietnam on China's behalf - or Vice versa - because this was basically a Sino-Vietnamese conflict.

Though, Gorbachev was calling for the ending of all regional conflicts here it appears that he was not

34 For details see Ibid., pp. 742-761.

ready to antagonise the Vietnamese, which would undermine the gaining of a Soviet ally in Southeast Asia after a long time. He understood fully well that Vietnam's significance to Soviet interests had historically been in terms of the Sino-Soviet rivalry and the key 'variable' to the solution of Cambodian tangle had been Hanoi-Beijing and Moscow. Though this variable was constant since 1979, both Hanoi and Beijing had taken rigid stances. In spite of Gorbachev offering concessions to Beijing thinking that it might have a positive repercussions in its relations with Hanoi, Beijing remained adamant about the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. Once again the Cambodian tangle showed no signs of entanglement.

Edward Shevardnadze, Soviet Foreign Minister and his deputy Michael Kapitsa have repeatedly emphasised from various political forums, the necessity to find a political solution to the Cambodian problem. As far the United States, even in mid-80s, Washington continued to let the ASEAN and to some extent China, to set the pace of a solution to the Cambodian problem. But no initiative was fruitful and the stalemate continued.

Resignation of Sihanouk as the Head of CGDK, May 1987

The sudden announcement of Prince Sihanouk in May 1987, that he was taking a year's leave of absence from the chairmanship of the CGDK, acted as a catalytic agent

and gave a real push to the whole process of conciliation talks.

The real motive behind Sihanouk's detachment from the CGDK was both political and diplomatic.³⁵ Sihanouk perhaps felt that his independence of action was being circumscribed by his position as the Chairman of the coalition group. By detaching himself from the group, he was trying to make room for independent initiative and political manoeuvrability. Sihanouk's real intention was revealed in a letter to his son Ranaridh in which he said that he would like to "recover a little of my previous freedom to conduct actions closer to the long-term interests of the Khmer people."³⁶

Sihanouk's action was also aimed towards distancing himself from China and the Khmer Rouge without, however, causing China to lose face. While China maintained public silence over the issue for some time, it nevertheless was embarrassed by Sihanouk's action. There was also no response from Washington. Both Hanoi and Moscow indirectly supported Sihanouk's move to distance himself from the Khmer Rouge.³⁷

35 B. Ghosal, n. 31, p. 7.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.,

The Soviet Peace Proposal

In June 87, the new Vietnamese party Secretary, Nguyen Van Linh, was in Moscow to hold talks with Gorbachev on Soviet-Vietnamese bilateral relations as well as on Cambodia. Gorbachev again came up with a new formulation on the political solution to the Cambodian problem. i.e. it can be solved only "on the basis of the unification of all their national patriotic forces" which meant the old coalition of nationalists under Sihanouk and Communists who fought against Lon Nol regime. The new formulation was included in the Soviet-Vietnamese joint Communique stating that the Cambodian problem should be settled by political means with the involvement of "all sides concerned." PRK's reaction to the new formulation was positive, but the Khmer Rouge described it as an "outdated propaganda trick."

Vietnamese Peace Moves

Hanoi declared that national reconciliation in Cambodia would be possible if the political and the military infrastructure of Pol Pot was dismantled. Hanoi also welcomed the idea of a 'cocktail party' floated by Jakarta which involved the meeting of the three Khmer factions and representatives of the Phnom Penh without preconditions.

PRK's Peace Initiatives

Now it was the PRK's turn to make further moves. In an unusual statement on the national reconciliation between the conflicting Cambodian parties, the PRK on August 27, dropped its earlier demand that the Pol Pot clique be eliminated and declared that it was ready to meet "with the other groups of Khmers and their leaders, except the criminal Pol Pot and some of his close collaborators." This was unpalatable to China and it implied American feelings and this was corroborated by the Khmer Rouge who called it "pertidious, tricky and deceitful manoeuvres to push the CGDK., into holding talks with its puppets in Phnom Penh." Surprisingly there was no statement from the Soviets.

Again in October, the PRK came up with a five point peace plan³⁸ in which it not only offered Sihanouk a high position in the future government, but also agreed to hold elections with foreign observers to set up a democratic neutral and non-aligned Cambodia. The other proposals were : the complete withdrawal of the Vietnamese volunteer army simultaneously with the cessation of foreign intervention; talks for establishing a peaceful and friendly Cambodia-Thailand border and it also proposed to convene an International Conference with the PRK, the CGDK, Vietnam, the ASEAN states and five permanent members of

UN Security Council and India to guarantee a political settlement among the contending parties. This initiative had the tacit approval of Moscow. But Thailand, the 'frontline' state of the ASEAN rejected these proposals.³⁹

Sihanouk-Hun Sen Meet, 1987

Realising the easing of tensions ASEAN once again mooted the idea of informal talks between the Cambodian warring factions. This proposal of informal talks received wide support from all quarters. As a result Sampdech Norodom Sihanouk and PRK Prime Minister Hun Sen met in a French village, Fere-en-Tardenois.

This has been hailed 'as a 'historic meeting' and has also been regarded as the 'first step' taken to end the 'Cambodian deadlock'. Because even to meet informally the two sides had to grant basic concessions. By agreeing to meet the PRK Prime Minister instead of Vietnamese leaders Prince Sihanouk has virtually conceded that he is fighting a civil war and not a war of liberation against the Vietnamese aggressions.⁴⁰ Likewise the Cambodian government has agreed for the first time that the Khmer Rouge is a part of Sihanouk's tripartite coalition and would be included in the peace talks. Its importance is in the

39 Sok An, "Kampuchea : Policy of Reconciliation", Patroit (New Delhi), 23 November 1987.

40 Editorial, "Hope in Cambodia", Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 8 December 1987.

fact that the two parties met at last across the table and here lies the historicity of the meeting.

In the meeting the two came to the following broad conclusions:

- (a) This conflict must necessarily be ended by a political conclusion.
- (b) The problem should be solved by negotiations among all parties to the conflict, so as to put an end to the war and to reconstruct a peaceful, independent, democratic, sovereign, neutral and non-aligned Cambodia.
- (c) Once an agreement is reached, an international conference will be convened to guarantee the Agreement.
- (d) The two parties would again meet in January 1988 at the same venue.

In the second round of talks in the same place during January 21, 1988, joint communique was not 'issued'. "Instead", Hun Sen claimed, "we have made a big headway. We discussed concrete questions many of which could not be settled within a few hours. We will continue to discuss the remaining questions."⁴¹ The five questions that were discussed:

- a. Time table for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.
- b. The establishment of a coalition government.
- c. The future political system in Cambodia.
- d. The principles for an independent, neutral and

41 Banerjee, D., r.l., p. 1284.

non-aligned Cambodia.

e. International guarantee and control.

Differences in perception remained, but gaps were narrowed. Three more meetings were scheduled : the next at Pyongyang in April 1988 and the fourth in Paris and the fifth in New Delhi.

This historic meeting was hailed by both the super-powers. The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Mr. Igor Rogachev hoped that the meeting between the two Cambodian leaders would lead to a solution of the problem. He said in an interview to a French daily: "It is necessary that both sides look for reasonable compromises and are prepared to make concessions to each other."⁴²

The US Secretary of State, Mr. George Shultz in a telegram to the Prince said that the Reagan Administration totally endorsed his efforts to establish a free and independent Cambodia. He said, "Nine years of war, struggle and suffering can not be washed away in a few hours, but the first step has been climbed with the father taking the hands of his sons".⁴³

China refused to comment on the significance of the meeting. In a subtle volte face in Beijing afterwards,

42 The Hindu (Madras), 4 December 1987.

43 Ibid.

when confronted with Zhao Ziyang, Sihanouk not only aborted future meetings, but totally reversed his stand on various other issues.⁴⁴

The Vietnamese announced in May 1988, that they would pull out, 50,000 troops by the end of 1988. This gave a further push to the informal talks and a search for political solution to the Cambodian problem. Now the ASEAN was not only forced to rethink their approach to the Cambodian issue but also to study the consequences of the troop withdrawal without a prior political settlement before the last Vietnamese soldier was left. Everybody including the ASEAN did not want the Khmer Rouge to come to power, so a regional initiative was urgent.

Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) - I

The Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, pursued the idea of the 'cocktail talks' initiated by his predecessor, Professor Mochtar Kusumatmadja. The talks were held from July 25-28 at Bogor, some 60 Km from Jakarta. The meeting was attended by three CGDK factions, PRK, ASEAN members, Australia and Japan.

During the meeting, Prime Minister Hun Sen proposed a peace plan. The proposals were,⁴⁵

44 Ibid.

45 Banerjee, n. 1, p. 1288.

- (i) To build a peaceful, independent, democratic, sovereign, neutral and non-aligned Kampuchea.
- (ii) By December 1989 or latest by the first quarter of 1990, all the remaining Vietnamese volunteer army will be withdrawn, along with the simultaneous ending of all foreign aid and sanctuaries provided to the genocidal Pol-Potists and other Khmer opposition forces.
- (iii) The internal problem of Kampuchea must be settled by the Kampuchean parties on the basis of national reconciliation after the elimination of the leadership of Pol Pot's regime.
- (iv) To maintain the status quo in Kampuchea until completion of general elections for the national assembly which will then adopt a new constitution and form a coalition government.
- (v) To set up a national reconciliation council made up of the four Kampuchean parties and headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The council's duties would be:
 - (a) Implement all the agreements reached between the various Kampuchean parties.
 - (b) Organise general elections for the national assembly.
- (vi) To set up an international control commission (ICC) to supervise the implementation of all the concluded agreements.
- (vii) To convene an international conference with broad participation, in order to guarantee the independence, sovereignty, neutrality and non-alignment of Kampuchea as well as peace and stability of Southeast Asia.

However, the KPNLF and Khmer Rouge outrightly rejected the Hun Sen Plan. Prince Sihanouk presented his own plan with some basic changes in the Hun Sen proposals. They were:

- (i) The country's name would be changed from Kampuchea back to Cambodia with a new National flag and anthem.
- (ii) Formation of a quadripartite government which would include the Khmer Rouge faction. Every ministry would have four ministers - one from each faction.
- (iii) Keeping intact the armies of the four factions, including the Pol Pot army, which would eventually be merged into one national army.
- (iv) The administration of Kampuchea to begin with the existing framework of the Phnom Penh Government. This one-party government would gradually be transformed into a four-party government.
- (v) Acceptance of an international conference to guarantee the neutrality of Cambodia; and an international commission to supervise the withdrawal of foreign forces as well as the conduct of elections and to help the quadripartite government safeguard the peace.

Referring to the international dimension of the issue, Sihanouk proposed another ^{Inter}national Commission of Control (ICC) to supervise the withdrawal of the foreign troops. About the constitution of ICC, Sihanouk suggested that it should be composed of two neutral or non-aligned countries not involved in the conflicts, two socialist or Communist countries and two nations from the "free world." Finally, he also called for a UN sponsored international influence, which should be held in "capital of a country authentically neutral and non-involved" in the conflict.

No communique was signed at the end of the JIM. Agreement was reached by the Khmer factions minus the

Khmer Rouge on some issues. These were: the setting up of a national reconciliation council chaired by Sihanouk; withdrawal of Vietnamese troops to be synchronised with neutralisation of the Khmer Rouge units; and General Elections were to be held under international supervision. However, the Khmer Rouge refused to be associated with this or any other point, Sihanouk persuaded others not to make a joint statement.⁴⁶ It was also decided to set up a working group at a senior officials level with a view to hold another informal meeting in 1989.

After the JIM, which was the first coming together of the rival Kampuchean groups, their mutual differences became clear. Firstly, apart from the Khmer Rouge question the CGDK and Hun Sen have reflected a serious difference on the issue of elections. The Heng Samrin government has proposed to hold elections under the supervision of a "reconciliation council" headed by Sihanouk. But the Sihanouk group asked for the dismantling of the Heng Samrin government and formation of a "quadripartite" coalition to supervise the elections. Secondly, Sihanouk is in favour of an international peace conference on Cambodia. The Heng Samrin government has outrightly rejected this proposal. Thirdly, the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops has also become a contentious one. Three dates were discussed. Vietnam had announced that all its troops

would be withdrawn latest by the end of the first quarter of 1990 (31 months). Sihanouk wanted it to be the end of 1989. China wants it by June 30, 1989. However, this problem has been solved almost by itself. The Vietnamese themselves are keen to get out-firstly because of the Soviet pressure, secondly due to economic constraints. So, the Vietnamese were planning to withdraw by 1990.

The JIM had the tacit blessings of both the super powers. Moscow has been consistently calling for a resolution of this conflict. Moscow is waiting for this issue to be resolved so that it can improve its relations with China and ASEAN. Whereas the US has left the initiatives to be taken by the ASEAN.

The Khmer Rouge Proposals

The Khmer Rouge who rejected the JIM proposals came out with their own set of proposals. They were announced on October 22, 1988.⁴⁷ The important points were:

- (i) Vietnam must withdraw all forces in accordance with a clear time-table and programme under correct international supervision within the framework of a clear and comprehensive agreement.
- (ii) This must be followed by a cease-fire by all factions.
- (iii) In the last phase of withdrawal, the following measures will be taken:

47 Banerjee, n.l, p. 1290.

- (a) Dissolve PRK and Democratic Kampuchea states simultaneously.
 - (b) Set up four-party Cambodian government.
 - (c) Put the armed forces of each Cambodian party in garrison under a four-party Cambodian Committee and under international supervision.
- (iv) Democratic Kampuchea will not return to power alone.
 - (v) Provisional four-party Cambodian government should then organise direct general elections under international supervision to elect a constituent assembly.
 - (vi) The future national army should consist of:
 - (a) In the preliminary stage a four party Cambodian Army to be set up. Each party troops strength to be fixed at 10,000 soldiers.
 - (b) Future composition will be decided by the Constituent Assembly.
 - (vii) An international conference to guarantee Cambodian independence, neutrality and territorial integrity.
 - (viii) Set up an international committee and UN peace-keeping force to supervise Vietnamese troop withdrawal and conduct direct and free general elections.

There was nothing new in this package. It was an amalgamation of the recent CGDK peace proposals. One point on which there must have been considerable Chinese pressure was in accepting the recommendation put forward by the ASEAN and Sihanouk about IPKF. Earlier the Khmer Rouge had rejected the proposal of IPKF but the Chinese had accepted it. This peace package failed to invoke

any positive response from the contending parties, except Beijing.

November Meeting in France

From November 5-7, 1988, at Fere-en-Tardenois, Sihanouk, Hun Sen and Son Sann started another round of negotiations. The Khmer Rouge did not participate and the Meeting did not make much headway. According to Hun Sen, there was agreement only on two aspects. They were:

- (a) Full withdrawal of Vietnamese troops;
- (b) No return of Khmer Rouge to power.

Hun Sen criticised the Chinese for preventing Sihanouk to reach a bilateral agreement. The Chinese explained their stand on the Kampuchean settlement on November 14, 1988. According to them:

- (a) Vietnam should work out a short time-table for withdrawal.
- (b) China supports a provisional quadripartite government. It opposes any single party exclusion and therefore opposes a dual or tripartite government. A coalition Heng Samrin government is not acceptable to it.
- (c) After a coalition government is formed, the troops of all sides to be frozen. There will be no armed interference in the elections. All sides will maintain no more than 10,000 soldiers.
- (d) There should be international supervision over Vietnamese troop withdrawal, maintenance of peace and security, and over the conduct of elections. China supports an IPKF and an International Supervisory Committee.

If various parties can reach an agreement on a political solution to the Kampuchean question, China is willing to join other countries in providing an international guarantee for Kampuchean independence, neutrality and non-alignment.

Sino-Soviet Joint Efforts for a Solution

The Soviet Union has been consistently calling for a resolution of this conflict. Moscow would take this issue to be resolved and then go on to improve its own relations with China and ASEAN. With this aim Moscow initiated a discussion with China. Talks were held between Vice-Foreign Ministers, Igor Rodachev and Tian Zengpai, in late August 1988 in Beijing. Rodachev called for restraint from all parties and a negotiated settlement. The talks were helpful, but showed the wide gap that still remained. Areas of agreement were only three:

- (a) Both sides decided to observe the outcome of national elections.
- (b) Accepted the need for some kind of international control.
- (c) Agreed that Sihanouk should play a major role in national reconciliation.

This initial contact was pursued further. Both Foreign Ministers met again at UN. The Chinese Foreign Ministers went to Moscow for continuing the talks in early December 1988. On December 3, General Secretary Gorbachev suggested that China and Vietnam undertake to

discuss the Cambodian situation with each other to find a solution to the problem.⁴⁸

The USA kept itself away from the Cambodian Peace process. It wanted to be seen as non hegemonistic in the region. Moreover, it also realised that its global priorities were higher than its interest in Southeast Asia. The USA had preferred to leave the initiative to the ASEAN and remain in the background.

The year 1989 witnessed a flurry of diplomatic initiatives to engange the Cambodian conflict. As the Vietnamese withdrawal became more and more evident, the fear of Khmer Rouge coming back to power began to loom large. This was to dislike of all parties involved, of course with the exception of China.

Jakarta Informal Meeting II (JIM II)

This JIM II⁴⁹ was held from February 19 to 21. It was attended by all the four Khmer factions, ASEAN members and representatives of Japan, Australia, India. Though there was a general disagreement once the formation of a provisional government to encompass all the four factions and the size and shape of an international force to supervise the Vietnam troops and monitor a

48 Times of India (New Delhi), December 4, 1988.

49 For details on JIM II see International Herald Tribune (Paris), 22 December 1989.

ceasefire until the elections are held. There was also a general agreement with regard to the halting of arms supplies to the factions. It was also hoped that the Sino-Soviet summit, might help in the breaking of deadlock over the question of sharing of power.

Vietnamese Withdrawal

On 5 April 1989, Vietnam announced that it would withdraw all its forces from Cambodia by the end of September 1989. This was based on the understandings reached by the foreign ministers of China and the Soviet Union and the general approval of the US. It also called for the stoppage of military aid to all the resistance factions by China and other countries. India, Canada and Poland were invited to monitor the withdrawal in coordination with a UN representative. This announcement did not contain any condition of a prior settlement. This was regarded as a hopeful sign of early restoration of peace.

Sihanouk-Hun Sen Meeting 1989

The Fourth Meeting⁵⁰ of the two readers took place in early May 1989. This meeting was a fruitful one. Hun Sen met some of the demands of Sihanouk. He

50 For details of the Meeting, see The Hindu (Madras) 4 May 1989.

accepted the new flag of red and blue colour (of Sihanouk) discarding the old red flag, a new national anthem and a few constitutional amendments and Buddhism as the state religion. The official name was also to be changed from the People's Republic of Kampuchea to the Republic of Cambodia.

Under the compromise formula, the Prince accepted Mr. Hun Sen's offer to be the head of State, with the present government in Phnom Penh remaining intact and not dismantled (as was earlier insisted upon by the former). The Prince was also to preside over a Supreme Council including a Prime Minister and two Vice Presidents which will be charged with the task of conducting elections within three months after the Vietnamese withdrawal.

Details of other steps like the convening of an International Conference and the constitution of an International Control Mechanism (ICM) were discussed and it was supposed to be comprised of India, Poland, Canada and members from Non-aligned community, the Eastern and Western Blocs and along with a representative of the UN Secretary General.

But they could not decide upon the the role of Khmer Rouge in the new set up. Because Hun Sen rejected any role to them.

Sino-Soviet Summit and Cambodian Settlement, May 1989.

The Deng-Gorbachev Summit of May 1989,⁵¹ called for a just and rational settlement of the problem and both expressed their readiness to work for the same goal. Both felt that the Cambodian internal problems should be settled through talks on the basis of national reconciliation and without any outside interference. The Chinese side favoured the creation of a provisional coalition government in Cambodia with the participation of all the four factions headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The Soviet side would support the agreement by the four Cambodian sides concerning the creation of a provisional body under the Chairmanship of Sihanouk, with a participation of representatives of the four sides, which would not be subordinate to any of the Cambodian sides and which would be responsible for putting into practice the agreements reached between various Cambodian sides and for holding free elections. Both sides expressed their desire to ensure that there is no dangerous aggravation of the situation and no civil war in Cambodia after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. Both felt that after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops it was necessary to exercise international guarantees with

51 For details of the settling of Cambodian issues, See Ceylon Daily News (Colombo), 14 February 1989.

regard to the status of Cambodia as an independent, peaceful, neutral and non-aligned state. Both called for an early solution of the problem.

International Peace Conference On Cambodia, 30 July - 30 August 1989.

An international conference on Cambodia was convened in Paris mainly to avert the catastrophe of a civil war. This conference was to hold negotiations for a period of thirty days, in order to assess the pros and cons of all the possible initiatives that were going to be put forward in the conference.

This month-long meeting was to be attended by the ASEAN members, Vietnam, Laos, five permanent members of the UN Security Council, India, Canada, Australia, Japan, Zimbabwe, the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement and Yugoslavia - the next Chairman along with the UN Secretary-General Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar were also invited. All the four Khmer factions were also present.

In the course of the Conference, Japan offered economic assistance to rebuild Cambodia, once a comprehensive solution is reached. China was also ready to compromise on Cambodia. For the first time, the Chinese 'played down'⁵² the Khmer Rouge. They maintained distance

52 International Herald Tribune (Paris), 1 August 1989.

from Khmer Rouge in favour of Prince Sihanouk. This was due to the international pressure in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Again the Chinese didn't want to be depicted as ruthless.

As the talks progressed, common goals began to emerge:

- (a) An international control commission headed by the UN to verify the final Vietnamese troop withdrawal.
- (b) A temporary Government or institution created by the warring Cambodian factions themselves that would allow them to oversee general elections and exclude any possibility of the Khmer Rouge returning to power.
- (c) Termination of all foreign military aid and assistance to the Cambodian factions once Vietnam completes its withdrawal and a formal accord is signed.

After accepting the principle of unanimity, three main committees were set up, namely:

- (i) Committee on International Control Mechanism
Co-chaired by India and Canada.
- (ii) Committee to guarantee the sovereignty, territorial integrity and neutrality of Cambodia, co-chaired by Laos and Malaysia.

- (iii) Committee on rehabilitation of refugees and reconstruction of Cambodia, co-chaired by Australia and Japan.
- (iv) An Ad-Hoc Committee was also set up which included four Cambodian parties and co-chairmen of the conference France and Indonesia. This Committee was to help in national reconciliation.

Stumbling blocks began to emerge towards the end of the conference. The major points of discord were:⁵³

- (a) the role of the United Nations in supervising in Cambodia, once Vietnam withdraws its 26,000 remaining troops, scheduled to be completed by 27 September. Hun Sen objected to a large UN role, arguing that the United Nations favours the guerillas.
- (b) whether to include the word genocide in the final communique. The Khmer Rouge insisted that the word be excluded. The Vietnamese, who ousted the Khmer Rouge insisted that the word genocide be included.
- (c) the problem Vietnamese natives or colonists remaining in Cambodia after the troop withdrawal. Mr. Hun Sen's opponents say that one million Vietnamese will remain in Cambodia and that may well do 'Hanoi's bidding.'⁵⁴

53 For details see, International Herald Tribune (Paris), 29 August 1989.

54 Ibid.

- (d) the means to bring about a cease-fire.
- (e) the question of national reconciliation, specifically, what form a provisional government should take. The adversaries disagreed over whether the Khmer Rouge should be part of the government. The Vietnamese and Americans said no, and the Khmer Rouge's Chinese backers and Prince Norodom Sihanouk head of resistance, said that they should be included.

At the Conference there was a growing sense that the Cambodian factions would have to fight it out once the Vietnamese troops were gone, testing one another's strength militarily, before they were ready to negotiate in earnest.

The month long conference ended without a peace settlement between the pro-Vietnamese Phnom Penh and the three Cambodian resistance factions. This was mainly due to the difference of opinion with regard to the sharing of power in the future political set up.

ASEAN again in its Foreign Ministers Conference called for a political settlement. But nothing fruitful took place.

As the date of final withdrawal drew nearer and nearer people began to think of 'Fourth Indochina war', thinking of the imminent civil war that looms large over Cambodia.

The US which hitherto supported and gave military aids to Khmer Rouge, did not wanted it to come to power. It was in a dilemma. Its Khmer Rouge policy was severely criticised in the Congress.⁵⁵ Time and again the US said that it does not want the Khmer Rouge to come to power. The Congress was told that, Bush Administration wants the resumption of Cambodian peace talks,⁵⁶ because "in the absence of a viable political process, the Cambodian factions are likely to turn increasingly to military means in resolving their conflict, a move most likely to benefit the Khmer Rouge,"⁵⁷ Realising the urgent need for a political settlement, a US Senator Stefan Solarz proposed a new Cambodian peace initiative, sidestepping the problematic power sharing among Cambodian factions. According to his peace formula, a quadripartite or tripartite interim government in Cambodian was not needed. Instead a UN supervised interim administration was proposed to prepare for and supervise free and fair elections. Solarz gave Namibian as an example. Though Singapore welcomed this proposal, there was every likelihood of its rejection by Hun Sen and Vietnam. Because they have been

55 International Herald Tribune (Paris) 16 September 1989.

56 Bangkok Post, 4 October 1989.

57 Ibid.

time and again stressing the minimum role of the UN. So nothing materialised.

As soon as the Vietnamese withdrawal was over, the Khmer Rouge began military operations in Western Cambodia. By October 25th it had captured important cities and had proceeded as far as Pailin⁵⁸ which leads to Battambang. These military operations were intensified and a civil war broke out between Khmer Rouge and the government forces. The Khmer Rouge is the most strongest of all the CGDK resistant factions and this is because of the American and Chinese military aid. It is with their help that the Khmer Rouge have grown in strength and they are in no mood to listen to them. To be precise they cannot be controlled now either by the Americans or by the Chinese.

Thus, while China, the Soviet Union, Thailand, Vietnam and to some extent even the US have all shown signs of increasing flexibility, it is Cambodia's own squabbling factions which have proved deaf and blind to the new spirit of compromise and have led the country to the verge of another Indochina war.

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

With the Communist victories in both Vietnam and Cambodia in April, 1975, American power and influence in Indochina was totally liquidated. On the contrary, the Soviet Union regarded the failure of American policy in Indochina as its own diplomatic victory. The outside world heaved a sigh of relief at the end of the three decade old turmoil in Indochina and hoped that peace and stability would prevail in the region in the following years.

Contrary to these expectations Indochina soon plunged into another round of bitter conflicts. Armed confrontations between Vietnam and Cambodia began almost immediately after the Communist victories in Indochina. The Cambodian-Vietnamese crisis which has been described as the "Third Indochina War" first started as border skirmishes and later developed into a major military intervention by Vietnam in the internal affairs of Cambodia against the Pol Pot regime.

The Cambodian-Vietnamese conflicts was the result of deep rooted racial animosity and historical rivalry between them. Notwithstanding their cooperation with each other during the Second Indochina War against the common enemy, the hitherto submerged antagonism came to the surface. Along with the ancient animosity, ill defined

border, and ideological differences played major role in the escalation of hostilities.

Initially there was no official reaction from the Soviet Union to these conflicts, But the Soviet media blamed that the People's Republic of China was responsible for the conflict in Indochina. On the other hand, the United States National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski characterised the conflict as the first case of a "proxy war" between China and the Soviet Union. Brzezinski's reference do not appear to be acceptable as it has already been stated that the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflicts were the results of racial animosity, historical rivalry, ill defined border and deep ideological differences. The Soviet Union and China took sides only after the crisis reached an advanced stage as the conflict served their interests and policies in the region.

Vietnam's attempts of de-escalating the tension met with negative response from Cambodia. Frustrated, the Vietnamese leadership decided to remove the Pol Pot regime from power in Phnom Penh and replace it with a friendly one. While taking this decision they were also aware of its adverse consequences. They anticipated a Chinese retaliatory move, possibly military intervention as by this time Peking had taken a strong pro-Pol Pot stand.

In order to make their position strong, the Vietnamese tried to mobilize diplomatic support from the ASEAN, Japan, Australia and even the United States. They dropped the pre-condition of reconstruction aid for a rapprochement with the United States. But the Carter Administration at that time was giving primacy to rapprochement with China, and it decided to postpone the Vietnam issue until an understanding with China was reached.

On the contrary, Vietnam achieved a diplomatic victory in Moscow by signing a Treaty of Friendship and cooperation. The United States expressed its displeasure at the signing of this treaty and accused Vietnam of subordination to the Soviet Union. But in fact, the United States itself was responsible for the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty. It was the negative response of the Carter Administration towards Vietnamese readiness for an unconditional normalization which forced Vietnam to sign the treaty. Moreover, a treaty of that nature did not make Vietnam subservient to the Soviet Union. The Vietnamese signed this treaty as they were in need of a reliable friend in the wake of their rapidly increasing hostilities with Cambodia and China.

The Cambodian rebels and Vietnamese army and airforce invaded Cambodia during the last days of December 1978, ousted the Pol Pot regime and replaced it with a

friendly one headed by Heng Samrin and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was thus established. The Soviet Union hailed the success of the United Front and accorded its recognition to the new Heng Samrin regime. It also supported the Vietnamese action and backed Hanoi diplomatically when the latter came under heavy diplomatic attack from several quarters including the United States at the United Nations and various other international fora.

The United States on the other hand condemned Vietnam strongly. It suspended its efforts at improving relations with Vietnam and demanded the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia before any kind of normalization of relations.

When China invaded Vietnam in February 1979 to "teach" it "a lesson" the Soviet Union again extended its diplomatic support to Vietnam. It also increased the supply of military hardware to Vietnam. However, it did not intervene in the conflict siding with Vietnam.

The United States, on the other hand, was accused by certain quarters including the Soviet Union of indirectly responsible for the Chinese punitive raids into Vietnam. But available sources do not support this allegation. The United States demanded the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia as well as the Chinese forces from Vietnam. Though the United States did not

support the Chinese against the Vietnamese, a pro-China tilt was clearly visible in its policy towards the conflict.

Vietnam had hoped to complete its Cambodian operation within six months. However, due to this strong resistance of the Khmer Rouge Guerilla elements, the Vietnamese army bogged down in a continued war. In the diplomatic front, the ASEAN successfully mobilized world opinion against Vietnam and the Heng Samrin regime and even against the Soviet Union. The ASEAN stand was backed by both China and the United States. The US kept itself away from the conflict, and left the initiatives of peace process to be taken by ASEAN and China.

The ASEAN successfully lobbied for the Democratic Kampuchea's seat in the United Nations and was also successful in convening an international conference on Cambodia (ICK) under the auspices of the United Nations in New York in 1981. The Conference called for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. The ASEAN stand was endorsed by the United States. The Soviet Union and Vietnam abstained from the Conference. The ASEAN was also successful in bringing together the other Khmer factions and in 1982 a viable opposition to the Heng Samrin regime - Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) under former ruler Prince

Sihanouk came into being. Moscow regarded this as a gross interference in the internal affairs of People's Republic of Kampuchea. As neither side was ready to modify its stand the stalemate continued till mid-1986, though attempts were made to bring peace to the region.

The Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in his Vladivostock speech of July 15, 1986, set the ball rolling for the solution of regional conflicts starting from Afghanistan. It had favourable repercussions on the Cambodian Question. Following this the CGDK began to show flexibility in its stand offering direct negotiations with the Heng Samrin regime (PRK). As a result, the CGDK leader Sihanouk and PRK's Prime Minister Hun Sen met for the first time in a historic meeting in Paris in December 1987. Though they discussed about various peace plans, nothing substantial was achieved. Encouraged by this the ASEAN mooted out a series of informal talks in Indonesian capital of Jakarta. The ASEAN stand had a tacit approval of the US. Gorbachev also began to pressurise Vietnam to reach an understanding with the CGDK. Realising the changing international scenario, and its own economic constraint Vietnam announced it would withdraw all its troops from Cambodia by 30 September 1989 and the same was promptly accomplished within the stipulated time.

The withdrawal of Vietnamese troops triggered off another problem - the future political set up and the role and share of Khmer Rouge in it. Both the super powers opposed the inclusion of Khmer Rouge in the transitional government. Even China appeared flexible. But Sihanouk, leader of CGDK insisted quadripartite government. The International Conference on Cambodia, (July 30-August 30 1989) which was convened especially for the purpose of achieving a peaceful settlement between CGDK and pro-Vietnamese Phnom Penh ended in deadlock. Then the Australians came out with their proposal of an UN supervised interim government instead of a tripartite or a quadripartite government. Though initially Hun Sen rejected it, later in the Jakarta Informal meeting (February 1989), he agreed. But again the deadlock over power-sharing in the interim government continued and talks once again failed. Another International Conference on Cambodia is scheduled to be held in July 1990 but it appears, as long as the issue of power-sharing exists, the deadlock over peace settlement will continue.

The Khmer Rouge has already taken military means to achieve their target. The civil war between the government forces and the Khmer Rouge are in full swing. The Khmer Rouge are gaining upper hand in Western Cambodia and it might continue further. Because of the

US and Chinese military aid, they have emerged strong among the Khmer resistant forces.

While the US, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Thailand even China have all shown signs of flexibility, it is only the Cambodian squabbling factions which have proved deaf and blind to the new spirit of compromise and have led the country once again into the verge of another 'Indochina war.' Thus the issue of arriving at a political settlement now rests with the Cambodians themselves.

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