

การตอบสนองของนานาชาติต่อการทูตของเขมรแดงระหว่าง ค.ศ. 1979-1991



นายเรีธา ฤน

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INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES TO THE KHMER ROUGE'S  
DIPLOMACY 1979-1991



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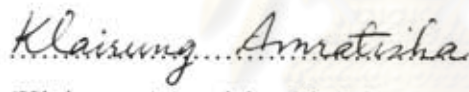
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หลังจากที่ระบอบปกครองของคณูปถัมภ์โดยทหารเวียตนามในช่วงต้น ค.ศ. 1979 เขมรแดงก็ไม่เพียงแต่ยังดำรงอยู่ได้เท่านั้น แต่ยังสามารถดำเนินการต่อต้านทหารเวียตนามที่เข้ามาตั้งมั่นอยู่ในกัมพูชาต่อไปได้ การรุดพ้นจากการถูกทำลายและความสามารถในการต่อต้านเวียตนามเป็นเวลากว่า ๑ ทศวรรษ เป็นผลส่วนหนึ่งมาจากการดำเนินนโยบายต่างประเทศของเขมรแดงเอง แต่ที่สำคัญคือเป็นเพราะการสนับสนุนจากนานาชาติ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นด้านการทูต เศรษฐกิจ ตลอดจนการทหาร โดยเฉพาะจากจีน ประเทศอาเซียน และสหรัฐอเมริกา ประเทศต่างๆ เหล่านี้ให้การสนับสนุนแก่เขมรแดงเพราะมีทัศนะร่วมกับเขมรแดงเกี่ยวกับความขัดแย้งในกัมพูชา ซึ่งเริ่มมาจากการที่เวียตนามเข้ายึดครองประเทศนี้ ในช่วงระยะเดียวกันกับที่สหภาพโซเวียตรุกรานอัฟกานิสถาน เพื่อที่จะกดดันให้เวียตนามถอนทหารออกไปจากกัมพูชา ประเทศเหล่านี้ให้ความช่วยเหลือแก่กองกำลังของพลพต ซึ่งเป็นนักรบที่เข้มแข็ง มีจำนวนมากที่สุด และมีประสิทธิภาพมากที่สุด เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับกำลังฝ่ายต่อต้านอีก 2 ฝ่ายที่ดำเนินการอยู่ตามพรมแดนกัมพูชาและไทย โดยอาศัยเส้นทางผ่านประเทศไทย จีนได้จัดหาความช่วยเหลือด้านทหารและยุทโธปกรณ์จำนวนมากมายมหาศาลแก่เขมรแดง และพร้อมกันนั้น อาเซียนก็ใช้ความพยายามทางการทูตในการคงที่นิ่งของเขมรแดงไว้ในสหประชาชาติ สหรัฐอเมริกาเดินตามนโยบายของจีนและอาเซียนด้วยการนำชาติตะวันตกออกเสียงสนับสนุนผู้แทนของเขมรแดงที่สหประชาชาติตลอดช่วงทศวรรษ 1980 นอกจากนั้นวอชิงตันยังให้ความช่วยเหลือทั้งทางเศรษฐกิจและทางทหารทั้งโดยตรงและโดยทางอ้อมแก่ค่ายเขมรแดง เมื่อความขัดแย้งในกัมพูชายุติลง จีน อาเซียน และสหรัฐอเมริกา ก็ยังคงมีบทบาทสำคัญในการผนวกเขมรแดงเข้าไปเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของขั้วมติดสันติภาพที่มีการลงนามกันในเดือนตุลาคม 1991

ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
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Following the toppling of its regime by the Vietnamese soldiers in the early of 1979, the Khmer Rouge not only survived the Vietnamese onslaught but was able to organize resistance to the continued presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. Its survival and ability to resist Vietnam for over a decade partly resulted from its foreign policy, and largely due to international support: diplomatic, economic as well as military, particularly from China and the ASEAN countries, and the United States. These countries supported the Khmer Rouge because they shared the same point of view concerning the Cambodian conflict, which was started by the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, at roughly the same time as the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. In order to put pressure on Vietnam to withdraw its troops, they provided assistance to Pol Pot's soldiers, who were most active, numerous, and effective fighters compared to the other two resistance military forces along the Cambodian-Thai border. Through Thailand, China supplied the Khmer Rouge with massive material and military aid, while ASEAN used diplomatic effort to maintain the Khmer Rouge's seat at the United Nations. The United States lined up behind China and ASEAN's policies by leading the West to vote for the Khmer Rouge's representative at the UN for all of the 1980s. Additionally, Washington indirectly and directly provided economic and military aid to the Khmer Rouge camps. At the end of the Cambodian conflict, China, ASEAN, and the United States assumed major roles by including the Khmer Rouge into a peace resolution signed in October 1991.

Field of Study: Southeast Asian Studies

Student's Signature: .....  .....

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# CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract (Thai).....	iv
Abstract (English) .....	v
Acknowledgement .....	vi
Contents.....	vii
 Chapter I <b>Introduction</b>	
1.1   Rationale.....	1
1.2   Problem Statement.....	6
Research Questions.....	6
Objectives.....	6
Hypothesis.....	7
Significance of Research.....	7
Research Methodology.....	7
1.7.1   Data Collection.....	7
1.7.2   Data Analysis.....	8
1.8   Scope of the Research.....	8
1.9   Literature Review.....	9
1.9.1   The Khmer Rouge's Diplomacy.....	9
1.9.2   International Responses.....	13
1.9.2.1   China's Support.....	13
1.9.2.2   ASEAN's Support.....	14
1.9.2.3   US Support.....	16
 Chapter II <b>The Khmer Rouge Diplomacy</b>	
2.1   Introduction.....	18
2.2   Denying the Killing Fields.....	18
2.2.1   Evidence of the Genocide.....	22
2.3   Disowning the Genocide.....	23
2.4   Changes in the Political System.....	26
2.5   Abandoning Communism.....	29
2.5.1   Did the Khmer Rouge Truly Change? .....	31
2.6   Propaganda against Vietnamese.....	34
2.7   Calling for National Unity.....	38
2.8   The Coalition Government.....	40
2.8.1   The Khmer Rouge in CGDK.....	42
2.8.2   Military Strength of the CGDK.....	43
2.8.3   Khmer Rouge Military Strategy.....	46
2.9   Conclusion.....	48

### Chapter III    **International Support for the Khmer Rouge**

3.1	Introduction.....	50
3.2	China's Support.....	51
2.2.1	Conflict with Vietnam.....	51
3.2.2	Seeing Soviet as the Main Threat.....	53
3.2.3	Politic towards Cambodian Conflict.....	56
3.2.4	Military and Economic Aid.....	56
3.2.5	Diplomatic Support.....	61
3.2.6	Political Support.....	63
3.3	ASEAN's Support.....	67
3.3.1	Thailand's Support for the Khmer Rouge.....	71
3.3.2	ASEAN's Policy to Prevent KR from Returning to Power....	74
3.4	United States's Support.....	77
3.4.1	Diplomatic Support.....	78
3.4.2	Economic and Military Support.....	80
3.5	Conclusion.....	84

### Chapter IV   **Khmer Rouge and Peace Settlement**

4.1	Introduction.....	85
4.2	Moscow's Policy toward Vietnam troops in Cambodia.....	86
4.3	Shifting of the Cold War.....	89
4.4	China's Position.....	92
4.5	ASEAN's Position.....	95
4.6	Washington's Position.....	99
4.7	The Khmer Rouge and Peace Accord 1991.....	102
4.8	Conclusion.....	107

### Chapter V   **Conclusion.....110**

### **References.....114**

### **Biography.....118**

ศูนย์วิทยพักร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย



# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Rationale**

Twenty years after the Paris accord was signed by the four political factions to end the conflict which had lasted more than a decade, people both inside and outside Cambodia still remember and debate the conflict which occurred during the second half of the Cold War. The Khmer Rouge was notoriously known as a faction that played the most significant role in the conflict. Compared to the other two non-communist resistance factions along the border, the Khmer Rouge forces were the strongest and most effective fighters who threatened the government in the capital, Phnom Penh, throughout the 1980s. Nevertheless, besides being at the epicenter of the entire Cambodian conflict, the Khmer Rouge faction as an entity and political player has not been seen as much scholarly attention as it deserves. Besides remembering their lives under the Khmer Rouge regime, however, Cambodians seem to pay less attention and have very limited knowledge on the group as the years pass by. This study then seeks greater understanding of the realist agenda employed by the Khmer Rouge and its relationship with the numerous countries involved in the conflict.

Over the past three decades, a plethora of studies have been published on the conflict in Cambodia, yet few of these studies have focused on the Khmer Rouge's diplomatic policy, which was the most important component that kept the group viable and relevant. As part of Southeast Asian history at the end of the Cold War, the Cambodian issue dominated the head line of discussions, debates, and publications. For example, in one particular western magazine called FEER, the number of stories on Cambodia from 1979

to 1991 numbers more than 1500.<sup>1</sup> Of course, some well-known scholars like Ben Kiernan, Philip Short, Michael Vickery, and David Chandler, in addition to journalists such as Nayan Chanda, Elizabeth Backer, John Pilger, Nat Thayer, and William Shawcross published numerous articles in newspapers, journals, and books on the conflict in Cambodia including the Democratic Kampuchea. However, those studies cover only portions on the group and rarely touch on its foreign policy which contributed to improving its image overseas which was in turn attracted crucial support. Further studies are required to fulfill the gaps because there is no complete study on the entire history of the Khmer Rouge, particularly from 1979 until their end in 1998. Therefore, this study is hoping to fill the gap and provide a more nuanced insight into the Khmer Rouge's flexibility in running its foreign policy.

Cambodians, victims of the Democratic Kampuchea regime, still carry horrific memories from the so-called 'Super Great Leap Forward' period during Pol Pot's time in power. After the United Nations backed-tribunal was created to try the highest surviving Khmer Rouge leaders, a large number of people have begun to pay more and more attention to the group. Notably people have again started opening up about their own experiences during the era. Debate rages as to whether those former high ranking people need to take responsibility for the mass killings that took place throughout the country. Young people, born during or after the regime, have endlessly questioned about what exactly happened during that time, in addition to the real intentions that were hidden behind the leadership which caused so many peoples to deaths. The 70s era is a good start in understanding of Democratic Kampuchea history (1975-1979), however understanding the Khmer Rouge group in the later period of its existence is also important because the faction still played an active role in the conflict. Even after their bloody reign, Cambodians still faced a horrendous era where the civil war ensued, and hundred thousands of people died. However, the knowledge of people both inside and outside the country during the period after the Khmer Rouge regime is very limited; Awareness is even less about the Khmer Rouge group. In Cambodian high school history books cover only the ancient history up

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke. (1999). *Cambodian conflict in western presses*, p. 9

to the Khmer Rouge period (ended in January, 1979).<sup>2</sup> Lessons on Cambodian history from 1979 until the present do not exist. In higher education, knowledge on the modern history of Cambodia is also narrow. Only two universities, the Royal University of Phnom Penh and Khemarak University<sup>3</sup>, have Bachelor degree programs in History, and the number of students attending the program is quite small simply because the employment opportunities for history majors are not as bright as other subjects. Also, lessons on the post Khmer Rouge period have not been introduced to the students as some information might have negative impacts on the present government. In the History Department of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, modern Cambodian history since the post-colonial period until the present is introduced to the fourth year students in the second semester; and it only includes a brief lesson, less than 6 hours, of the post-Democratic Kampuchea period. Moreover, there are a few publications in Cambodian during the People's Republic of Kampuchea regime and the later period, but these studies do not focus particularly on Democratic Kampuchea during the 1980s. Therefore, this project hopes to encourage the public to pay more attention to the Khmer Rouge political faction after its regime was unseated from power. Additionally this project seeks to contribute to the public's awareness of the Cambodian conflict era, in particular the political life of the Khmer Rouge group.

Furthermore, the Cambodian conflict reflected the Cold War attitudes of China, ASEAN, and the United States considerably as they politically, economically, and militarily supported the Khmer Rouge throughout the 1980s. In the public arena, there was no doubt that these countries knew about the unspeakable crimes that had occurred under the Democratic Kampuchea's rule. A supposed leader of democratic ideals like the United States, where human rights are seemingly celebrated and upheld, should have sought to bring the Khmer Rouge leaders to justice at the UN International Justice Court on a charge of crimes against humanity, but the U.S committed no such an initiating. To serve

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<sup>2</sup> The Documentary Center of Cambodia has just distributed a book, History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979), last couple years to high schools across the country.

<sup>3</sup> Khemarak University just established an M.A program in History in 2010

their national interests and foreign policy, justice, principles and morality were overlooked, and the Khmer Rouge political faction was actively supported by more than one Washington regime. From a realist perspective, this project is written to understand the real factors that caused these countries to aid the Khmer Rouge.

All things considered, it seems that the study of “the Khmer Rouge’s diplomacy and its international support” is very significant in stimulating more advanced scholarly discussions in addition to providing understanding and elevating public awareness of the Khmer Rouge group from 1979 to 1991. Moreover, the study intends to give a more nuanced understanding of the roles of China, the ASEAN countries, and the United States in keeping the Khmer Rouge faction alive.

On Christmas Day 1978, Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia and within two weeks they captured its capital, Phnom Penh. The government led by the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), known as Democratic Kampuchea or the Khmer Rouge, was overthrown and driven toward the Thai-Cambodian border. The faction became disorganized while trying to escape the Vietnamese attacks, but they still remained optimistic about the chance of coming back to power within a short period of time. The Khmer Rouge leaders found it necessary to map out a new effective policy. Pol Pot, who never admitted responsibility for the more than 1.5 million deaths under his leadership, quickly decided to seek foreign support. This was the only real choice he had at that time since his regime was not popular among the public and his forces would require a large amount of support to wage guerilla war against the estimated 200,000 Vietnamese soldiers in Cambodia.

On the Thai border, the disorganized Democratic Kampuchean soldiers remained under the leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea which survived only because of a quick response of its powerful ally, the Communist Party of China (CPC) in collaboration with the Thai government. The Chinese assistance kept the Khmer Rouge from starvation and destruction by the Vietnamese troops, and even enabled its forces to pose a sizable threat to the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh throughout the 1980s.

Additionally, the Chinese aid enabled the Khmer Rouge to create a new image overseas that was acceptable to international organizations, ASEAN and capitalist countries, notably the United States, its allies, as well as the United Nations. Throughout the 1980s, even though Vietnam had sought recognition for its client government in Phnom Penh, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), by ASEAN, China, and the United States, and the PRK's admission to the United Nations and other international forums, the Khmer Rouge, later in the guise of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), succeeded in retaining its seat at the United Nations. Most importantly, the Khmer Rouge representatives assumed control of the CGDK's foreign affairs and stayed on for years at the United Nations.

It is not an accident that the Khmer Rouge succeeded in its foreign affairs. Two main reasons that kept their faction alive are: its efforts in improving its image overseas by transforming its political body, and international support primarily from China, the ASEAN countries, and the United States.

After their so-called genocidal regime was put an end, the Khmer Rouge leaders were very well aware of their bad reputation both inside the country and overseas. In order to paint a new picture of their faction's image, several policies were implemented. For example, in September 1979, they announced a new united front of their faction. In December 1981, they proclaimed the dissolution of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, and the CPK became the first and the only Party in the history of international communism to terminate its own existence (Short, 2004: 416). And, in July 1982, they unwillingly joined with the other two resistance groups to create a tripartite coalition government, even though the two factions were still not on good terms with their faction.

In addition, in the global context of the late Cold War period, the Cambodian conflict was seen and often referred to as a war by 'proxy' for the Cold War protagonists. Almost immediately, the dispute over Cambodia resulted in a new polarization, with ASEAN, China and the United States on one side, and Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and the Eastern Bloc on the other. China, the United States, and ASEAN saw the Vietnamese invasion as



a Soviet push into Southeast Asia. For the former, the Khmer Rouge soldiers were the only effective fighters who could shake the government in Phnom Penh and make the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia costly.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Throughout the 1980s, the Khmer Rouge succeeded in maintaining its existence largely because of the military, political, and diplomatic support from China, the ASEAN countries, and the United States and its allies. This support kept the Democratic Kampuchea forces strong enough to destabilize the western parts of Cambodia which required large military deployments by the Vietnamese. This study aims, first, to find out how the Khmer Rouge played a flexible diplomatic game in order to attract support from overseas, and second, to examine how foreign aid helped the Khmer Rouge operate as the strongest resistance group compared to the other two Khmer factions in opposing the Vietnamese presence.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

In order to respond to the thesis topic, four questions are put forward as follow:

1. How did the Khmer Rouge change their political system and leadership to improve its overseas image?
2. Why did China, ASEAN, and the United States support the Khmer Rouge faction even though they already knew the group had killed so many people?
3. How did these countries individually and all together help provide economic, politic, and diplomatic support for the faction?
4. Why was the Khmer Rouge group included into the Peace Accord in Paris in 1991?

## **1.4 Objectives**

The main objectives of this study are:

-To discover the extent to which international support was a result of the effort of the Democratic Kampuchea leaders to gain acceptance by China, the capitalist ASEAN countries, the United States; and

-To find out the real reasons why those countries chose to support the Khmer Rouge groups.

## **1.5 Hypothesis**

*It is argued in this study that foreign support was forthcoming as a result of the interests of the countries involved and the Khmer Rouge's own diplomacy effort.*

## **1.6 Significance/Usefulness of Research**

-This study will provide a better understanding of the Khmer Rouge political faction during the civil war period, 1979-1991;

-The finding will be useful for distinguishing ASEAN's efforts, involving the Khmer Rouge, in solving the regional dispute of the Cambodian problem;

-It will give a better insight into the influences of big powers, such as China and the United States, on Southeast Asian affairs in the late Cold War period, particularly their support for the Khmer Rouge; and

-The project will be a reference for further studies concerning contemporary Cambodian as well as Southeast Asian issues.

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

### **1.7.1 Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period in the field, located on the Cambodian-Thai border where former Khmer Rouge members live. Ten key informants were interviewed to find out more about their group's situation, leadership, the effect of foreign aid, and their relations with other countries throughout the civil war period. Some open questions had been drafted for the interviews. The field research was implemented

from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, 2010. Information from the field research yielded some information useful for understanding the Khmer Rouge's propaganda, in addition to information concerning the Khmer Rouge's situation along the border, and the large amount of material aid (political and military) given by China, the United States, and ASEAN, particularly Thailand, to the Khmer Rouge group.

In order to gather additional information, books, journal articles, as well as published and unpublished theses were studied. The researcher also used a series of reports done by governments and relevant organizations, ASEAN's meeting and conferences reports, as well as local and international newspapers.

### ***1.7.2 Data Analysis***

The descriptive method was used to analyze data. All of the data was interpreted and discussed which resulted in significant and usefull insights, especially into the Khmer Rouge's diplomacy.

## **1.8 Scope of the Research**

In order to respond to the research questions and to verify the hypothesis, a scope of study needs to be precisely delineated. The study has covered:

- The Khmer Rouge: A political faction along with the other two resistance groups who fought against the Vietnamese backed-government in Phnom Penh from 1979 to 1991. The group had camps along the Cambodian-Thai border. The study focuses particularly on the Khmer Rouge's propaganda which was conducted to keep their group relevant, from January 1979 to October 1991; the date the Peace Agreement took place.
- International Responses: It is a term given to represent the economic, military, and political aid to the Khmer Rouge faction provided by China, ASEAN, and the United States from 1979 to 1991.

## 1.9 Literature Review

David Chandler and Evan Gottesman consider the Cambodian conflict as a *proxy* war which took place during the late Cold War period between America, China, and ASEAN on one side, and the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Eastern bloc on the other. The description is a good example of explaining why Democratic Kampuchea, widely-known as the Khmer Rouge, was supported after they were overthrown from power in 1979. Undoubtedly, China, ASEAN, and the United States considered the Khmer Rouge political group as the only effective force to counter Soviet hegemony. These major powers attempted to use the Khmer Rouge troops as an instrument against the sole Soviet ally in Southeast Asia, Vietnam, which invaded and maintained its troops in Cambodia. Along with its effort in managing a flexible foreign policy to its improve overseas image, the Khmer Rouge benefited militarily, economically, and diplomatically with support that kept its forces viable which enable them to launch guerrilla attacks on the government in Phnom Penh and its Vietnamese ally throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

### 1.9.1 *The Khmer Rouge's Diplomacy*

It was believed that the Khmer Rouge were almost swept away by the Vietnamese attacks and by starvation in early 1979. Some scholars like William Showcross, Steve Heder, and Philip Short saw the Khmer Rouge's survival perhaps only as a result of the help from the Thai army, the Chinese, and humanitarian organizations. After Democratic Kampuchea moved its headquarters to the border and set up its camps there, the administrative system was almost the same, but "Pol Pot, whose name had come to symbolize the horrors of Khmer Rouge rule both at home and in much of the world, was shifted out from the top leadership" (Showcross, 333). After years of self-imposed isolation, the Khmer Rouge now looked to the international community for diplomatic support (Evan, 42) by adapting a new diplomacy.

The Khmer Rouge had started their propaganda offensive in late 1978. Pol Pot sent Prince Sihanouk and his Minister of Foreign Affairs to explain about the Vietnamese

attacks to the United Nations. According to Chandler, in early January 1979 Pol Pot himself appeared briefly, giving interviews near or at the Thai border to four Japanese journalists and a team from the American ABC television network. He said that “only several thousand Cambodians might have died due to some mistakes in implementing our policy,” and blamed the rest of the deaths on the Vietnamese. He added that the Vietnamese were waging a ‘war of genocide’ and were worse than Hitler (cited in Clarke, 1999: 87). In January 1979, the Khmer Rouge launched another diplomatic offensive by sending a representative of its group to meet a delegation in meeting of Southeast Asian central bank governors in Singapore, even though its regime had abolished currency and financial institutions. “It was strange that nobody made any effort to stop it” (Clarke, 1999: 87). According to Clarke, “the Khmer Rouge was getting a better press coverage through their propaganda campaign” (99). During 1980, the Khmer Rouge invited several western journalists to visit its camps and interview top leaders like Khieu Samphan (the new Prime Minister, who had replaced Pol Pot in that position). In August Samphan again told John Burgess of *the Washington Post*, “To talk of systematic murder is odious. If we had really killed at that rate we would have no one to fight the Vietnamese” (cited in Clarke, 1999: 100). He additionally told Marsh Clark, another western journalist, that “not more than 10,000 had died under KR rule while ‘no fewer than 2 million’ had been ‘victims of the Vietnamese’ either through killings or starvation” (Cited in Clarke, 1999: 100). As a result, the “Khmer Rouge’s image was improved overseas by the stories of those journalists that were mostly positive about the group.” For example, *The Times* described Samphan as “‘a youthful, sturdy man with a ready smile’ who said he wishes to clear away the past’ so that Democratic Kampuchea could work for freedom for the people to choose a government of any ideology” (cited in Clarke, 1999: 100).

A few months after the coming of Vietnamese troops, Khieu Samphan announced the creation of a new united body, the Patriotic Democratic of Grand National Union of Kampuchea. According Philip Short, “the new creation was memorable mainly for the clumsiness of its name.” More significantly, “three months later, Samphan took over the Prime Ministership, ostensibly to allow Pol Pot to concentrate on his role as Commander-



in-Chief of the Armed Forces but in fact to try to give the Khmers Rouge a more acceptable public image. It was the opening gambit in a long-drawn-out political game” (Short, 415).

Afterward, the Khmer Rouge leaders made several trips to China to discuss their future political movement. In August 1981, Pol Pot travelled with a special chartered Chinese airline to China to meet Deng Xiaoping and Premier Zhao Ziyang. At the first meeting, Zhao told him that, “We think you should be flexible. You have to adapt your policy to the twists and turns of the road ahead” (cited in Philip Short, 2004: 416). Later, In Sopheap, a core member of the Communist Party of Kampuchea pointed out that, “We must adapt our policy in the light of the dominant trend in the world. If Democratic Kampuchea retained a communist system, it would be out of step with its main allies” (Short, 418). More interestingly, Philip Short quoted Pol Pot’s words, “We helped the Vietnamese, who were communist. But now the communists are fighting us. So we have to turn to the West and follow their way” (418). Therefore, in December 1981, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea announced its self-dissolution and started a new faction that fitted within a supposed capitalist framework.

“The dissolution of the CPK was a farcical gesture that convinced no one, but it did enable the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) to claim it was a capitalist formation” (Chandler, 1996: 234). According to Short, “the bulk of Democratic Kampuchea’s diplomatic support at the United Nations and elsewhere came from capitalist countries—notably the United States and its allies—while the supply lines which kept the Khmer Rouge alive passed through pro-Western Thailand” (2004, p. 417). Interestingly, Showcross saw that, “these were to be exactly the tactics that the Khmer Rouge and their supporters used with some success over the years to come” (1984, p. 332). However, in many respects the Khmer Rouge administrative system remained as before; as Sihanouk told Deng Xiaoping, “Tigers (he refers to the Khmer Rouge) do not change into kittens” (cited in Philip Short, 2004: 414).

Besides, in order to promote the resistance movements against the presence of the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia; China, ASEAN, and the United States combined the Khmer Rouge faction (45,000 strong in 1982) with the other two non-communist military forces—the 15,000 strong Sihanoukist faction and the 9,000 strong Son Sann group in the same year. Actually, besides challenging the same enemies, the two factions actually hated the Khmer Rouge. For example, Prince Sihanouk blamed the brutal Khmer Rouge group for killing millions of Cambodians. “He told the world that his patron China had pressured him to join the Khmer Rouge while American Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrook told him to do what China wanted” (Ruangsawasdisab, 1999: 26-17). Also, the Khmer Rouge leaders saw the two factions as enemies, since their political points of view were totally different, even though they were fighting against the same enemies.

As a result of the influence from China, the US, and ASEAN, the Khmer Rouge leaders decided to join the two factions to create a coalition government which became known as the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in Bangkok in July 1982. In practice, Philip Short wrote that “even after the CGDK had been established, there was little military co-operation on the ground” (421). “For the next ten years, the three factions continued to distrust each other, and their spokesmen made no promises about what Cambodia might expect if the coalition came to power” (Chandler, 1996: 234). Alongside massive support from China and Thailand, the Khmer Rouge faction enjoyed a large amount of aid given by the capitalist countries in the name of the newly formed coalition government, and Democratic Kampuchea still assumed control of the foreign affairs of the new government, especially at the United Nations General Assembly, until 1991.

### ***1.9.2 International Responses***

#### ***1.9.2.1 Chinese Support***

Immediately after escaping the Vietnamese attacks in late December 1978, at the border, the Khmer Rouge leaders sought immediate military and economic aid to save their group. Naturally, Pol Pot saw China, the greatest ally of Democratic Kampuchea throughout the 1970s, as the main supporter who could help his group from being destroyed. Deng Xiaoping replied positively to Pol Pot's appeal by providing massive support. "Chinese military and economic aid and *international* relief and rehabilitation assistance played a crucial role in the recovery of the Democratic Kampuchea remnant forces..." (Heder, 1980: 10). Also, Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge included a large delivery of weapons, ferried through Thai ports. According to Puangthong, "Chinese arms to the Khmer Rouge were delivered to Thailand's eastern ports at Sattahip and KlongYai districts before being shipped by the Thai army transport company to the Thai-Cambodian border. Sino-Thai businessmen and the army took care of the supply of other necessities such as food, medicine, etc" (1999, p. 27-28). Moreover, senior KR leaders were allowed to draw \$5 million at a time, with an \$80 million annual limit, to purchase arms and supplies from the fund established at the Chinese embassy in Bangkok (Abuza, 1993: 1011), and "the Chinese Foreign Minister announced in early 1980 China's determination to continue full arms support for the Pol Pot's group" (Ruangwasdisab, 1999: 27). However, "based on U.S. intelligence reports, China provided the Khmer Rouge forces with US 100\$ million per annum" (Kiernan, 1993: 199). According to David Chandler, in order to teach Vietnam a lesson, China launched a military attack in northern Vietnam with the tacit support from the United States in February 1979. Despite their attacks, Vietnamese policies toward Cambodia were unchanged (1998, p. 229).

In rallying international support for the Khmer Rouge especially from other ASEAN countries, Min Chang notes, "China saw the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia as an act of naked aggression across international boundaries and a colonial war in which the strong bullies the weak with the aim of subjugating a small independent nation" (Min Chang, 1983a: 599). Throughout the 1980s, China not only regarded the Democratic Kampuchean government and then the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea

as the legal representatives of Cambodia, but also played roles in promoting the Khmer Rouge leaders' image overseas in order to gain additional support from the international community. Deng Xiaoping said in 1984, "I do not understand why some people want to remove Pol Pot. It is true that he made some mistakes in the past but now he is leading the fighting against the Vietnamese aggressors" (Kiernan, 1993: 199). As a result, in 1979, the UN General Assembly voted to seat the delegation of Democratic Kampuchea and exclude the Vietnamese-backed regime in Phnom Penh (Short, 2004: 412). "At the same time the Khmer Rouge announced a new political program drafted for the specific purpose of uniting a large national front including the patriotic and democratic forces, at home and abroad in order to fight the Vietnamese" (Min Chang, 1983a: 602).

#### ***1.9.2.2 ASEAN's Support***

Like China and the United States, ASEAN saw the Vietnamese occupation as a violation of the United Nations Charter and international law, which calls for respect of the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of other nations. Whereas Thailand directly opposed the Vietnamese aggression by providing military, political, and diplomatic support for the Khmer Rouge, ASEAN played a major role in garnering international support for Democratic Kampuchea, especially the United Nations.

Thailand saw Vietnamese forces in Cambodia as a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Undeniably, "Vietnamese forces frequently intruded in to Thai territories purposely and caused the loss of properties and lives" (Thai Foreign Ministry, 3). This is significant reason why Thailand strongly supported the Khmer Rouge, in association with China. David Chandler wrote in his book that, "in 1979 and 1980, the Thai military government fed, clothed, and restored to health several thousand DK soldiers who straggled across the border, and these soldiers also received arms, ammunition, and military supplies from China, ferried through Thai ports" (231). Moreover, according to Philip Short, the key leaders of the Khmer Rouge groups, sometimes, were given accommodations inside Thailand. For example, "in May 1979, Pol Pot, Noun Chea, and

Khieu Samphan were given the protection of the Thai army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Bureau, headed by the Ministry Intelligence Chief, General Chaovalit" (Short, 408).

At the same time, the ASEAN States laid the groundwork by mobilizing international opinion against Vietnam and sustaining the Khmer Rouge in international forums. According to the United Nations General Assembly record, the number of votes for Democratic Kampuchea to retain its seat in the United Nations General Assembly increased from 1979 to 1982, as shown in the table below:

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982
Yes	71	74	79	90
No	35	35	36	29
Abstain	34	32	30	26
Non-Participation	11	12	10	12

Democratic Kampuchea was able to maintain its legitimacy in the international community mainly because of ASEAN's effort in persuading member countries of the United Nations to support it. An example of an argument in support of Democratic Kampuchea is as follows, "Recognition of this government as a legitimate government of Cambodia included the following arguments: the right of Democratic Kampuchea to retain its seat was linked to the UN charter concerning the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and the non-use of force in international relations," (Soon, 1982: 549). However, ASEAN saw difficulty in seeking further support for Democratic Kampuchea in the United Nations General Assembly because its leadership was responsible for the deaths of a sizable number of people, almost 2 million. In 1982, ASEAN states encouraged the Khmer



Rouge faction to work together with the other two factions,<sup>4</sup> and finally a new coalition government, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) emerged. Notably, Democratic Kampuchea's representatives still assumed control of the CGDK's foreign affairs, and "the Assembly had agreed to honor the CGDK's credentials, making the regime the only government-in-exile to fly its flag at the United Nations Plaza" (Chandler, 1996: 291).

### ***1.9.2.3 US support***

Additionally, for the United States, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia was seen in a similar way, that is, as Vietnamese aggression against a sovereign nation. At the same time, "U.S. policymakers saw an opportunity to fight another proxy war with the Soviet Union, using the remnants of Democratic Kampuchea as shock troops (Hallsey, 2007: 101). Ben Kiernan interestingly said that, "the three major planks of U.S. policy towards Cambodia remained unchanged. These were: the U.S. veto of aid to Cambodia, including UN, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund aid; U.S. support for a Khmer Rouge role; and U.S. military support for the Khmer Rouge's allies (17-32 million per annum)" (1993, p. 199).

Washington was concerned about being associated with the genocidal group and the atrocities perpetrated in Cambodia. Hence, it always tried to maintain secrecy in its support by providing indirect aid to the Khmer Rouge faction. For example, "in 1980, the United States increased military aid to Thailand; the Thai military consequently resold the weapons to Khmer Rouge and Khmer Serei alike at great profit" (Hallsey, 2007: 103). Interestingly, according to Hallsey's book, "this was facilitated in part by the United States government, which pledged \$70 million dollars to the relief effort in October 1979. The result was that the Khmer Rouge was saved from total collapse, and instead of starving, their army was able to rebuild itself" (2007, p. 102-103). Remarkably, Ben

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<sup>4</sup> The Khmer People's National Liberation Front under Son Sann; and the Moulinaka, which supported Prince Sihanouk.

Kiernan details the amount of money which the U.S government had provided to the Khmer Rouge during the 1980s:

The details cited included the following annual amounts of U.S aid to the “Khmer Rouge” for “development assistance, food assistance, economic support, and in smaller amounts for the Peace Corps, narcotics enforcement and military assistance”: (in FY 87 dollars) 1980 \$54.55 million, 1981 \$18.29 million, 1982 \$4.57 million, 1983 \$2.46 million, 1984 \$3.70 million, 1985 \$0.84 million, and 1986 \$0.06 million. This has since been denied by the US State Department, while the Congressional Research Service has reportedly transferred its employee who provided the statistics (1993, p. 250-251).

In the diplomatic arena, the United States voted for Democratic Kampuchea to retain Cambodia’s seat, as did the majority of countries in the United Nations Council Assembly.

The United States led most of the Western world to line up behind China in support of the Khmer Rouge. The Carter and Reagan Administrations both voted for Pol Pot’s representative, Thiounn Prasith, to occupy Cambodia’s seat in the United Nations. He did so until late 1990, and in 1992 continued to run Cambodia’s UN mission in New York. As of 1993, no Western country had voted against the Khmer Rouge in the thirteen years that their tenure has been challenged (Kiernan, 1993: 201).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE KHMER ROUGE DIPLOMACY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Undoubtedly, the Khmer Rouge had serious credibility problems. Inside the country, its popularity was more or less close to zero since most people were badly affected by its 'Super Great Leap Forward' policy. Outside the country, it still got support from countries that benefited from its foreign policy toward Cambodia as well as the region, whereas for many other countries their future stance on supporting the Democratic Kampuchea government was not clear. Foreign recognition for the Khmer Rouge was very important as it needed diplomatic support to maintain its legitimacy. Moreover, it needed military and economic aid to build its forces to wage guerrilla warfare against a large number of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. For these reasons, the Khmer Rouge leaders needed to improve their group's image.

Throughout the times of struggle during the 1980s, the Khmer Rouge apparently attempted to prove to the world that it had abandoned its old policy in addition to Communist ideology. In order to distance itself from its old regime, it set up a new political unit, changed the system of political leadership, rejected its responsibility for the killing fields, and had conducted some other propaganda offensives against its enemies as well as promoting its faction's credibility overseas.

#### **2.2 Denying the Killing Fields**

The top influential Khmer Rouge leaders like Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, Noun Chea, Ieng Sary, and Son Sen, never admitted their mistakes of carrying out a mistaken policy that resulted in killing of almost 2 million people. During conflict times, however, instead of these instances being regarded as crimes, they explained those crimes as "errors." On 1

March 1980, Ieng Sary explained, “We admit that errors were made. We thought insufficiently about the concrete structure of the state. We placed too great an emphasis on the political consciousness and had too little experience in administering the state” (cited in PRK Foreign Affairs, 1985: p. 17). 17 years later, during his last interviews with Nate Thayer in August 1997, Pol Pot was asked whether or not he regretted mistakes that had happened in the regime under his leadership, the answer was the same; “he only regretted his little experience to control the movement.” Since the stories of massacres or genocide that happened under their regime had been spread to the outside world, the Khmer Rouge leaders had realized that it would become a big obstacle for their faction’s overseas image to rally foreign support, especially to maintain Democratic Kampuchea’s seat at the United Nations. Therefore, besides trying to distance themselves from their past, they had repeatedly denied the accusations of those large scale massacres under their regime.

As part of their propaganda offensive, the Khmer Rouge leaders opened up the country to the outside world at the final stage of their regime. Visitors from the West were welcome to tour around the country. The first Western delegation the Khmer Rouge invited to visit Cambodia was a group of Swedes, who spent fourteen days in Cambodia in August 1978. During their visit the group was taken to visit many places across the country and allowed to interview top Khmer Rouge leaders including Pol Pot. In fact, what the Swedes had seen during their visit was not the real situations people were facing in their everyday lives. They had prepared all the places where the group was taken to visit in order to construct good views for the delegation’s impressions and photographs. The Khmer Rouge leaders intended to use the delegation to tell the world that their revolution was pure and in favor of the people. At the end of their visit, the Swedish group returned home with a positive view of the DK regime. The group proclaimed that ‘Cambodia was at the early stages of creating a model communist society; communism would save the Cambodian people.’

The second delegation was a group of journalists who visited Cambodia in December 1978, a few days before Vietnamese troops captured Phnom Penh. Among the three newsmen, Elizabeth Becker was an American journalist representing the *Washington Post*. Becker wrote that perhaps the DK government allowed her to visit because they wanted to get their view across to the American government (1998, p. 402). Similar to the previous delegation, the Khmer Rouge officials took the reporters to tour around the country, under strict eyes watched by their guards. After the visit, Becker confessed that, “We were the original three blind men trying to figure out the elephant. At that time no one understood the inner working of the regime—how the party controlled the country; that torture and extermination centers like Toul Sleng even existed; the depth of the misery and death” (1998, p. 409).

According to Nayan Chanda, “through the summer and autumn of 1979 the DK government had played host to a series of friendly delegations—from tiny U.S. Marxist-Leninist groups to Maoists from Belgium and Socialists from Japan. Some of those visitors returned with growing account of progress made in Cambodia and condemned press reports of killings as propaganda” (1986, p. 334). For further explanation, Chanda quoted an article in the *New York Times* written by one American visitor, saying “while there may have been some excesses in Cambodia, which no revolution is immune to, a genocide myth is being fabricated in Bangkok by operators in Thailand who were paid up to \$50 a shot for some refugees to tell good horror stories to foreigners” (Chanda, 1986: 334-335).

Likewise, as part of their propaganda campaign, DK Minister of Foreign Affairs Ieng Sary, in mid July 1978, made a trip to Thailand, where he was granted an hour-long audience with King Bhumipol and Crown Princess Sirindhorn. During the visit, besides blaming Hanoi of instigating several coup attempts in Cambodia, through the Thai media, Sary also called for closer ties between the two neighbors; Thailand and Cambodia, which share a common border. It was an important part of his mission, in front of the Thai press, to deny the charges that his government had committed crimes against its own



people. In another press conference in New York, Sary launched another image-building operation by announcing, “We want you to see for yourself whether there are human rights violations in Cambodia” (cited in Chanda, 1986: 335). The UN Secretary-general was scheduled to visit Cambodia in February 1979, but his trip was interrupted as the Khmer Rouge was already kicked out from Phnom Penh a month earlier.

Pol Pot, known as ‘brother number one’ and the most powerful man in the Khmer Rouge (even until his arrest by Ta Mok in July 1997), also took part in denying genocide under his leadership. In his replies to several groups of foreign journalists who had been allowed to visit Khmer Rouge camps along the border in December 1979, before his yearlong disappearance from the public, Pol Pot explained to them (cited in Chandler, 1999: 162):

Only several thousand Cambodian might have died due to some mistakes in implementing our policy of providing an affluent life for the people. The Vietnamese were shifting the blame to me for the million of deaths they had recently inflicted. From 1976 to 1978, there had been six coups d’état against my government. If we had [not?] executed the plotters, several thousand people would have died...

Similar to Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, another very important man within the Khmer Rouge leadership, also strongly asserted that the accusations of massive deaths committed by his government were simply not true. For Samphan, there was no large scale massacre. “It could be that some persons who have contradictions with or hard feeling for us about this or that matter are talking this way, but this is not the way things were in terms of concrete reality” (cited in Heder, 1991: 25). According to Samphan, such killings were conducted only with those who were infiltrated by the Vietnamese into the ranks of the Khmer Rouge state power to spy on its Democratic Kampuchea government. Indeed, they were agents of the Vietnamese and those people such as Sao Pheum, Ruoh Nheum, and Chou Chet (mostly they were in charge of zones). Then in an apparent allusion to the purges of them and other alleged “traitors”, he explained that “by 1977-78 we had basically sorted

them out and put proper order into the situation inside the country” ( cited by Heder, 1991: 25). When he was asked whether or not those purges or executions might possibly be done with those who were not the Vietnamese agents, Khieu Samphan replied “among the important leaders who were killed, there were none.” Moreover, in the same conversation, he was repeatedly asked similar questions<sup>5</sup>:

You don't think it is possible some of them were wrongly accused, that some of them were loyal communists and patriots and wrongly killed? As far as you know, there weren't any cases where somebody innocent was accused?

[Answer] No.

[Question] Not a single one?

[Answer] No, none.

[Question] So everybody who was executed was in fact a traitor?

[Answer] Yes, as far as I can grasp

[Question] And no one was wrongly accused?

[Answer] As I said, there was one old man, in the West, who was accused of being a traitor but was in fact loyal.

### ***2.2.1 Evidence of the Genocide***

Alternatively, while the Khmer Rouge leaders had been denying genocide under their regime, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), in association with its Vietnamese counterpart, conducted several campaigns to strengthen their legitimacy and react to the Khmer Rouge's claims. In August 1979, the PRK, in association with its Vietnamese assistance, set up a trial of two Khmer Rouge leaders, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, who were found guilty of committing genocidal crimes and sentenced them in absentia to death. At the end of 1979, they appealed a national-wide campaign to search for crimes of the Pol Pot regime. The result of the campaign was reported and presented on 25 July 1983, which claimed that the total number of deaths during the Khmer Rouge rule 1975-78 was

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<sup>5</sup> This conversation were quoted in Stephen Heder, 1991: p. 26

3.3 million. Also, in early 1980 PRK reopened the S-21 (Toul Sleng) security prison, one of the most dreadful places created by the DK government. Public and foreign visitors, including journalists and television reporters, were invited not only to visit the prison, but also to travel freely across the country to interview countless survivors and observe the mass graves. “Gradually, pictures and documents were released to a stunned world showing the corpses from Toul Sleng, the corpses from mass graves and from fields behind cooperatives, where people were killed nearly at random” (Becker, 1998: 433). The negative impact resulting from those reports and films caused some countries like Britain and Australia to remove their recognition of Democratic Kampuchea.

Among those films, a movie called “the Killing Fields” was the most popular. The film is mainly about the experience of a Cambodian journalist named Dith Pran, who had witnessed the Khmer Rouge authorities running amok and massacring their own people which destroyed the very heart of peasant life. The movie premiered in 1984 and became a most famous movie which won several big awards, including the Oscar. It played a big role in spreading countless stories about the atrocities and mass killings committed under the DK regime to the rest of the world. In general, “the Killing Fields” had very much ruined the Khmer Rouge’s image overseas, and its effect had caused countries to change their policy toward the Khmer Rouge faction. As Edmund Muskie, a former US Secretary of State, said “it was this film that changed Cambodia from being ‘outside public focus in the United States’ and brought it attention in the press, Congress and administration” (cited in Clarke, 1999, 171).

However, despite the film and evidence of atrocities, this had no effect on China, the United States, and the ASEAN countries to change their foreign policy toward the Khmer Rouge and consider issues of morality and human rights.

### **2.3 Disowning the Genocide**

It became impossible for the Khmer Rouge leaders to deny the genocide committed under their leadership since pretty much all of evidence which had been released by the PRK

and from many terrible stories told by Cambodian refugees was undeniable. More and more undeniable information from documentary films, movies, photos, journalists, and scholars had been spread out to the world. Facing those problems, the Khmer Rouge leaders changed their propaganda strategy from completely denying genocide to admitting their mistakes, but lay all the blame on its enemies and Vietnam, in particular.

Among a set of documents prepared for the International Conference on the Cambodian Conflict in Bangkok in July 1987, the Office of the Vice President of Democratic Kampuchea in charge of Foreign Affairs on 15 July 1987 issued a paper entitled, “What are the truth and justice about the accusations against Democratic Kampuchea of mass killing from 1975 to 1978.” This paper was created to declare that the DK regime did not commit the mass killings. According to Heder the document was authored by Khieu Samphan, who attempted to absolve Pol Pot and himself, and others still with the Democratic Kampuchea leadership of any responsibility for the “mass killings” (1991: 27).

The document came out to provide what Samphan calls “truth and justice” for the Democratic Kampuchea regime from 1975 to 1978. “In fact, the DK government had helped people, especially poor people, since the times before they came to power,” the document claims. It continues that “the living conditions of poor people had remarkably changed for the better since 1973 in the vast liberated zones. In order to be able to ensure the country’s defense and to speed up the national reconstruction after the war, the main policy of the DK government had been to promote fast population growth; there is no reason why this regime had killed its own people.” The document claims that “after the time they came to power their life began to improve for all of them had enough rice to eat and clothes to use”; “their health was constantly improving since 1976”; and “the situation supposedly kept improving right through 1978”. “A mid-1978 census indicated that Cambodia had 8.4 million inhabitants.” The same paper continues, “in the management of the State affairs we did good things and also committed mistakes. We

had high sense of responsibility towards the nation and people of Cambodia. We have already come to the conclusion that the good outweighed the mistakes.”

As Heder mentioned, the document never challenge the basic policies of the Democratic Kampuchea. It only admits some weaknesses of its government that allowed the Vietnamese agents to infiltrate its State Organs and the “legislative, executive, and judiciary bodies who, being at their early stage...could not function effectively and efficiently.” It asserts that “the situation got all the more confused of the subversion activities of Vietnam’s agents.” As a consequence “we committed mistakes that affected the lives of minor offenders or innocent civilians from 1975 to 1978, over 3,000 people died in that category.” “To be fair, the number of people who died in Cambodia during those years is less than people who die by car accidents in some countries where each year 30,000 people or more died from road accidents”, Samphan explained in the document. Moreover, the Khmer Rouge paper puts the blame for all the large scale of massacre on Pol Pot’s enemies, whose responsibility is more than 30,000 deaths. It asserts that the Democratic Kampuchea government truly found out that more than 8,000 enemies were actually involved in trying to carry out six supposed coups d’ état to overthrow the government and those chief traitors had connections with Vietnam.

Samphan outlined in the document that there were more than 20,000 people who had died from illness and food shortage during the DK regime, mostly urban people. Those deaths of starvation and diseases were not under Pol Pot’s or his responsibility. The problems happened because of “the Vietnamese agents who supposedly carried out activities of sabotage especially to destroy medicines and other materials and stole tens of thousands of tons of rice each year from 1975 to 1978 and sent to Vietnam.”

In reality, during their four years in power (April 1975-January 1979), the Khmer Rouge leaders, including Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan, carried out a radical program which rejected any modern technology. Within a few hours after capturing the Phnom Penh, Pol Pot ordered his young soldiers to evacuate the entire population in the city—more than 2.5 million people—to leave for the countryside. To carry out what they called “the super



great leap forward revolution” schools, hospitals, banks, finance and currency, private property, religions, markets, courts, and social networks were all abolished. People in the urban areas were relocated to the countryside where they were turned into agricultural laborers who were forced to do heavy work with long-hours without adequate rest or food. These actions resulted in massive deaths through illness, starvation, work exhaustion, and arbitrary executions. Soldiers and officers of the former regime, rich men, professionals, intellectuals, and even those who possessed stereotypical symbols of learning like wearing glasses were targeted to be killed by execution. As a result of those Khmer Rouge leaders’ policies, Cambodia was entirely turned into the ‘year zero’, in which almost 2 million people were killed by countless horrific and unspeakable crimes.

## **2.4 Changes in the Political System**

On 21 August 1979, as the Head of State of Democratic Kampuchea, Khieu Samphan officially announced the draft of the political program of a new political front of the State of Democratic Kampuchea under the new name, “The Patriotic and Democratic Front of Great National Union of Kampuchea (PDFGNUM).” In the new drafted political program, the Khmer Rouge leaders attempted to show to the public that their faction had nothing to do with the previous bloody regime. Their new political program was set up in favor of democracy. Unlike the former regime, the PDFGNUM domestic policy attempted “to build a new society where every citizen enjoys the democratic freedom in his occupation as well as in his daily life; guarantee the democratic freedoms in the political life, freedom of forming political parties and freedom of speech; and guarantee a parliamentary regime.” In the economic field, the government would “build up a national independent economy, ensure the rights to production, guarantee all activities of every citizen in the agriculture, where everyone enjoys the liberty of working and carrying out of individually or family productive activities, guarantee private property, and at home trade exchanges are carried out by using national currency.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Summary of some points in the draft of the Khmer Rouge new political program, August 1979, pp. 2-12

It is clear that the PDFGNUM wanted to prove that the Khmer Rouge group, of which all the members were the DK officials, did not follow their old political system; in contrast they were attempting to build a society in favor of the welfare and freedom of the people. Their main goals, as written in their two objectives, were to build up arms to fight the Vietnamese troops and its puppet Heng Samrin government and to build up an independent, united, democratic, peaceful and neutral Cambodia.

Afterward, it was announced by the Khmer Rouge radio that Pol Pot, the most influential man of the group and the prime minister of the DK government, to be replaced. In fact, Pol Pot knew very well about his unpopularity among the public. He was deeply hated by many people in the country. The new government in Phnom Penh and its Vietnamese counterpart used his name, [*Samay A Pol* (means Pol Pot regime)], to represent the genocide committed under his leadership; and because of this his name became a cruel word representing the sense of hatred and killings. In order to save his group's image, Pol Pot did not want his enemies and the public to see him as the poster child of the Khmer Rouge faction. Khieu Samphan became the new prime minister in December 1979, and Pol Pot himself became the commander-in-chief of the army. Some analysts believe that even though Pol Pot was no longer the prime minister, he was still the most powerful man behind the scene.

At the same time, there were six new officials, who were reportedly not members of the Communist Party, in the new Khmer Rouge government. They were Thiuonn Thioeunn's two brothers, Thiuonn Thioum, who in 1979 became Minister for Economy and Finance, and Thiuonn Mumm, who became Chairman of the National Commission of Sciences and Technology, with Ministerial rank; Keat Chhon, who became Minister of the Prime Minister's Office; Thuch Rin, who became Secretary of State for Information; Sar Kim Lomouth, who became Secretary of State for Supply and Transportation; and Chhorn Hay, who became Secretary of State for the Postal Services and Telecommunication [(Democratic Kampuchea), "Composition of the Government;" quoted in Heder, 1991: 23]. These new officials were appointed as a sign to prove to the world that the Khmer

Rouge leadership and policies had significantly changed, however, according to Heder, “Khieu Samphan has continued to play this game. None of the six decorate new faces have any post in a significant Democratic Kampuchea body and most have gone into exile abroad” (1991, p. 23).

After Pol Pot stepped down from his office as the prime minister and was replaced by Khieu Samphan, the administrative system of the Khmer Rouge did not change by any significant degree. All the important positions were still led by the same cadres: Son Sen was still the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of National Defense; Ta Mok (also known as Chhet Choeun), vice chairman and chief of the general staff of the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK) and reportedly Pol Pot's right-hand man; Ieng Sary, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Foreign Affairs; Ieng Thirith, wife of Ieng Sary and head of Democratic Kampuchea's Red Cross Society; Nuon Chea (also known as Long Reth), chairman of the Standing Committee of the People's Representative Assembly of Democratic Kampuchea, and Pol Pot became the commander in chief of the NADK.

The Khmer Rouge leaders saw mass media as the most effective way to reconstruct their faction's credibility overseas. Most of the time, high ranking Khmer Rouge leaders gave importance to journalists, publications, and radio. For Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary, of course, they had talked many times with journalists and scholars, but mainly with those who were ideologically close to them. Some of those people had played a very important role in casting a positive light on their political faction. Throughout the conflict era, no journalists or television reporters could interview or visit the Khmer Rouge camps without permission. As for Pol Pot, since he escaped to the border until he died, he appeared for interviews only two times. The first time was with several groups of journalists in December 1979 and the second one was with Nate Thayer in 1997, some months before his death. According to Chandler, in 1990 an American television group offered him US\$ 300,000 for an interview, but he refused. Besides the Khmer Rouge radio, the Voice of Democratic Kampuchea was broadcasted from Southern China. Additionally, the Khmer Rouge faction published some print media, including the

Magazine of the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea, chiefly for propaganda purposes.

In the same month (December 1979), several groups of journalists, including Henry Kamm, who represented *the New York Times*, were invited to visit the Khmer Rouge camps. Some of them even spent several days observing the new Khmer Rouge government. According to Phillip Short, the Khmer Rouge were trying “to persuade public opinion abroad that they had changed, to counter the atrocity stories filling Western newspapers and to make it easier for Western governments to continue upholding Democratic Kampuchea’s right to be represented at the UN and in other international bodies” (2004, 414).

## **2.5 Abandoning Communism**

Throughout the history the Khmer Rouge movement, China played the most important role in supporting the group. The Khmer Rouge leaders regarded China as the best ally who not only always stood at their back by providing all the essential aid, but also as their ideological model of carrying out their ‘Super Great Leap Forward’ revolution. In terms of influence, China was likely the only country that had some tenable impacts on the Khmer Rouge leaders. The idea originally proposed by China to improve the Khmer Rouge’s image overseas, Khieu Samphan announced the Communist Party of Kampuchea would be abolished.

During Sary’s trip to China in January 1979, the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping blamed his government of conducting purges that were excessive and too broad a scope which caused China to be inconvenient and brought quite a few negative results. Deng advised Sary to change the Khmer Rouge propaganda tune. “For the moment, don’t put the Communist Party in the foreground; rather, emphasize patriotism, nationalism, and democracy” (cited in Chanda, 1986: 348). Deng confirmed that, “If the Communist Party had become a hindrance, better to get rid of it altogether” (cited in Short, 2004: 418). In fact, Beijing saw Prince Sihanouk, who was still popular both inside and outside the

country, would play a crucial role in leading the anti-Vietnamese resistance. “We would lose a large deal, if we failed to unite with him. So at the opportune moment and in the near future, I would ask you to reserve the post of the head of state for Sihanouk. Comrade Pol Pot will be prime minister in charge of national defense and supreme commander” (cited in Chanda, 1986: 348), Deng told Sary in the meeting. In August 1981, via a special chartered Chinese airliner sent to Bangkok to collect him, Pol Pot took a trip to Beijing to meet Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang, Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of China. Zhao explained to Pol Pot in the first meeting, “We think you should be flexible. You have to adapt your policy to the twists and turns of the road ahead.” It means, Deng explained, “In order to retain the support of ASEAN, the Khmer Rouge’ differences with Sihanouk and their objections to giving a pledge to disarm after an eventual Vietnamese withdrawal should be papered over. China would use its influence to ensure that, in the detailed negotiations that would follow, Khmer Rouge interests were protected” (cited in Short, 2004: 415-416).

A few months after Pol Pot returned from China, the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) announced its self-dissolution, and “it became the first and only Party in the history of international communism to terminate its own existence” (Short, 2004: 416). Ieng Thirith claimed that DK that changed completely and they had even restored religious beliefs. Ieng Sary added, “Cambodia would not be subjected to socialism for many generations” (cited in Chandler, 1996: 234). A key member of the Khmer Rouge faction In Sopheap (cited in Short, 2004: 417) noted:

One day China will have a capitalist system. That’s not a criticism. But we must take it into account. It’s not good trying to comfort ourselves because their system still contains crumbs of socialism. We must adapt our policy in the light of the dominant trend in the world. If Democratic Kampuchea retained a communist system, it would be out of step with its main allies.

Since the Communist Party of Kampuchea used to have connections with the Communist Party of Vietnam during the times of struggling for power in the early 1970s, the Khmer



Rouge leaders wanted to prove that the dissolution was a declaration of war against the expansionism of Communism in the region. They wanted to let the world know that the Cambodian conflict was not the war between two communist countries, but it was the war between Communism and Democracy. A few years later Pol Pot explained, “We helped the Vietnamese, who were communist. But now the communists are fighting us. So we have to turn to the West and follow their way” (cited in Short, 2004: 417). Thus, “Our main duty is not to ....build socialism, but to drive all the Vietnamese forces out of Cambodia and to defend our nation, our people, our race”, Samphan declared (cited in Short 2004: 414). Actually, since they were overthrown from power, very few socialist countries around the world supported their cause. Apart from China, most of their supporters came from Western capitalist countries, notably the United States and its allies. Their party’s self-dissolution was implemented to fit within the Cold War ideology of those countries and keep their faction alive by receiving aid provided by pro-Western countries like Thailand.

### ***2.5.1 Did the Khmer Rouge Truly Change?***

Since they had been implementing some policies such as changing the united front’s name, removing top leaders like Pol Pot, and abandoning Communist ideology as well as dissolving the Communist Party, some people were believed that the Khmer Rouge had really changed. Jacques Bekaert in his “*Cambodia Diary, 1983-1986*” quoted a senior Chinese official saying that, “Okay, they made mistakes on the past. We all know that. But they have changed, they have recognized their errors. How could the Party of Democratic Kampuchea find any popular support for its struggle if people hate it?” (1997, p. 194). Also, according to Philipp Short, “The change was real. The goal of communism was abandoned. Offenders were re-educated rather than killed. The ban on individual possessions was lifted. Collective eating ended. Families lived together normally again. Young people chose their own marriage partners. Social restrictions were eased...each person has a family” (2004, p. 418). However, many other aspects inside the

Khmer Rouge camps still remained the same and their camps were controlled stricter than those of the other two factions.

Within the administrative system of the faction, besides the replacement of Pol Pot from the prime ministerial post, there are no other remarkable changes and all the influential members of the former Communist Party like Pol Pot, Ta Mok, Son Sen, Khieu Samphan, and Ieng Sary still held the same positions. In September 1983, after the three factions joined a coalition government, some ASEAN leaders wanted to see some top leaders like Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Ta Mok to retire for what they called the “sake” of Cambodia. Khieu Samphan immediately rejected the idea and firmly replied, “All that is not important. What is important is unity. We have always been united and we will always be. Nobody can separate us” (cited in Chanda, 1989: 394).

Inside the Khmer Rouge camps, basic human rights and basic freedom for civilians were not respected. Some reports still claimed that the Khmer Rouge authorities treated civilians inhumanely. “Refugees were not allowed to leave, military commanders attended annual study sessions as they had done in the 1970s, and military aid continued to flow to the faction from China” (Chandler, 1998: 234). Any criticism of the leadership and any attempts to contact people outside the camps were prohibited and those who broke the rules were detained or sent to work in heavily mined areas. “Some civilians have reportedly been executed because of their proclaimed preference for Prince Sihanouk’s political movement<sup>7</sup>” (Stromseth, 1988: 16). Since the Khmer Rouge authorities controlled their camps strictly, no accurate reports were released on the exact number of people under their control. Many refugees had fallen into the Khmer Rouge camps by accident while they were trying to reach camps controlled by the other factions along the border. After those refugees stumbled into the Khmer Rouge hands, they were tightly controlled and prevented from trying to escape. According to *the Nation* (Thailand), in 1989 about a fifth of the roughly 300,000 Cambodian refugees in the

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<sup>7</sup> Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Kampuchea: After the Worst (New York: August 1985). Pp. 174-207; Nayan Chanda, “The Prince Makes Waves”, FEER, 18 June 1987, p. 48.

border camps were under Khmer Rouge control in four accessible locations: the showcase Site 8, which was open to foreigners; O'Traso, also opened to the United Nations; and the more austere Ta Luan and Borai (February 20, 1989). Until the early 1990s, the Khmer Rouge controlled some 100,000 people.

Inside the Khmer Rouge camps, military personnel and civilians were not separated. All the people had to contribute to the war effort even pregnant women and pre-teenage children. An open letter<sup>8</sup> was broadcast on Voice of the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea radio asserted on November 29, 1988 that:

Some of us have given up spouses and children to serve in the army. Others have volunteered to become porters of provisions and material to the battlefield... if we, as Cambodians, are not striving for national liberation for ourselves, then who will carry the task for us?... we shall do it with all our heart and our patriotic sentiments.

Some women living in the former Khmer Rouge stronghold areas along the Cambodian-Thai border admitted to me that during the civil war, besides carrying out tasks inside the camps, they were taken by trucks, most often at night, into Thailand to transport weapons and food to soldiers at the front line inside Cambodia, and the work was difficult, dangerous, and frightening. They said that, as porters, if they failed to bring those weapons and food to the hands of soldiers, for any reasons, they would have to do it again without taking a rest<sup>9</sup>. Civilians in some camps, because their authorities regarded them as part of the military, were forced to wear uniforms, the dark green shirt provided by China. In some other Khmer Rouge camps only boys and men were required to do so.

In the *Asia Watch* report published in February 1989, there are several case studies concerning the way that the Khmer Rouge authorities treated their people who committed mistakes. Here is an example:

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<sup>8</sup> Cited in An Asia Watch Report, February 1989, *Khmer Rouge Abuses along the Border*. p.25

<sup>9</sup> Interviewed with some former Khmer Rouge women at Malay 8 December 2010.

Moeun Noeun, 30, is a Khmer Rouge soldier based at Site 8 South. On 4 April 1988, he had come to Site 8 to take part in Khmer New Year celebrations, without the permission of his camp commander, according to some of the refugees in Site 8. He was said to have stolen weapons from his camp in order to sell them at Site 8 and get money for the New Year. On April 10, one of the commanders from Site 8 South came to summon him at his home, but Moeun Noeun refused and went into hiding. On April 24, the Khmer Rouge administrators of Site 8 discovered that he was staying at his aunt's house, and at 8:00 that evening, 20-30 armed soldiers surrounded the house. Three soldiers called out to Moeun Noeun to surrender, and when he did not reply, three or four shots were fired into the house. His aunt, her daughter and three children were allowed to leave the house, and four soldiers then entered to arrest Moeun Noeun. They took him outside and immediately executed him. He was shot at point blank range, according to eyewitnesses, once in the bladder, once in the heart, and once in the head. Khmer Rouge officials cremated the body early the next morning (p. 23-24).

## **2.6 Propaganda against Vietnamese**

It was priority for the Khmer Rouge to gather the foreign support by the process of internationalizing the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as an aggressive act against its weaker neighbor. The Khmer Rouge leaders repeatedly accused Vietnam of attempting to control the three countries of Indochina, an idea of being the master of the so-called "Indochina Federation." After realizing the Vietnamese plan of invading Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge leaders started opening Cambodia up to the world and appealing any to foreign observers, journalists, and the United Nations officials to visit Cambodia and witness the Vietnamese aggression.

As mentioned earlier, as part of their propaganda strategy, a group of three journalists, Richard Dudman, Elizabeth Becker (two journalists, a distinction the Khmer Rouge

considered important), and Malcolm Caldwell<sup>10</sup> (Khmer Rouge's friend), were allowed to visit Cambodia a few days before Vietnamese troops captured Phnom Penh. Besides taking tours to a few places in the country, they were allowed to interview Pol Pot on Friday of December 22 1978. During the interview, "Pol Pot spent more than one hour to lecture about Vietnamese activities and he spoke without a script or a scrap of paper, painstakingly building up the case against Vietnam," Becker wrote. Quoting Pol Pot's words, Becker reported that, "He repeated himself regularly. Vietnam wanted to swallow up Kampuchea and make it a satellite in a Vietnamese-controlled Indochina Federation...Vietnam went and kissed the feet of the Soviet Union and made a military alliance with the Soviet Union" (1998, 425). In fact, the Khmer Rouge leaders were not only trying to persuade the world to blame Vietnam for conducting an aggressive policy, but they also accused Vietnam as a satellite of the Soviet Union, which was threatening the security of the whole Southeast Asian region. Pol Pot said, "The situation will be clearer and clearer...what are the criminal acts of Vietnam and the Soviet Union against Kampuchea, Southeast Asia, and the world" (cited in Becker, 1998: 426).

Pol Pot had realized Prince Sihanouk, who was put in house arrest for more than two years in the Grand Palace in Phnom Penh, would play an effective role in condemning the Vietnamese acts to the world. Sihanouk and his wife were taken for the first time to meet Pol Pot, who told them, "It's time for you to help us in the diplomatic field. We are in great difficulty" (cited in Becker, 1998: 433). While Vietnamese troops, accompanied by Heng Samrin forces, were attacking eastern Cambodia and approaching closer and closer to Phnom Penh, Pol Pot decided to send the Prince, together with his wife, in the name of Democratic Kampuchea to call on international community to condemn Vietnam at the United Nations. At the United Nation headquarters in New York, Sihanouk played the role as the representative of Democratic Kampuchea during the United Nations debate over the Vietnamese invasion. "Sihanouk won the vote for Democratic Kampuchea (DK), the country that just months before was threatened with condemnation by the NU's

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<sup>10</sup> He had authored a book about the Cambodian War and, after the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975, had been a champion of their revolution.



Human Rights Commission. But this proved to be one of the many ironies and hypocrisies stemming from the invasion and the new situation in Asia (Becker, 1998, p. 434).

As discussed earlier, after the arrival at the Thai-Cambodian border, in December 1979, Pol Pot appeared briefly to give interviews with Japanese newsmen and a team from the American ABC television network. Actually, Pol Pot was using those newsmen to bring his propaganda to the world that the Vietnamese were waging a war of genocide. Pol Pot once again denied the mass killings committed by his regime. He claimed only that “several thousand Cambodians might have died due to some mistakes in implementing his policy.” He found them [the Vietnamese] “more ferocious than Hitler; “Hitler killed the Jews and those who opposed him. Vietnam kills those who oppose it and innocent people who will not join it” (Pol Pot’s words, cited in Chandler, 1999: 163). A month later, Ieng Sary, Minister in charge of DK Foreign Affairs, similarly told *the Far Eastern Economic Review* about the number of deaths under DK regime. According to Sary: “Several thousand;” but immediately he went on to add that revenge killings and excesses were nothing compared to the Vietnamese effort to “subvert our party and government” (Chanda, FEER, June 1979).

In a Khmer Rouge document published in 1984 entitled, “The United Front for the Liberation and Independence of Kampuchea,” the Khmer Rouge leaders accused the Vietnamese troops of waging a genocidal war against Cambodians in Cambodia. It consisted of documents from newspapers, short articles, press statements, letters of declarations, and some internal documents of the Khmer Rouge faction. There is little doubt that the document was written and published to serve their propaganda campaign. It started with a selective chronology of events from June 1978 to April 1984, which primarily involved Vietnam’s activities, such as its close connection with the Soviet Union and Vietnamese attacks on the Khmer Rouge forces. Unspeakably terrible photos of starving Cambodian refugees, horrible dead bodies, and crying children were compiled in the document, and the Khmer Rouge leaders put all charges on the Vietnamese

claiming that “these are true stories of atrocities caused by the Vietnamese occupation.” In fact, those pro-Khmer Rouge photos and articles were selected from some pro-Khmer Rouge newspapers such as *the Bangkok Post* and *the Washington Times*.

For years, the Khmer Rouge had accused Vietnam of trying to send Vietnamese people to settle in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge leaders asserted that as part of its plan to control Indochina, Vietnam was trying to settle Vietnamese in Cambodia to serve the policy of Vietnamization. As a main part of their agenda to attack Vietnam, some short articles and papers concerning Vietnamese settlers since the colonial times could also be seen in the document. “Together with the genocide they have committed against Cambodian people, the Hanoi authorities systematically have carried out the policy of ‘Vietnamization’ of the country as well through the settlements in Cambodia of the Vietnamese nationals brought from Vietnam” (p. 71). The Khmer Rouge document claimed that “Vietnamese troops had no plan to withdraw from Cambodia since their original attempt was to colonize Cambodia. The Vietnamese colonization policy was not only threatening Cambodia and Laos, but it caused Thailand to worry about its sovereignty as well.” Quoting a short article from *the Bangkok Post*, a Thai government delegation asserted that, “Hanoi sent 150,000 Vietnamese families to live in Cambodia and it is exploiting that country’s natural resources for its own benefit” (*Bangkok Post*, 29 May 1984).

In a conference on 25-26 July 1987 in Bangkok, Khieu Samphan, who did not believe Vietnam was willing to withdraw from Cambodia, mentioned that, “they [Vietnamese] will never withdraw in the year 1990 or in the year 2000 or in any other year. They will stick to their Indochina Federation and their regional expansionist strategies.” Moreover, in his speech Samphan used a logical argument to prove to the audience that his regime was the victim of the Vietnamese aggression. He said<sup>11</sup>:

The man in the street can surely understand the problem. At present, Vietnam has more than 60 million inhabitants with a regular army of 1.2 million strong. In

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in the report of the Third International Conference on Kampuchea, Bangkok 25-26 1987; p.8

addition, it has hundreds of thousands of militia and other para-military forces. The Vietnamese army has been often referred to as the third largest in the world. As for Kampuchea, she has only about 7 million inhabitants with an army of some ten thousand men, an army of guerrillas. In such a ratio can Kampuchea pose a threat to or commit aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam? Needless to say that Kampuchea wishes only to live in peace and security with Vietnam. In such a ratio, Kampuchea cannot even dream of committing aggression against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. By contrast, the Vietnamese relying on their forces, have committed aggression against Kampuchea in conformity with their “Indochina Federation” strategy worked out and maintained ever since the year 1930.

## **2.7 Calling for National Unity**

At a very early stage of their guerrilla war against the Vietnamese troops, the Khmer Rouge leaders called all Cambodians living everywhere to join all of their forces together to push foreign soldiers out. The Khmer Rouge appeal included Heng Samrin supporters and Prince Sihanouk. “The Communist Party of Kampuchea is ready to efface itself for the sake of unity with all groups and personalities including Sihanouk”, Foreign Minister Ieng Sary asserted in June 1979 (cited in Nayan Chanda, *FEER*, June 1979). In fact, the Khmer Rouge were attempting to use the same strategy which they had successfully used in the early 1970s. Their target was Prince Sihanouk, who had played the most important role in leading their group to seize power in 1975. Many people still remembered the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* regime (1955-1970) and still desired to see the Prince leading Cambodia again. In this respect, the Prince’s popularity among Cambodians was still very strong. The Khmer Rouge leaders wanted to do the same thing by appointing the Prince to lead their front in order to gather the Cambodians to strengthen their forces quickly. Khieu Samphan noted:

We offered Sihanouk the post of Chairman of the Front of the Great National Patriotic and Democratic Union...if he accepted it, we are ready to recognize the

government to provide for the formation of such a front. In this event, he will also take the office of Chairman of the State Presidium (cited in PRK Foreign Affairs 1985: 16; Le Monde, September 2 1979).

If they were able to persuade the Prince to lead their group, the Khmer Rouge would receive a number of advantages: they could gather more people to join their group; their reputation abroad would be more positive since many countries still liked the Prince leading Cambodia; and it could legitimate the support of their military suppliers like China, for example. However, Prince Sihanouk still remembered vividly how the Khmer Rouge authorities had treated him and killed his children and other royal family members. To put it simply, the Khmer Rouge were the Prince's most obvious enemy. He said, "Pol Pot may be a patriot but he is a butcher. He treats the Cambodian people as cattle good for forced labor and pigs good for the slaughterhouse" (cited in Chanda, 1986: 364). In response to this quote, how could the Prince agree to join his enemy, the Khmer Rouge? Response to this question, Ieng Sary explained, "You know him, he is like that...by this patriotic sense he will certainly come in the direction of struggle" (Chanda, FEER, June 1979). Claiming the Vietnamese as invaders of Cambodia, the Khmer Rouges again and again appealed to all political beliefs to forget the past and join hands together to drive out the invaders. They even proposed a coalition government that might include Prince Sihanouk and Heng Samrin in addition to a future election supervised by the UN to determine the new leadership of Cambodia.

Prince Sihanouk, however, rejected the Khmer Rouge offer, and he created his own political faction known by its French name as FUNCINPEC (The United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia) in February 1981. The formation of the resistance was encouraged mainly by ASEAN, which had a long term vision of mobilizing all the anti-Vietnamese factions together in order to pressure Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia. One year later, in June 1982, Sihanouk could not avoid joining a coalition government with the Khmer Rouge, together with

another non-communist faction created in 1979 known as “the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF)” led by a former prime minister named Son Sann.

## **2.8 The Coalition Government**

The main player in the formation of the coalition government was Prince Sihanouk, who in early 1980 criticized ASEAN and China for continuing to support the Khmer Rouge. A few months later, the Prince announced his permanent retirement from all political activities. Nevertheless, in February 1981, he reversed his decision and came back to politics by leading the FUNCINPEC. In the same month, ASEAN's special envoy, Anwar Sany, an Indonesian diplomat, flew to meet Sihanouk in Pyongyang and urged him on behalf of the organization to head the coalition government. China also did the same thing by sending its ambassador to convince the Prince to join the new government. Finally, the Prince came out with his will to lead the anti-Vietnamese front if China and the Khmer Rouge agreed with his preconditions which were: first, China's military and financial support must go to all Cambodian resistance factions, not only the Khmer Rouge; and second, the factions must be disarmed after the Vietnamese withdraw from Cambodia. Responding to the Prince's announcement, Khieu Samphan flew to Pyongyang to hold the first exploratory unity talks, without Son Sann, on March 10-11 1981. However, the talks were unfruitful because Samphan objected to Sihanouk's demand for the disarmament for his faction in the future.

The KPNLF was also enlisted into the coalition. All the factions came out with their own set of preconditions. Son Sann insisted that the top Khmer Rouge leaders most compromised by their atrocities be exiled to China and the united front must be led by the KPNLF. Meanwhile, Khieu Samphan urged that the future government must not determine the autonomy of the Khmer Rouge or to undo the legal status of Democratic Kampuchea. In this respect, the future of the coalition government was unlikely to happen since the Khmer Rouge leaders could not accept the preconditions advanced by the FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF. The deadlock was broken, however, under pressures from ASEAN and China. Sihanouk and Son Sann agreed to drop down their demands in



exchange for aid from China, ASEAN and the United States. “ASEAN and the United States had made it clear to the two leaders that they could give assistance only to a legal government like Democratic Kampuchea and not to a guerrilla movement” (Chanda, 1986: 391). The Khmer Rouge faction was threatened to be deprived of support from the international community if it failed to join the front with the two factions. The three anti-Vietnamese factions had their own concerns, but they had to join their rivals to create the coalition government to follow the international demands. On 2 September 1981, Sihanouk, Khieu Samphan, and Son Sann met in Singapore to hold their first summit on the formation.

The meeting took three days to reach a four-point agreement that included the creation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK); the establishment of an ad hoc committee to draw up a blueprint for the coalition government; an expression of support for the resolution of the first International Conference on Cambodia as well as for other relevant UN General Assembly resolutions on Cambodia; and an appeal for international support of their common causes. During a press conference, Sihanouk noted, “the Cambodians must not only reach ‘an honorable compromise’ with Hanoi, but should also work toward a comprehensive solution among all Cambodian factions including the PRK” (cited in Bekaert, 1997, 17). Unfortunately, the PRK objected to the Prince’s appeal claiming that the coalition was only to facilitate Pol Pot’s group to gain more aid for the West.

The agreement signed in Singapore was only the first principle agreement to open the door for detailed negotiations on the structure and power sharing of the future coalition government. These tasks came to the hands of the ad hoc committee in which each faction had three representatives. The Thai government provided them with a place to meet and other facilities but did not involved itself in their close door meetings held in an undisclosed location in Bangkok. Representatives of Prince Sihanouk were In Tam, Bour Hel, and Tol Loh. The Khmer Rouge had Ieng Thirith, Suong Sikoeun, and Ok Shoun as

their representatives. Son San's Khmer People's National Liberation Front was represented by Hing Humthou, Neang Ching Han, and Dr. Abdul Gaffar Pen Meth.

Between September 13 and November 14, 1981 the ad hoc committee between these formed rivals met nine times, yet they still could not agree among themselves on principles of power sharing, decision making by consensus, and use of Democratic Kampuchea's legal framework as the basis for the proposed coalition government. Once again, ASEAN and China intervened by proposing the formation of a loose coalition government in which Democratic Kampuchea would become one of three equal partners of the alliance. Finally, the three anti-Vietnamese resistance groups agreed with the formula of a coalition government which has Sihanouk as the head of state, Son Sann as prime minister, and Khieu Samphan as deputy prime minister. The new coalition government was named "the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK)" and the text of the declaration of the formation was signed and announced on 22 June 1982 in Kuala Lumpur.

### ***2.8.1 The Khmer Rouge in CGDK***

All resistance groups got benefits from the coalition. The KPNLF of Son Sann and the FUNCINPEC of Prince Sihanouk got some financial and military assistance from China and the United States, as they promised to give them after they joined the coalition. But the aid was still far from enough to build their strength as strong as the Khmer Rouge forces. As the biggest and the strongest anti-Vietnamese faction along the border, the Khmer Rouge enjoyed a great number of benefits from the tripartite government.

In the diplomatic arena, the Khmer Rouge had by far the largest influence as their faction won the right to control all the foreign affairs of the coalition government. According to the text of the declaration in Kuala Lumpur, "To ensure the order and the efficiency of the Democratic Kampuchea's diplomatic affairs, no question of change of Democratic Kampuchea currently in office should be raised in the period of six months following the

formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea<sup>12</sup>.” In this respect, the Khmer Rouge leaders could dominate the new government’s foreign policy by maintaining all the foreign posts for this new entity, including its representatives at the UNESCO in Paris and at the UN in New York. As claimed in the declaration, “...the current State of Democratic Kampuchea led by H.E. Mr Khieu Samphan will have the right to resume its activities as the sole legal and legitimate State of Kampuchea and as a Member State of the United Nations in order to ensure the continuity of the State of democratic Kampuchea<sup>13</sup>.” “The coalition partners also accepted the Democratic Kampuchea flag and anthem in addition to granting the Khmer Rouge right to withdraw from the coalition, taking DK label with them” (Chanda, 1986: 392).

In October 1982, the CGDK was successfully voted by country members of the United Nations Assembly to retain its right as the legal representative of Cambodia. At the same time the UN resolution calling for withdrawal of all the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia was passed with a great majority, 105 in favor and 23 against. It continued with the same result in 1983 and in 1984, with the number increasing 110 nations voting for withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. Thus, the Khmer Rouge could end its fear of losing support from the international community as it had already cleaned its image by associating with the other two resistance factions. Instead of playing its own international policy, the Khmer Rouge’s foreign affairs were based on the coalition government policy, which had Ieng Sary as the minister.

Between 1982 and 1988, a number of countries had built relations with the CGDK at the ambassadorial level. Those countries were China, Malaysia, North Korea, Bangladesh, Mauritania, Egypt, Pakistan, Senegal, Sudan, Yugoslavia, and Thailand. As the president of the CGDK, Sihanouk normally received the credentials of ambassadors from those countries in the liberated areas along the border.

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<sup>12</sup> *Text of the Declaration of the Formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea*. Kuala Lumpur, June 1982: Operating principle 4.5, p. 3

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

As a government in-exile, the three factions in the coalition still maintained their own organization, political identity, and freedom of action, including the right to receive and dispose of international aid. Each participating party remained entirely separated. Ben Kiernan asserted that, “the CGDK must be recognized for what it is-neither a coalition, nor a government, nor democratic” (cited in Etchesos, 1987: 187). Each participating faction did not have any common political program while Sihanouk and Son Sann badly had problems with the Khmer Rouge in the past. They agreed to join the Khmer Rouge because they were pressured by some countries which preferred to see a mobilized resistance to push Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia. As Sihanouk noted during a press conference following the signing ceremony of the creation of the CGDK, “I know very well that Mr. Khieu Samphan here is a criminal. But it is countries like yours which leave me with no choice. Nobody in the West or among the ASEAN countries is willing to support Sihanouk and Son Sann, unless they join the Khmer Rouge” (Bekaert, 1997: 17). However, for the next ten years, the three factions continued to distrust each other, and their spokesmen made no promises about what Cambodia might expect if the coalition came to power. “Militarily, the coalition’s forces consisted of thirty thousand men and women, more than half mobilized by the DK” (Chandler, 1998: 234). Even though the presidential post went to the hand of Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann as the prime minister, these two men could do nothing to control the Khmer Rouge forces, who were the best trained, most numerous, and most active compared to the other coalition forces.

### **2.8.2 *Military Strength of the CGDK***

The Khmer People’s National Liberation Armed Forces (KPNLAF) was founded in March 1979 by combining several small factions based along the border areas since mid 1975. The army did not have enough weapons, had only a few thousand effective fighters, and was short of ammunition. “Supporters of the faction came from Cambodians living overseas, nostalgic for the past, and from recent arrivals at the border, enraged by the destruction of the 1970s and by what they saw as open-ended Vietnamese control” (Chandler, 1996: 231). Son Sann, who was a former prime minister of Prince Sihanouk in

the old times, gained support from the United States, which saw no interest in giving him enough military aid to build his faction to become a serious force. While the West could not give him enough aid, Son Sann needed to depend on Chinese support. It was believed that though Son Sann could assemble his force from 3000 to some 15,000, it was never a match for the Khmer Rouge, who received a larger amount of aid from China.

As the smallest faction, the FUNCINPEC recruited refugees for building its forces, which was known as the Sihanoukist National Army (SNA). “Founded in 1981 Sihanouk’s people, inevitably, were competing with Son Sann’s group for refugee recruits and foreign assistance” (Becker, 1998: 452). The number of forces was estimated at some 14-15,000 in 1986 with the administration more disciplined and effective than the KPNLAF. “While Sihanouk emerged as the popular anti-Vietnamese symbol, Beijing sent weapons to the Khmer Rouge believing them to be the only force within Cambodian capable of resisting the Vietnamese” (Hood, 1990: 978).

Most often, the two non-communist factions received aid in similar quantities. The United States gave some 15\$ million each year through international organizations such as the United Nations Border Relief Operation, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the UN Food program. Some ASEAN countries also provided some military support to the non-communist factions. “While Indonesia opposing the idea of providing military aid to the resistance forces, Singapore has supplied arms to the KPNLF and the Sihanoukist National Army (ANS), and Malaysia reportedly had trained KPNLF troops” (Niksich, 1984: 4-5). In summer 1985, for the first time, the US Congress voted for openly granting 5\$ million each to the KPNLF and the FUNCINPEC. In the same year, Sihanouk revealed how much the coalition had received in funding: “US\$700,000 from North Korea and US\$550,000 from China, plus US\$50,000 a year to FUNCINPEC from France and US\$100,000 from ASEAN, the latter sum possibly including US aid (though it was not clear if this went to the FUNCINPEC alone or not)” (FEER, 7 November 1987; cited in Clarke, 1999: 176).



After retreating to the Thai border, the Khmer Rouge forces, known as ‘the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK),’ were more or less devastated by heavy attacks by Vietnamese offensives. A large number were killed, deserted, and were in disarray during the attacks. At the border, while they had little food, few arms and very limited medicine supplies, most soldiers suffered from malaria. “Thanks for the Chinese assistance, the army of the Khmer Rouge was able to regroup, put together some level of organization and launch small-scale attacks, hit and run operations not far away from the western border of Cambodia” (Bekaert, 1997: 11). After regrouping and reorganizing, the number of the NADK reached some 40,000 fighters, based along the Thai-Cambodian border in Battambang, Pursat, Oddor Mean Chey, Preah Vihear provinces. Meanwhile, some troops still remained in some other provinces like Rattanakiri/Mondulkiri, Kampong Chhnang/Kampong Speu, and Kampong Thom/Kampong Cham.

Unlike the two non-communist resistance forces, the Khmer Rouge troops had a high level of military discipline and coordination between allied units. Provided military and economic aid by China, in early 1979, the Khmer Rouge leaders blamed China for insufficient assistance, which failed to stop the Vietnamese invasion. But from 1980 onwards, China provided massive material assistance, money, and weapons through Thailand to the border. Besides Chinese aid, the Khmer Rouge troops also got some helpful assistance from some international organizations operating along the border. “That humanitarian aid was provided in the Khmer Rouge controlled camps with a significant amount of medicine (and medical care), supplementary foods, seed rice, and other seeds, and mosquito nets and blankets” (Heder, 1980: 11). Aid from China and the humanitarian organizations helped the NADK recover its strength and prepare guerrilla attacks against the Vietnamese troops. In the early 1980s, the Khmer Rouge forces were occasionally spotted conducting their operations in Siam Reap and along the national road number 6.

### ***2.8.3 Khmer Rouge Military Strategy***

After being driven toward the border, the Khmer Rouge forces could not conduct any large scale military operations on the Vietnamese forces, reportedly numbered some 200,000 personnel. The old military strategy that they used during the times of fighting with the Lon Nol soldiers during the early 1970s was used again, the guerrilla warfare.

This was the strategy set up in the first two years after the Vietnamese troops continued operations in Cambodia. According to Steve Heder<sup>14</sup>, the Khmer Rouge official Party military set up guerrilla attacks by 10-12 men teams in order to conduct many small groups of guerrilla attacks which were highly mobile and difficult to detect. The Vietnamese troops could not intercept and destroy those groups because they were so small and they would attack only the most isolated, vulnerable Vietnamese units (or even individuals). At the same time, they also prepared what was called “special attacks” whenever necessary. Those special attacks would take place with the coordination of two 10-12 men teams (or a 30 man task force). Besides the two types of guerrilla attacks mentioned earlier, they had some other attack strategies such as movement attacks (vay cholana), combined attacks (vay chamronh), and full-scale attacks (vay sambobeap). Son Sen, Minister of National Defence of Democratic Kampuchea, explained:

Large scale-attacks involve large scale-losses. We often fight as small guerrilla units...but we have had experience with large-scale fighting and whenever we want to we fight on a large-scale basis; also whenever we want to fight on a guerrilla basis we can do that as well, but we prefer large-scale fighting. Now we are beginning to fight on a company and even battalion basis.

Moreover, as part of their military propaganda, Son Sen claimed that Democratic Kampuchea had 60,000 concentrated guerrillas divided into 5,000 guerrilla teams. He explained that in accordance with that big number of forces each of those teams was supposed to seek out Vietnamese forces every day, carry out at least one attack every day, and kill at least one Vietnamese every day. On the other hand, as Heder asserts, the

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<sup>14</sup> This information is a summary of Heder’s paper: *Kampuchea October 1979-August 1980: Democratic Kampuchea Resistance, the Kampuchean Countryside, and the Sereikar*. Bangkok November 1980. pp. 5-8

Khmer Rouge leaders were attempting to let the world see their guerrillas would be doing more fighting. In fact, according to a Democratic Kampuchea battalion member there were only about 40,000 guerrillas and among them only 10-15,000 were available for offensive guerrilla action on any given day. The same source claims that less than half of those attacks succeeded in killing and wounding Vietnamese military personnel. Often the combatants just opened fire on the Vietnamese and then pulled back when the Vietnamese returned fire. More Vietnamese were killed when they stepped on land mines than in DK attacks. Similarly, one combatant who took part of a team of 10-12 men said that, “We were supposed to attack the Vietnamese in groups of only ten men, but if you go with only that many, it’s hard to find groups of Vietnamese small enough to attack and it’s dangerous if you run into a Vietnamese patrol.”

## **2.9 Conclusion**

All things considered, it seems that the Khmer Rouge foreign policy to improve its image overseas was conducted in the way of propaganda offensives which can be understood in analyzing several strategies. First and foremost they carried out a propaganda campaign against the so-called “killing fields” committed under their leadership. To deny the existence of such a large scale massacre, the Democratic Kampuchea government opened the country to the outside world and gave numerous interviews to foreign journalists in an attempt to end the rumors at the last breath of their regime. All the interviews that they had given to foreign journalists were reflected in two ways: one was the rejection of all the claims that their regime had committed serious crimes against its people, and the other was to put all charges and blame on the Vietnamese. Since a large body of evidence about the mass killings has been uncovered and the PRK government conducted a series of campaigns to let the world know about such massive killings, including reopening the Khmer Rouge security center S-21 for foreign visits, the Khmer Rouge strategies had little effect anymore. For this reason, they changed their propaganda offensive from completely denying the killings fields to disowning such serious crimes by putting all charges on Pol Pot’s enemies and the Vietnamese.

Additionally, to improve their credibility among the international community that had played the most important part in maintaining support and recognition of Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge set up several policies to disconnect its group from its previous government. Immediately after setting up new camps along the border, their movement announced a new political body with a new pro-democracy name. Afterward, Pol Pot, the prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea and the most well-known person, who was widely accepted of being responsible for almost 2 million deaths, resigned from the post and was replaced by Khieu Samphan. Pol Pot's resignation was simply to vanish from the public eye to allow his faction have a better image. Moreover, to prove to the world that they had recognized their past errors and abandoned their old administrative system as well as the communist ideology, the Khmer Rouge leaders decided to dissolve the Communist Party of Kampuchea and opened a new political faction in favor of democracy. However, these changes were only on the skin deep, many aspects inside their tightly controlled camps remained the same as before. At the same time, the Khmer Rouge leaders had also carried out a policy of national reconciliation of all Cambodians regardless of political beliefs to fight against the Vietnamese. Though their appeal did not produce any notable result, at least they could tell the world that they were fighting foreign occupation. Concerning this proposal, China, the United States, and ASEAN pushed all the anti-Vietnamese resistance groups to join a coalition government. In this respect, it can be argued that the Khmer Rouge leaders had carried out a successful foreign policy initiative because they could maintain their seat at the United Nations and other international forums during the entire Cambodian conflict times. Additionally, they received a multitude of advantages from the coalition government to keep their forces remaining as the strongest resistant army.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE KHMER ROUGE**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

A few months after being driven to the border, the Democratic Kampuchea government began to open their camps for Western journalists to visit. There was an interesting report which purportedly described Khmer Rouge luxury guest house built for their guests in the forest; in front of each bungalow was found a packet of Chinese tea, packs of American cigarettes, and a plate filled with fruits brought in from Bangkok. Although there is no exact evidence telling the original place[s] where they brought those amenities, it is an interesting point when considering and questioning the roles of those countries behind the Khmer Rouge political faction during the Cambodian conflict in the 1980s.

Undoubtedly, after moving their headquarters to the Cambodian-Thai border, the Khmer Rouge troops were decimated, and it was likely, given this destruction that they would not have been able to rebuild their forces, if China and Thailand had not directly helped them. Due to the regional and world political context of the era, Pol Pot's forces were saved from complete collapse and were encouraged to start attacks on the Vietnamese troops. Throughout the civil war period, the remnants of the Khmer Rouge troops remained the strongest and most effective forces which prevented the Phnom Penh government and its Vietnamese ally from totally controlling the entire country.

There were several reasons that the Khmer Rouge group received the amount of support that they did, but the most important reason lied within the context of the Cold War era. The Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia started a conflict which resulted in a new form of polarization for the region with ASEAN, China, and the United States on one side, and



Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and the Eastern Bloc on the other. China, ASEAN, and the United States saw the Vietnamese invasion as a Soviet putsch into Southeast Asia. The Khmer Rouge soldiers were the only effective fighters who could make any serious threat to the government in Phnom Penh and make the Vietnamese expenditure costly in maintaining its troops in Cambodia. Therefore China, the United States of America and ASEAN played the most important role in supporting the Khmer Rouge forces, or Democratic Kampuchea, politically, economically, and militarily.

### **3.2 China's Support**

China played the most important role in the Cambodian conflict. Several factors of Beijing's policy toward the region, including China's dispute with Vietnam and the Soviet Union, had a tremendous influence on the Chinese stance on the conflict in Cambodia. China viewed the conflict in two particular ways: Vietnamese ambition of domination over its weaker neighbors and the security threat from the Soviet Union, which had set up a military base in Vietnam. China's foreign policy with its southern neighbor could be seen as using the anti-Vietnamese resistance, principally the Khmer Rouge faction, along the Thai-Cambodian border to punish its neighbor, which had moved its political and ideological tilt toward the Soviet Union. Additionally, China wanted to maintain her influence over Cambodian political issues which reflected onto wider interest of the whole Southeast Asian region.

#### **3.2.1 *Conflicts with Vietnam***

Similar to the dispute with the Democratic Kampuchea government, one big issue was Vietnam's disagreement with China over their common land and sea borders. According to Stephen J. Morris (1999, p. 172), the territorial dispute had three components: "the 797 mile-long land border between northern Vietnam and China's two southern provinces, the water area of the Gulf of Tonkin, and the issue of sovereignty over two offshore island groups in the South China Sea, which are called Paracels and the Spratlys." Over the issue of the common land border, both sides blamed each other of moving border markers

and establishing illegal settlements. The dispute over the offshore island groups, which are located in areas which are thought to have rich under seas oil deposits, became the most sensitive concern between the once friendly countries. China seized the Paracels by force from South Vietnam in January 1974, and North Vietnam sent troops to capture the Spratlys in February 1975, two months before North Vietnam successfully conquered South Vietnam. After April 1975, the issue of territorial dispute and rightful ownership of the island chains was brought to the front burner for both Hanoi and Beijing's foreign policy, understandably this affected to the previously friendly relations between the two socialist countries.

Another element that had a strong impact on the relationship between China and Vietnam was the issue of the ethnic Chinese, Hoa, in Vietnam. For generations, like anywhere else throughout Southeast Asia, Vietnam had been inhabited by a large Chinese population and this diaspora had assumed a huge role in the Vietnam's economy. Le Duan claimed, "The Hoa previously [before April 1975] controlled 80 percent of the economic activity in the south" (cited in Morris, 1999: 187). However in the north, "most them served as workers in mines, factories and ports, and as fishermen, with a few thousand being engaged in small trade and family handicraft" (Morris, 1999: 171). As Vietnam began to move away from China and lean towards the Soviet Union, its concern grew over the connection between the Chinese diaspora and the government in Beijing. Vietnam began to initiate some domestic policies which were seen as unfavorable to the ethnic Chinese diaspora in the country. "Estranged from Beijing over the secondary foreign policy matters, Hanoi now imagined that all ethnic Chinese were hostile" (Morris, 1999: 171). Significantly, the ethnic Chinese's exodus from Vietnam took place after the Vietnamese News Agency spread a rumor that the Chinese in Vietnam might be in harm's way as China was openly supporting Cambodia in the possibly expanded war between Vietnam and Cambodia. The rumor exacerbated the situation. "In April 1978 thousands of ethnic Chinese began leaving Vietnam for China. By the end of May the number had reached 105, 000, according to the Chinese government" (Morris, 1999: 187-188).

Undoubtedly, the Beijing leadership was angered with the exodus of the ethnic Chinese communities from Vietnam. However, China attempted to cool the situation by trying to negotiate with Vietnam over how to solve this huge refugee flow, unfortunately for China, an agreement with Vietnam over the issue was never reached. The Beijing government viewed the Hanoi administration's policy as unfriendly. Finally, in May 1978, China announced its intention to cut back Vietnamese aid. These cut funds would be diverted to a program which would assist Hoa refugees entering into China. "The aid cutback began with the cancellation of aid to twenty-one projects in May 1978. Chinese aid was cut back even further with the termination of fifty-one more projects, including the equipment and money used in them, and the recall of numerous specialists" (Morris, 1999: 193-194). Notably, "during the Vietnam war China had given some 20\$ billion in aid—economic, military, and grain and even cash" (Nayan Chanda, *FEER* April 18, 1980).

Another significant element which disturbed the relationship between China and Vietnam related to Vietnam's decision to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), on 29 June 1978. Vietnam's decision to begin leaning more toward the Soviet Union had started to occur since in the late 1960s, but Vietnamese entry into COMECON, for Beijing, amounted to a slap in the face to China's foreign policy interests. Ending all the aid projects was a concrete punishment that China could do to express its anger. Increasing aid for Democratic Kampuchea was another strategy which was used to pressure Vietnam to rethink its acts. Moreover, "in July 1978, for the first time, China publicly accused Vietnam of desiring to annex Cambodia and make it a part of an Indochina Federation in an article appearing in *People's Daily*. This article further declared Chinese sympathy and support for Phnom Penh against Vietnamese war of aggression" (LM, July 14, 1978, cited in Heder, 1979, 182)

### 3.2.2 *Seeing Soviet as the Main Threat*

Since China had broken its relationship with the Soviet Union, the Cold War rapidly changed in meaning. It was no longer the war between the liberal and the socialist countries; it had become a war between two former socialist brothers, China and the Soviet Union. The Cambodian conflict is a good example of the manifestation of antagonisms between the two large socialist powers, a country where the Cold War warmed and turned into open conflict. Actually, China had tried to prevent Vietnam from moving away from her because losing Vietnam meant the same thing as allowing the Soviet Union to establish its presence in Southeast Asia, and China was in deep concern over what was seen as a Soviet military encirclement. Eventually, Vietnam did distance itself from China and moved toward the Soviet Union, simply because she wanted to reduce her dependency on China and viewed China as a main threat to her own future regional security. Finally, China's bad dream came true. Thus, China's involvement in the war in Cambodia was a struggle against a perceived Soviet imperialist expansion and domination.

“The four years between the end of the Second Indochina War in 1975, and the outbreak of the Third in 1979, initiated by Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, was a period of intense political maneuvering in China” (Stuart – Fox, 2003: 198). Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia caused China to become deeply concerned, as the Pol Pot government was the only close ally of China in the region, and Vietnam's act would increase the Soviet Union's influence in Southeast Asian affairs. It was likely that Vietnam would probably need more support from the Soviets to fight the war in Cambodia. As Chinese a statement at the UN in January 1979 asserted:

By means of supporting Viet Nam's invasion of Kampuchea, the Soviet Union has tightened its grip over Viet Nam and moved into Cam Ranh Bay.... This action, in concert with its activities in invading Afghanistan and driving south towards the Indian Ocean, has become an important component of its global strategic plan in its quest for world hegemony. Therefore, Viet Nam's invasion of Kampuchea is a result of the collusion between Soviet global hegemonism and Vietnamese

regional hegemonism (China in the U.N, Charles M. Lichenstein, Summer 1986: 23).

At the same time, China also obtained some benefits from the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the Soviet Union's presence in Vietnam. Concerning the Vietnamese threat to Cambodia, China could build de facto alliance with the Khmer Rouge and maintain her influence over the Cambodian political issues. China could also build common cause with the United States as well as other Western countries and the ASEAN countries from the act of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia.

### ***3.2.3 Policy towards Cambodian Conflict***

In the past, China had always attempted to maintain its good relations with both Vietnam and Cambodia. The conflict between the two former Communist brothers brought China into a difficult position. "The Chinese wanted simultaneously to strengthen and consolidate their anti-Soviet alliance with Cambodia and to prevent a deterioration of their relations with Vietnam, which would prevent a strengthening and consolidation of a potentially anti-Chinese alliance between the USSR and Vietnam" (Heder, 1979: 173). Since border clashes along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border began in 1977, China had tried to bring the two sides to negotiate peacefully to solve the conflict. Through its Foreign Minister, Huang Hua, China expressed its desire to settle the conflict peacefully as follows (cited in Morris, 1999: 183):

1. The three states of Indochina should all stop armed conflicts and return to the negotiating table. They should ...seek to resolve their differences through mutual respect and mutual concession.
2. All people of the three Indochina states cherish the same wish for solidarity. Having been neighbors for generations, they have no basic conflicts of interest and they should be united as one. If the three states deem it necessary, China is willing to serve as a mediator in order to enable the three states to return to the



negotiating table to resolve their problems and promote their solidarity, friendship, and cooperation.

However, all the negotiations were unfruitful and the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia became increasingly hostile. Eventually Vietnam and Cambodia were at war with one another. The Chinese mediation, ultimately failed. Consequently, the Chinese policy of balancing between these two Indochinese states became impossible. The conflict forced China to make a difficult choice.

The three previously mentioned fundamental issues: the problem over the ethnic Hoa; the border disputes; and the Vietnamese entry into COMECON had a strong realist impact on the Chinese foreign policy decisions to support the Khmer Rouge. China did not have any other options to persuade Vietnam. Vietnam, however, was not likely to be afraid of having conflict with Cambodia and China, and no reason to come back to Chinese led overtures of peace. Moreover, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 clearly convinced China that Vietnam was an enemy. Besides threatening Vietnam by displaying more troops along its border, China saw the Cambodian conflict as an important card to force Vietnam to turn back and restore Chinese influence in Indochina.

The only effective anti-Vietnamese forces that China attempted to use to struggle against Vietnamese troops in Cambodia were the Khmer Rouge forces. In fact, this group had enjoyed Chinese aid well before they came to power in April 1975, and “China promised to give them \$200 million worth of aid per annum over a five to six year period” (LN, 13 September 1975; cited in Heder, 1979: 173). After the Khmer Rouge government led by Pol Pot was overthrown and pushed toward the Thai-Cambodian border, China saw an urgent need for his troops to confront the presence of some 200,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. China replied by providing immediate aid to rebuild the Khmer Rouge forces from their near destruction, and from then on China played the most important role economically, militarily, and diplomatically in supporting the Khmer Rouge faction.

#### ***3.2.4 Military and Economic Aid***

Publicly, China regarded the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia as an act of naked aggression across international boundaries and as a colonial take over in which the strong bullied the weak with the aim of subjugating a small independent sovereign nation. In reality, however, China saw the invasion as an act that mirrored the Soviet's aggressive military actions against Afghanistan. Vietnam's defeat of Democratic Kampuchea, China's sole ally in Southeast Asia, caused China to be concerned about the Soviet Union's influence in the region. Therefore, China saw it as a necessity to help the Khmer Rouge rebuild their strength in order to halt or slow the Soviet, together with the Vietnamese, ambitions by pushing the Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia. To do so, China provided massive amounts of economic and military aid to the Khmer Rouge to build up its military strength.

Immediately, after escaping from the Vietnamese attacks in late December 1978, along the Thai-Cambodia border, the Khmer Rouge leaders sought immediate military and economic aid to save its group from complete destruction. At that critical time, Pol Pot saw China, the greatest ally of Democratic Kampuchea all the times, as the only country which could provide such important support. After travelling a long way from Phnom Penh to the border in early January 1979, Ieng Sary took a flight from Thailand to Beijing to ask the Chinese leaders for assistance. In Beijing, Sary was allowed to meet top Chinese leaders like Deng Xiaoping, who advised him to set up a new military strategy. According to Deng, "One must have a firm grasp on how to engage in mobile warfare. One must conduct a people's war, fight the enemy along the border and in his positions, pin him down there, and cut his supply lines" (cited in PRK Foreign Affairs, 1985: 15). Deng also guided Sary to set up a new united front opened for Prince Sihanouk to join. During this visit, Deng also offered Sary 5\$ million which could be picked up at the Chinese embassy in Bangkok. He also promised to give more funds as needed.

Immediately after Sary's visit, two senior Chinese officials flew to Thailand to discuss the plan with Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanand on how to ferry arms to the Khmer Rouge camps across Thai territory. At the meeting at Utapao military airbase on

the eastern Thai coastline, Kringsak agreed to let China send weapons and other military aid to the Khmer Rouge forces in exchange for the Chinese withdrawal of support for the Thai Communist insurgency and helping Thailand, in case the Vietnamese troops attacked. At the meeting, a Chinese official proposed three routes (cited in Short, 2004: 405):

The first would be...for China to send merchant ships, flying a foreign flag, to Cambodian waters off the coast of Koh Kong, where the arms could be transshipped and brought ashore in small boats... The second would be for...Chinese aircraft to parachute arms into northern Cambodia....But that would be difficult to keep secret. The third method would be for China to ship arms and other aid in small quantities through the commercial port in Bangkok...They would be packed to look like consumer goods...The Thai army would unload and store them in military warehouses, after which they would be transported by road to Ubon, west of PreahVihear. From there Kiangsak would arrange for them to be taken into Cambodia.

Additionally, according to Phillip Short, the Thai government, as Kriangsak indicated, would also allow the Khmers Rouges to buy arms and order supplies from Sino-Thai merchants in Bangkok (2004, p. 405).

Later on, Chinese military supplies to the Khmer Rouge forces were shipped to Thai eastern ports at Sattahip and KlongYai districts. After that the weapons were ferried by the Thai army transport company to the Thai-Cambodian border. Following the plan proposed by the Thai Prime Minister, the Khmer Rouge soldiers could buy food, medicines, housing materials, and arms from Sino-Thai businessmen and the Thai army by using the money they withdrew from the fund established at the Chinese embassy in Bangkok. According to Zachary Abuza, "Senior Khmer Rouge leaders were allowed to draw \$5 million at a time, with an \$80 million annual limit, to purchase arms and other supplies" (1993, p. 1011).

Moreover, replying to the Vietnamese overthrow of Democratic Kampuchea, in February 1979, China launched a 17-day military attack on Vietnam. Several Vietnamese cities along the border were damaged while thousands of people were killed on both sides. The attack was done to teach the Vietnamese leaders a lesson. Also, “it gave the Khmer resistance the breathing space they badly needed; and it worked. Vietnam was forced to withdraw its crack divisions from Cambodia to confront the Chinese troops inside Vietnam” (Orlow, 1987: 52). Likewise, according to Stephen Morris, “the attack did compel Hanoi to maintain a large portion of its army in the northern part of Vietnam and thereby prevented those troops from being deployed in Cambodia. The threat of a second Chinese invasion meant that Vietnam had to continue to keep a large portion of its forces in this location indefinitely” (1999, p. 221).

In early 1980, the Chinese Foreign Minister announced the continuation of China’s full arms support for the Khmer Rouge faction. Thanks to the Chinese military support and some international organizations operating along border, the Khmer Rouge leaders could quickly rebuild their strength. Throughout 1979, their troops were in a situation of starvation and were in a constant threat from malaria, and their divisions were in disarray as a result of the Vietnamese attacks. But, “their troops were now adequately armed, and each battalion had a signals unit. In the interior of the country, as well, guerilla activity was increasing and military structure was being rebuilt” (Short, 2004: 412). Also, they increased the number and quality of their forces and by mid-1980; they claimed their faction had 40,000 troops in the field.

In 1982, after forcing the three resistance groups to join the coalition government, China increased its military and economic aid to all three political factions in the coalition government. Financial and weapons aid, including B62—effective anti-tanks weapons, were reportedly sent to the resistance forces. In November 1982, Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang told Sihanouk in Beijing, “China will as always support the Cambodian people in their struggle against Vietnam’s aggression until they win final alive” (cited in Becker, 1984: 41). Similarly, Deng Xiaoping later confirmed the Chinese stance in supporting the

CGDK that, “if it takes a hundred years to succeed we will support you until victory” (cited in Stromseth, 1988: 20). In November 1984, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported “China had promised to provide each faction arms, ammunition and equipment for 2,000 men (that is to equip a total of 6,000 new combatants) and 413,000\$ in cash each. A month and a half later the three resistance forces received the aid they had been promised” (cited in the PRK Foreign Affairs report, 1985: 44). Moreover, in May 1985, according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, “while most of the arms went to the Khmer Rouge, the Sihanouk faction received 1,500 Ak-47 assault rifles, an assortment of grenade-launchers and anti-tank weapons, and a huge supply of ammunition” (cited in the PRK Foreign Affairs report, 1985: 44). In fact, China did not believe in the strength of the Sihanouk and Son Senn forces; in comparison, from the perspective of the Chinese the Khmer Rouge forces still remained the best fighters. Because of this, most of Chinese aid went to the Khmer Rouge camps and the Chinese provided a minimum number of arms to the other two resistance forces simply to keep them alive in order to justify its military support to the Khmer Rouge.

Based on the data given by the *Library of Congress Country Studies*<sup>15</sup> in December 1987, the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK) received the bulk of its military equipment and financing from China. One pro-Beijing source put the level of Chinese aid to the NADK at US\$1 million a month, while another source, although it did not give a breakdown, set the total level of Chinese assistance, to all the resistance factions, at somewhere between US\$ 60 million and US\$100 million a year. Meanwhile, “the US intelligence estimated the Chinese aid to the Khmer Rouge forces at US 100\$ million per annum” (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 199). The Chinese economic and military aid to the Khmer Rouge faction reportedly continued up until early 1990. “In the summer of 1990, a shipment via Thailand of 24 PRC T-59 tanks was reportedly made to the Khmer Rouge resistance forces, this was the first heavy armor transferred to any of the Cambodian guerrilla faction” (Gill, 1991: 539).

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<sup>15</sup>More can be read at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field%28DOCID+kh0168%29>



### 3.2.5 *Diplomatic Support*

Besides playing the most important role in supporting the Khmer Rouge faction militarily and economically, China also took a big part in supporting and promoting Democratic Kampuchea overseas. Some analysts believe that because China was unable to supply enough material aid to the Khmer Rouge in its military struggle against Vietnam, Beijing sought to generate international support for keeping Democratic Kampuchea as the legitimate government abroad and prevented the Phnom Penh government (PRK) from being recognized in the international community, including the UN.

First and foremost, the Chinese strategy was done to frame the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia as an aggressive act, a case of a more powerful country (Vietnam) abusing the sovereignty of its weaker neighbor (Cambodia). This was also regarded as part of the Vietnamese ambition of controlling all of Indochina. According to China, the invasion and occupation not only brought Cambodia a great disaster and brought suffering to the Cambodian people, but it also de-stabilized the entire Southeast Asian region. After the successful invasion, Beijing asserted that Vietnam set up the Heng Samrin government, which was no more than a puppet government created by a bayonet being pointed at the heads of the Cambodians. “Beijing insisted that the continuation of recognizing Democratic Kampuchea was a matter of principle, since it was upholding the sovereignty and independence of a member of the United Nations” (Min Chang, May 1983: 599). Consequently, while the Heng Samrin government was recognized by a number of pro-Soviet countries, including Laos and Vietnam; the United States, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia quickly joined the Chinese in condemning Vietnamese aggression and distancing themselves from the new government in Phnom Penh.

In addition, in January 1979, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported that “a number of Chinese Embassy staff who had earlier served in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army have accompanied Cambodian leaders to the jungle to underline China’s continuing recognition of the legality of the regime ousted from Phnom Penh” (Chanda,

FEER, January 19, 1979). In the same month, at a debate on the Cambodian problem at the UN Security Council, China asked the Council to condemn and cut off aid to Vietnam and continue to recognize Pol Pot's government as the legitimate representative of Cambodia. The Cambodian problem was at the top list of China's concerns and this Chinese appeal led to a large argument with the Soviet Union at the UN. Thanks to the United States, China's strongest supporter, China was able to win everything it asked for concerning the Indochinese solution. By and large, it is important to note that as a principal supporter of the Khmer Rouge, throughout the 1980s, China actively proposed that the solution over the Cambodian issue would not be met until a complete Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia.

China had moved its relationship closer to the ASEAN states, in particular Thailand, in order to support the Khmer Rouge faction diplomatically. "Close relations with Thailand, a leading member of ASEAN and the front-line state against Vietnamese expansion in the region, would allow China a measure of political clout that could be earned almost entirely through military aid to Bangkok and to the insurgent Khmer Rouge and other anti-Vietnamese guerrilla groups in Cambodia" (Gill, 1991, 536). To broaden support from the international community, along with the ASEAN countries, China pushed the Khmer Rouge group to join a patriotic coalition government with the other two non-communist resistance factions. Finally, the three factions successfully created a Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in 1982. Throughout the 1980s, China, together with ASEAN, and the United States and its allies regarded the CGDK as the sole legal representation of Cambodia. And Democratic Kampuchea continued to be represented to the world as a sovereign government while the United Nations, a majority of its members, and numerous inter-governmental organizations still regarded it as the legitimate government of Cambodia.

China also played roles in promoting the Khmer Rouge leaders' image overseas in order to gain more support from the international community. Deng had repeatedly appealed to the international community that only Pol Pot forces could fight against Vietnamese

troops in Cambodia. The Chinese also instructed the Khmer Rouge leaders to change its economic system from socialist to be capitalist and their political system from communist to “democratic” to look on paper as a modernizing country since most of the countries supporting them were capitalist and democratic ones. In September 1989, Beijing announced its defense of the Khmer Rouge:

It is undeniable that the Khmer Rouge have made mistakes in the past, but they are now one of the important forces resisting Vietnamese aggression and also a component part of the legitimate Cambodian government.... A future government without the participation of the Khmer Rouge is not only unjust but will also be unable to realize internal peace (McGregor, 281).

China’s diplomatic support for Khmer Rouge lasted till 1991. Throughout the late 1980s, ASEAN and other capitalist countries like Australia proposed several peace proposals to solve the conflict in Cambodia. “The Chinese government had shown its strong stand in supporting the Khmer Rouge by rejecting any revamping of the Khmer Rouge organization and indicated that it would favor little more than a cosmetic change of the top leadership of the Democratic Kampuchean government” (Niksich, 1984: 226). For example, in December 1987, Sihanouk met Hun Sen for the first time, and carried to Beijing Hun Sen’s proposal to disarm the Khmer Rouge. China opposed the idea, and Sihanouk canceled his next round of talks with Hun Sen.

### **3.2.6 Political Support**

For more than ten years of fighting within Cambodia, China had maintained its influence over the Khmer Rouge faction not only in its economic and foreign affairs but also in the internal political affairs and structure. The ‘Super Great Leap Forward’ policy that Democratic Kampuchea had implemented when they were in power resulted in the killing of nearly two million people and China blamed them for committing such mass killings. Since meeting Sary in January 1979, Chinese leaders had instructed the Khmer Rouge leaders to reform their policy and start a new political front which was opened for the

national reconciliation and democracy. After that, China used its influence to protect the Khmer Rouge interests from any attempts that could have had any negative impact on the faction.

The results of Sary's meetings with several key leaders of China in 1979 had a great influence on the Khmer Rouge political reform throughout the early 1980s. The Chinese leaders advised Sary to return with two political messages. One was related to the reform of the Khmer Rouge administrative system and second was related to communist ideology. According to China, Democratic Kampuchea should create a new united front which would draw Sihanouk, whom China had successfully brought back to stay in Beijing, into the front. Deng confirmed the role of Sihanouk with Sary, "We would lose a great deal," he said, "if we failed to unite with him [Sihanouk]. So at the opportune moment and in the near future, I would ask you to reserve the post of head of state for Sihanouk. Comrade Pol Pot will be prime minister in charge of national defense and supreme commander" (cited in Chanda, 1986: 348). The second political reform that the Chinese leader mentioned concerned the Khmer Rouge propaganda, conducted exclusively for improving their image overseas. China advised Sary to change the propaganda tune which did not put the Communist Party and ideology in the foreground. Khmer Rouge leaders should emphasize patriotism, the nation and democracy, which were more important at that moment in time. Deng also warned Sary to prepare his group for a long struggle in which some old methods should be used like fighting in small guerilla groups to wear down the enemy.

After Sary's return, following Chinese advice, Democratic Kampuchea launched many reforms, including the dissolution of the Communist Party. Moreover, China, which worried about the dearth of DK's international supporters, saw advantages in combining the Khmer Rouge faction with the two anti-Vietnamese organizations. Starting in 1981, China, together with ASEAN, put pressure on the Khmer Rouge to create a resistance coalition. In February 1981, during the Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang's visit in Thailand, he suggested to Sihanouk and Son Sann to collaborate with Samphan's faction

to mobilize a greater Khmer anti-Vietnamese resistance. Both Sihanouk and Son Sann rejected the proposal. However, later the two men agreed to join the coalition in exchange for the Chinese promise of providing them with more aid. For the Chinese, the coalition government was meaningful because they could mobilize a bigger resistance force against the Vietnamese troops and enhance the Khmer Rouge acceptability in any kind of future Cambodian government.

While more and more evidence had come out proving the large scale genocide during the Khmer Rouge time in power, some ASEAN leaders like Prem Tinsulanonda and Lee Kuan Yew urged China to push the top Democratic Kampuchea leaders such as Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, and Ta Mok, out of the new united front leadership and accept Sihanouk and Son Sann. Beijing, however, objected to the idea and Deng explained to Prem that “to drop the Khmer Rouge leaders would demoralize the very Khmer Rouge fighters who were acting as buffer between the Vietnamese forces and Thailand” (cited in Chanda, 1986: 384). In a meeting in July 1984, ASEAN foreign ministers raised the same suggestion of expelling some of the notorious Khmer Rouge leaders. China, however, immediately blocked the initiative and made clear that its support for the CGDK depended entirely on the preservation of the existing structure. Sihanouk later recalled that Deng was in a rage. China warned ASEAN and the other two factions that any coalition formula or political settlement that might destroy the structure of the Khmer Rouge was impossible.

As mentioned earlier the three factions were entirely separate and the CGDK was just a semblance of partnership. Behind the united government, the three partners had many problems among themselves. For example, in September 1983, both Sihanouk and Son Sann complained that the Khmer Rouge soldiers had attacked their troops and urged Beijing, which was a NADK weapon supplier, to pressure the Khmer Rouge to stop their the attacks. Later, as the attacks were still taking place, Sihanouk complained and warned that he would resign from his position as the president of the CGDK if the Khmer Rouge forces did not stop attacking his soldiers. In replying to those matters, in October 1984,



Deng invited the three leaders to meet in Beijing to solve the military incidents. He threatened to cut off all assistance altogether if one faction of the CGDK quitted.

Ever since the Vietnamese occupation in early 1979, some major problems such as border and territorial disputes resulted in the freezing of trade agreements between Beijing and Hanoi. China had declared that the pullout of all Vietnamese troops from Cambodian soil would be a precondition for any direct talks between the two countries. Notably, after a large number of Vietnamese troops had been pulled out, “China and Vietnam did begin unofficial talks on their relations, but Chinese leaders were careful to point out that improved ties remained dependent on a settlement in Cambodia, thus maintaining pressure on the Vietnamese to continue their pullout” (Xinhua, February 11, 1989; cited in Hood, 1990: 978). Also, according to Hood, “the Chinese also used the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia as one of three preconditions for normalizing ties between China and the Soviet Union-the others being a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and a reduction of troops along the Sino-Soviet border” (1990: 978). In late 1988 Li Peng repeated once again that, “if Vietnam withdraws its troops...all sides may even gradually reduce such military support in step with the tempo of the troop withdrawal” (ZhongguoXinwen She, December 19, 1988; cited in McGregor, March 1990: 277).

### **3.3 ASEAN’s Support**

Like China, ASEAN saw the Vietnamese occupation as an act of violation of the United Nations Charter and international law, which calls for respect of the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of other nations. In ASEAN’s view, the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia was not only threatening to the security of the ASEAN countries, in particular Thailand, but also to the stability of the whole region. Therefore, ASEAN’s stance was that Vietnam must withdraw all of its troops from Cambodian territory and hand over all rights to Cambodians. However, ASEAN did not have any ability to force Vietnamese troops to return home either militarily or economically. The best thing that ASEAN could do was to keep the Cambodian conflict alive in the

international community's eyes, motivate the anti-Vietnamese groups to join together, and appeal to the international community to support the resistance groups along the border. Interestingly, ASEAN's effort provided quite a big benefit to the Khmer Rouge, especially in garnering international support to their side.

A few days after Vietnamese troops captured Phnom Penh, following a statement by the US State Department, the ASEAN foreign ministers held an urgent meeting in Bangkok, issued a joint statement calling for a prompt Vietnamese troop pullout and reaffirmed the right of self-determination of the Cambodians. Later on, ASEAN regarded the Cambodian conflict as one of the most important issues that all the member countries needed to be concerned with. All the joint communiqués of its regular Ministerial Meetings from 1979 to 1989 concentrated much of the time on its concern over Vietnam's military occupation of Cambodia. The joint communiqués yearly repeated ASEAN's stance over the conflict: that this was the violation of the United Nations Charter and international law, and that the Cambodian people had a right to self-determination. Subsequently, in order to maintain the rights of Democratic Kampuchea as the legitimate representative of Cambodia, ASEAN submitted the recognition of its government, together with the request of withdrawal of foreign troops from Cambodia, to the General Assembly every ordinary session, and it was successful in gaining UN support and attention.

ASEAN's strategy was conducted in the way of pursuing broader support for the anti-Vietnamese resistance movements and preventing the Vietnamese and the Phnom Penh government from completely controlling all of Cambodia. As Singapore's Ambassador to the UN, T. Koh mentioned, "isolating Vietnam within the international community combined with the continued guerrilla warfare by Pol Pot's forces could force the Vietnamese to rethink their policy in Cambodia" (*The Nation* (USA), September 13: 1980). "ASEAN even wanted to have a draft resolution deploring the armed intervention, reaffirming Democratic Kampuchea's right to freely decide its own future, and asking the Secretary General of the United Nations to dispatch a mission to verify the withdrawal of

foreign troops” (Choomak, 1983: 5). According to Lau Teik Soon, the political settlement that ASEAN wanted to see consisted of several elements namely (1982, p. 549-550):

1. Total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops within a specified time and with UN verification
2. UN measures during the withdrawal period to prevent Cambodian armed elements from seizing power
3. UN guarantees against the interference by external powers
4. UN-supervised free elections
5. Agreement to prohibit the introduction of foreign forces into Cambodia
6. Respect for Cambodia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity
7. Assurances that Cambodia would not be a threat to any of its neighbors

ASEAN regarded the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia as a threat to regional security and used this as an appeal to the international community to support its efforts of aiding the anti-Vietnamese groups. Since most Vietnamese attacks took place at the Cambodian-Thai border, ASEAN accused Vietnam of threatening the security of Thailand, ASEAN's front-line state. In the future, these skirmishes could cause instability and promote the pro-Soviet communist insurgency across the region. In a visit of the Singapore Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs with the new U.S. Secretary of State at the end of January 1981, “the Singapore Minister expressed the view that the United States should openly support with political and material aid the anti-Soviet forces in the Third World, particularly the anti-Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. But the U.S. administration did not respond” (Soon, 1982: 558). “ASEAN had worked to create and maintain an international coalition of countries opposed to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. The coalition consisted of China, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the West European countries, Canada, and numerous countries of Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America” (Niksch, 1984: 7). And because of the coalition, “the UN had passed annual resolution calling for the withdrawal of Vietnamese armed forces from

Cambodia and the continued seating of the government of Democratic Kampuchea...and many had boycotted trade with Vietnam” (Niksch, 1984: 7).

ASEAN’s strategy was also apparently seen in promoting the formation of a united government among the resistance factions in order to let them work together and make sure the legitimate right to control Cambodia did not belong to the Heng Samrin government. Consequently, in 1982 the new coalition government was formed with the support from ASEAN, which wanted to bring international support to the struggle. Then, while China and North Korea were taking care of supplying massive material assistance to the Khmer Rouge, ASEAN and the United States developed a program for economic and military aid and training for the other two factions in the government. “With Singapore leading the way, a covert Singaporean–Malaysian–Thai–American group was convened regularly in Bangkok to coordinate assistance to the CGDK. This included arms, ammunition, training, communications equipment, food, and the establishment of a Khmer-language KPNLF radio station with British assistance. The three ASEAN states dispensed just under US\$70 million and were critical in persuading Washington to participate” (Lee, 2007: pp.378-380). The report from the PRK Foreign Affairs<sup>16</sup>, which used the source of Hong Kong weekly *Asianweek*, claimed that “the first shipment of Singapore-made M-16 automatic rifles was sent to the Son Sann troops back in April-May 1982, at the time the Singapore leadership was pressuring Son Sann to force him to enter into the coalition with the Sihanouk and Pol Pot factions” (p. 45). The same report subsequently claimed that Singapore’s military supplies for the forces of the coalition became regular. For example, Singapore secretly supplied 2,640 automatic rifles to the Son Sann front and promised an equal number of rifles to the Sihanouk forces. The Singapore weapons were delivered to the resistance forces via Thailand, and part of them got into the hands of the Pol Pot’s troops (p.45). What is more, the report quoted the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in 1985, saying that one of the latest shipments of Singapore weapons reached the resistance forces in the autumn of 1984. The Son Sann and

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<sup>16</sup>The People’s Republic of Kampuchea Foreign Affairs. (1985). *The Undeclared War against the PRK*. pp. 45

Sihanouk troops received 2,000 and 1,000 firearms respectively at that time (p. 45). Thanks to the efforts of ASEAN, in a few years after the formation of the coalition government, the strength of the two non-communist factions had notably increased to almost thirty thousand fighters.

Though Vietnam and the PRK had tried very much through its foreign policy and other propaganda offensives to build more support from the international community and other international forums, the result was always negative. Conversely, they became more and more isolated and the number of votes at the UN against Vietnamese occupation continued to increase from 1982 to 1989. This deprived the PRK government from receiving development assistance provided to poor countries by international assistance agencies like UNICEF, the World Food Program, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Additionally, it became increasingly difficult for the new government in Phnom Penh to perform its functions for every sector of government. These difficulties which faced the PRK government resulted mainly from ASEAN's campaign.

Throughout the 1980s, because of the Khmer Rouge attacks on the troops of the coalition partners several times, Sihanouk, on several occasions offered his resignation from the presidency of the coalition government. This was a sign of the eventual breakup of the anti-Vietnamese movements. To keep the coalition together, ASEAN diplomacy repeatedly intervened by asking the three partners to pay more attention to national interests.

Every dry season, the Vietnamese troops conducted offensives to wipe out all of the resistance factions along the border, and the most successful one occurred in 1985. The resistance soldiers were badly destroyed and the Vietnamese forces, accompanied by Heng Samrin's forces, successfully captured all twenty of the Khmer Rouge and its allied camps. In the joint statement issued in Bangkok on 11 February 1985, ASEAN urged the increase of military support to the resistance movements. After the offensive, Hanoi came out with a new proposal appealing to Beijing to stop providing military support to the



Khmer Rouge and to prevent the group from returning to power in exchange for the Vietnamese troop pullout from Cambodia. For the first time, ASEAN reportedly tended to agree with the idea, but as China and the U.S. opposed the plan, it was soon rejected. Based on the resolution submitted by ASEAN, in mid-November 1989 at the 44<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, once again the Phnom Penh regime was rejected with a record high vote of 124 in favor of CGDK. Therefore, throughout the 1980s, through their collective efforts ASEAN successfully led most of the world to throw support behind the Khmer Rouge group, whose representative sat at the UN until 1992.

### ***3.3.1 Thailand's Support for the Khmer Rouge***

Thailand, the front-line state, was directly affected by the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia simply because it shares the common border with the country. During the time of the conflict, other ASEAN states mentioned Thailand's security, threatened as Vietnam stationed a huge number of troops along the border. Therefore, most of the ASEAN policies concerning the Cambodian conflict were formulated mainly to protect Thailand's interests and sovereignty. When looking back on historical instances, Thailand had preferred Cambodia as a buffer state between itself and Vietnam. The fall of Democratic Kampuchea and the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia not only caused Thailand to worry about its security, but also encouraged it to assist the resistance forces, particularly the Khmer Rouge troops, who would in turn put pressure on Vietnam to pull its troops back. Thus, Thailand played the most important role than any other ASEAN state in supporting the Khmer Rouge faction.

First of all, it is necessary to understand the perspective of Thailand in the Cambodian conflict as a whole. Thailand faced a more serious threat than the other ASEAN nations; Thailand believed that the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam was a sign of Vietnam's long-time ambition of reviving the so-called "Indochina Federation". In 1985, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a document claiming that "there is clear evidence

that Vietnam wants to annex the 17 northeastern provinces of Thailand into its Indochinese federation plan” (1985, p. 8). In that year, a survey of Thai elite’s perspective over the conflict in Cambodia was conducted. The result clearly indicated that the Thai elites did worry about a large number of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. Almost all respondents (over 98 per cent) saw the Vietnamese as a threat to Thailand’s national security. Also, in 1985, 765 Thai academics from several institutions signed a petition to protest against the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia. In short, from Thailand’s point of view, at least from the educated and elites perspective, the civil war in Cambodia was a result of the Vietnamese overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime and its ultimate goal was to control the three states of Indochina. Since the Khmer Rouge forces were still the most effective fighters against the Vietnamese troops and the Phnom Penh government, Thailand supported the faction until the late 1980s.

It is undeniable that China would not have been able to provide massive aid to the Khmer Rouge, if the Thai government had not allowed Chinese aid to go through its territory. Also, all the Khmer Rouge leaders would have found it more difficult to go abroad, if the Thai government had not allowed them to fly in and out of Don Muang Airport. In fact, Thailand, in addition to the interventions from China, did help Pol Pot’s group by providing the assistance that could help them to pursue their policy within Cambodia. According to a high ranking Khmer Rouge official who worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1980s, “most of the times his leaders, including Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, and Khieu Samphan stayed and went to the hospital in Thailand<sup>17</sup>.” According to Phillip Short, “three of them were given the protection by the Thai army’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Bureau, headed by the Military Intelligence Chief, General Chaovalit” (2004, p. 408).

The majority of Khmer Rouge encampments that were located along the border of Aranyaprathet province were restricted to relief workers who wanted to contribute aid to refugees inside Khmer Rouge camps. For this reason, the Thai military acted as an intermediary for food deliveries to the camps and allowed the Khmer Rouges to cross

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<sup>17</sup> Interviewed with a Khmer Rouge official in Phnom Penh on May 4, 2010

into the Thai side to pick up the food. Some sources claimed a large amount of aid provided by the UN assistance agencies along the border went to the Khmer Rouge soldiers. Ruangwasdisab claimed that “more than 2,000 tons of food a month were reportedly supplied to Khmer Rouge villages by international relief agencies on the Thai border” (1999, p. 36). Additionally, each time that the Vietnamese troops initiated heavy attacks against the resistance camps, refugees and soldiers in those camps escaped into Thailand. For example, in October 1979, the French Magazine *Paris Match* reported that “the Khmer Rouge had fled across the border in confusion, after that they had been taken by Thai trucks to a special camp. There they rested, were given provisions by the Thai military, and subsequently were brought back to Cambodia to continue the unending war” (cited in PRK Foreign Affairs report, 1985, 15). This was the main reason which made the Vietnamese troops unable to wipe out all the resistance forces completely.

Throughout the 1980s, besides Beijing, which was the main supporter for the Khmer Rouge forces, Thailand assumed the most important part in practical help and supplying all essential needs to the Khmer Rouge camps as well as to their troops. David Chandler wrote, “in 1979 and 1980, the Thai military government fed, clothed, and restored to health several thousand DK soldiers who straggled across the border, and these soldiers also received arms, ammunition, and military supplies from China, ferried through Thai ports” (1998, p. 231). “By 1980, Thailand was accused of shipping 500 tons of arms to the Khmer Rouge every month. US intelligence estimated that Thailand’s army funneled US\$100 million of arms annually to the Khmer Rouge during the 1980s” (cited in Lee, 2007: 528). Thailand’s military cooperation with China and the Khmer Rouge guerrilla fighters was often exposed by some foreign media<sup>18</sup>. For example, The Japanese news agency *Kyodo* reported in September 1979 that about 10,000 Pol Pot troops had gathered near the Aranyaprathet border, seeking medical supplies from Thailand. In November, *the Associate Press* wrote a story of the Khmer Rouge’s troops’ logistic bases on Thai soil and the Thai army collusion with the guerrillas in military activities along the Thai-

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<sup>18</sup> The three newspapers mentioned below were quoted from Ruangwasdisab, 1999: 28.

Cambodian border. A month later, a London-based *Sunday Times* journalist discovered the supply-line from the Thai border to the Khmer Rouge. He saw the transportation of Chinese weapons and food to a Pol Pot base on Thai territory. The journalist also asserted that some of the weapons used by Khmer Rouge fighters were American-made and of American standard issued to the Thai army. According to him, the Thai armed forces also provided helicopters to the Khmer Rouge leaders from their hideout deep in the jungle to Bangkok en route to other countries. However, the Thai authorities denied all the allegations of their connections and cooperation with Pol Pot's group.

### ***3.3.2 ASEAN's Policy to Prevent the Khmer Rouge from Returning to Power***

Some people might wonder about ASEAN's motives in supporting the resistance factions, particularly the Khmer Rouge, in the struggle to force Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia. Resulting from the ASEAN policy, most of the benefits had gone into the Khmer Rouge hands. In this respect, did ASEAN want to see Pol Pot's group seize power again? The answer is *no*.

Since everyone knew that the Khmer Rouge regime had committed serious crimes against its people, the ASEAN countries did not have any desire to see the group return to lead the country again. Throughout the 1980s, ASEAN adopted various strategies to put pressures on Vietnam to withdraw all its troops from Cambodian soil. According to ASEAN, Vietnamese troop withdrawal should be implemented in stages, meaning that before the Vietnamese troops would have all been withdrawn, other facets of a settlement must have been put in place. In this respect, there would be a peacekeeping force coming in to prepare law and order and prevent any group from the Khmer Rouge political faction from seizing control by force. In a press conference on June 15 1981, Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Sawetsila expressed that "the process of Vietnamese withdrawal could take one to two years as peacekeeping forces moved in," and Malaysian and Indonesian officials also reportedly preferred this type of partial withdrawal. A few days later in the ASEAN foreign minister's meeting, "Siddhi called for the withdrawal of

foreign forces in the shortest time as possible under the supervision of the UN forces” (two quotes cited in Niksch, 1984: p. 10).

The ASEAN member Singapore tried to support the Son Sann and Sihanouk factions through its own efforts and requested other countries like the United States to send more aid to the two parties. Singapore’s attempt was seen as trying to promote the Khmer Rouge’s coalition partners in order to create some balance against Pol Pot’s military strength. Some other ASEAN states such as Indonesia and Malaysia saw China as more dangerous than Vietnam. Because of this fear of China, a settlement concerning the Cambodian conflict would have to include some measures to avoid the country from falling again into Khmer Rouge’s hands. “The Indonesian attitude toward the Khmer Rouge regime was manifested during the visit of Ieng Sary to Jakarta in November 1980. There was little official response to the Khmer Rouge leader's visit, and Jakarta also closed down its Cambodian-watching mission in Bangkok” (Soon, 1982: 552). Nayan Chanda reported that in 1980 and 1982, Indonesia Armed Forces chief Benny Murdani made two secret trips to Hanoi attempting to mediate in the dispute (cited in Kiernan, 1993:195).

Otherwise for Thailand, its support for the Khmer Rouge contained three main elements, excluding the attempt of bringing them to power. First, throughout the time the country was under the Khmer Rouge rule, Thailand tried to maintain good relations with Cambodia although border clashes between the two countries had taken place countless times. Bangkok saw the Communist regime in Vietnam as the main threat to its security and while the Thai Communist insurgents were threatening its government, Thailand attempted to use Democratic Kampuchea as a buffer zone which prevented Vietnamese communists from entering Thailand. Vietnam’s defeat of the Khmer Rouge would mean Thailand would lose a crucial buffer. Thus, it was essential to encourage the Khmer Rouge to encamp along its border and help it build up its troops in order to stop the Vietnamese troops from attacking Thailand. But most of the time, Pol Pot’s forces were



no match for the Vietnamese, and they ran into the Thai territory causing the Vietnamese troops to attack some areas inside Thailand many times.

Secondly, by supporting Pol Pot forces, Thailand could create a common cause with China, the biggest donor of aid to the group. Bangkok's acceptance of Beijing's requests for delivering weapons and other supplies to the Khmer Rouge forces provided two advantages to Thailand. China's promise to cease its military support for the Thai communist insurgents was one benefit. The other benefit was Chinese military aid which had steadily increased since the early 1980s. According to Ben Kiernan, "Chinese aid to the Bangkok regime totaled \$283 million from 1985 to 1989 alone, and the military also gained preferential access to advanced weapons technology and oil" (1993, p. 218). The Chinese also promised to stay at the back of the Thai people, if Vietnam openly attacked Thailand. Similarly, by promoting the notion that the Cambodian conflict was a cause of Vietnamese hegemony, backed by the Soviet Union, Thailand urged the superpowers like the United States,<sup>19</sup> as they viewed the conflict similarly to China, to help strengthen Thailand's national defense. In return, the U.S. ensured Thailand that they would take definite action on behalf of protecting its security. Afterward, besides providing a huge number of weapons, "the Washington administration also accepted congressional drafts of security assistance legislation, which authorized \$70 million in foreign military sales credits (FMS) to Thailand in FY 1981-\$20 million more than the administration had requested" (Niksich, 1980: 228). Hallsey asserted, "In 1980, the United States increased military aid to Thailand; the Thai military consequently resold the weapons to Khmer Rouge and Khmer Serei alike at great profit" (2007, p. 103). The Thai government also had good enough reason to increase the budget. "The total defense budget raised from 16,136.8 million baht in 1978 to 31,395.3 million baht in 1982. The defense budget<sup>20</sup>'s

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to notice that after normalization with China which started in early 1970s, the U.S. also had common cause with China in supporting the Khmer Rouge to push the Vietnamese troops to leave Cambodia.

<sup>20</sup> These figures do not include the purchase of weapons from the United States under the U.S. Foreign Military Credit Sales program; Thailand received FMS loans totaling US\$29.5, 30.0, 36.0, and 50.0 million in 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1981, respectively.

share of the total budget was 20%, 21%, 20%, 22%, and 19% for the years 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1982, respectively” (Theeravit, 1982: 571).

The last benefit that Thailand gained from its cooperation with the Khmer Rouge was related to businesses. Within a few months after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, the border areas in Aranyaprathet province reportedly experienced a thriving black market, and business connections between the Thais and the KR began as early as 1981. There was no report on the amount of money that the Sino-Thais had earned by selling goods and weapons to the Khmer Rouge soldiers following the agreement which Kriangsak made with the Chinese officials in January 1979. In 1981, according to the governor of Trat province, “around two thousand Thais were already digging for rubies on the Khmer Rouge-controlled area opposite Trat. They regularly crossed into Cambodia despite a warning of possible danger. Many were killed and injured when Vietnamese troops attacked the area” (cited in Ruangwasdisab, 1999: 44-45). Another report claims that “the local black market trade conducted between the Thai army and the Khmer Rouge was estimated at US\$500,000 per day by 1983, and by 1989 the Khmer Rouge was earning US\$2.4 million per month from territory it controlled with Thai assistance” (Lee, 2007: 531). Generally, “on scales set up around the markets, Thais and Cambodians weighted gold and jewels, often in the form of rings and bracelets. On some days, up to half a million dollars in gold came across the Cambodian border into Thailand” (Evan 2003: 89).

### **3.4 United States’ Support**

Similar to China and the ASEAN member states, the United States publicly viewed the Cambodian conflict as caused by the Vietnamese aggression against Cambodia, a smaller sovereign nation. However, within foreign policy circles and within the changing dynamics of the Cold War, Washington also saw the conflict as involving Soviet support for Vietnam which was in control of Cambodia. “Using the remnants of Democratic Kampuchea as shock troop, U.S policymakers saw an opportunity to fight another proxy

war with the Soviet Union” (Hallsey, 2007: 101). But Washington, concerned about being blamed for supporting a political group accused of having committed genocide, supported the Khmer Rouge secretly and indirectly. Ben Kiernan argued that, “three major planks of U.S. policy towards Cambodia remained unchanged; these were: the U.S. veto of aid to Cambodia, including UN, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund aid; U.S. support for a Khmer Rouge role; and U.S. military support for the Khmer Rouge’s allies (17-32 million per annum)” (1993, p. 199). Unlike the Chinese who firmly stood behind the Khmer Rouge, the U.S role in helping Democratic Kampuchea was less tangible; its role was covered by its policy on the Cambodian conflict and its military support for the resistance groups, including the Khmer Rouge faction.

#### **3.4.1 Diplomatic Support**

Perhaps, the United States was the first country that reacted to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Only a few days after the Vietnamese troops captured Phnom Penh, U.S State Department spokesman Hodding Carter issued a statement condemning Vietnam for aggression against Cambodia and called for a speedy withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. Afterward, from 1979 to 1982, the U.S led the western world of voting in favor of Democratic Kampuchea retaining its seat, with Thiounn Prasith as its representative, in the United Nations General Assembly. John Pilger explained that, “This policy apparently represented an extension of the Cold War; ...it was a mechanism for US revenge on Vietnam, and was part of its new alliance with China” (p. 7).

To condemn the Vietnamese acts against Cambodia, the United States froze its normalization with Vietnam and indicated that any form of economic aid would not occur unless Vietnamese soldiers were pulled out of Cambodia. U.S Secretary of State Alexander Haig suggested that, “...any economic assistance to Vietnam, from whatever source, as long as Vietnam continues to squander its scarce resources on aggression” (The Time, July 27 1981). In fact, by July 1981, Washington had already been successful in temporary blocking \$118 million in aid for Vietnam from the United Nations. When

the Reagan administration went to office, the US even sought more ways to increase the political and economic pressures on Vietnam. Undoubtedly, the U.S. leaders knew every well about the Khmer Rouge crimes, which Hoolbrook called “the worst and more brutal leadership any nation had known,” (cited in Chanda FEER, April 18 1980), but in order to fight the Vietnamese, Washington found necessary to support all the anti-Vietnamese resistance, including the Khmer Rouge.

The United States took the most important role in backing ASEAN and China’s bid to help rebuild the Khmer Rouge forces. Washington’s policy towards the Cambodian conflict was in line with its ASEAN counterpart, and there was no doubt that the ASEAN countries, in particular Thailand, provided massive material aid and diplomatic support for the Khmer Rouge forces. For over a decade, the U.S led most of the Western world to line up behind China’s policy towards Democratic Kampuchea. The United States was also reported to have been involved in the Chinese military attack on Vietnam in February 1979 by providing tacit support for Chinese forces in that war. Zbigniew Brzezinski, US National Security Advisor claimed that, “He concocted the idea of persuading Thailand to cooperate fully with China in efforts to rebuild the Khmer Rouge....I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot. I encouraged the Thai to help the DK. The question was how to help the Cambodian people. Pol Pot was an abomination. We could not support him but China could” (cited in Colhoum, 1990). Moreover, throughout the 1908s, Washington never proved any willingness to pressure Beijing to stop supplying arms and other material aid to the Khmer Rouge.

By 1981, along with ASEAN and China, the U.S realized that a number of governments, including its allies, became decidedly uneasy about the charade of continued UN recognition of Pol Pot as legitimate head of the country. In 1982, the US and China, supported by ASEAN, successfully invented the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), which was still dominated by the Khmer Rouge. US aid started to flow to the CGDK. “In 1982 the United States began a program of convert assistance worth \$15 million a year, channeled through ASEAN countries to the non-Communist

partners of the coalition. Reflecting the new U.S. mood in support of anti-Communist “freedom fighters” all over the world in 1985, Congress stepped in to authorize up to \$5 million in overt economic or military aid to the Cambodian resistance” (Chanda, 1986: 402). Throughout the Carter and Reagan administrations, the U.S. voted in favor of Pol Pot’s ambassador Thaoun Prasith continuing to hold Cambodia’s seat at the United Nations, and he did so till the late 1990s. Additionally, in 1992 Prasith continued to run Cambodia’s UN mission in New York. Kiernan said that, until 1993, “no Western country had voted against the Khmer Rouge in the thirteen years” (1993, p. 201). Additionally, in association with China, the U.S. opposed any proposals that excluded the Khmer Rouge faction from the peace process to settle the Cambodian conflict.

### ***3.4.2 Economic and Military Support***

The U.S. was one of the most important food suppliers for Pol Pot’s forces along the Thailand border. Immediately, after setting up camps along the border, the Khmer Rouge received food and other material aid from international organizations such as the World Food Program, World Relief, and other Western humanitarian organizations in order to rebuild their logistics and forces. Hallsey asserted that “the United States government pledged \$70 million dollars to the relief effort in October 1979. The result was that the Khmer Rouge was saved from total collapse, and its army was able to rebuild itself” (2007, p. 102-103). In November 1979, the first Lady Rosalynn Carter visited refugee camps in Thailand, including a Khmer Rouge camp in Sa Kaew. Perhaps Rosalynn did not know that they were Khmer Rouge; she described the Khmer Rouge camp as the scene of devastation and warned the international community that “the plight Cambodian refugees would worsen soon because of expected influx of several hundred thousand more refugees fleeing Cambodia.”

While China and Thailand were trying to transfer aid to the Khmer Rouge, the United States pressured UN agencies to supply the group with food. Linda Mason and Roger Brown, graduates of the Yale School of Management, revealed: “The U.S. Government,



which funded the bulk of the relief operation on the border, insisted that the Khmer Rouge be fed.” They added: “when World Relief started to push its proposal for aid to the Khmer Rouge, the US was supportive, though behind the scene...the US preferred that the Khmer Rouge operation benefit from the credibility of an international-known relief organization” (Kiernan, 1993: 201). Therefore, in 1980, under US pressure, the World Food Program handed over food worth \$12 million to the Thai army to pass to the Khmer Rouge. According to former Assistance Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, “The fact that 20,000 to 40,000 Pol Pot guerrillas have benefited indirectly from this [border] operation should be kept in perspective of the total number Khmer fed”. Showcross asserted, “There was some truth to that—though he ignored the thousands of Khmer Rouge being fed without question by the World Food Program supplies in other parts of the border” (1984, p. 345). “That aid helped restore the Khmer Rouge to a fighting force, based in Thailand, from which it destabilized Cambodia for more than a decade” (Pilger, p. 6). Mason and Brown noted that the health of the Khmer Rouge army ‘rapidly improved’ throughout 1980. “The Khmer Rouge had a history of unimaginable brutality, and having regained their strength, they had begun fighting the Vietnamese” (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 201). “The United States really did want to see the Khmer Rouge resuscitated” (Clymer, 2004: 136).

Surprisingly, the US had been quietly providing aid, worth some \$ 85 million, to the Khmer Rouge war effort for several years. There was a group set up in the US embassy in Bangkok and on the Thai-Cambodian border called “the Kampuchean Emergency Group (KEG). According to Pilger, KEG’s job was to “monitor” the distribution of Western humanitarian supplies sent to the refugee camps in Thailand and to ensure that Khmer Rouge bases were fed” (p. 6). A letter from Jonathan Winer, dated 22 October 1986, then counsel to Sen. John Kerry of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, detailed annual amounts of U.S aid to the Khmer Rouge for development assistance, food assistance, economic support, and in smaller amounts for the Peace Corps, narcotics enforcement and military assistance: 1980 \$54.55 million, 1981 \$18.29 million, 1982 \$4.57 million, 1983 \$2.46 million, 1984 \$3.70

million, 1985 \$0.84 million, and 1986 \$0.06 million. Kiernan said that “this has since been denied by the US State Department, while the Congressional Research Service has reportedly transferred its employee who provided the statistics” (Kiernan, 1993: 464-465).

Moreover, the US had reportedly been involved in some other activities in the Khmer Rouge camps. According to the report given by William Showcross, one American evangelical group was delighted with its success in persuading the Khmer Rouge to accept hundreds of Khmer-language Bibles. The group did not know, or perhaps did not believe, that the gospels were being used as cigarette paper (342). In late 1989, Sihanouk’s word was reported in *La Figaro* [Paris] that he had received intelligence information that there were US advisers in the Khmer Rouge camps in Thailand, notably in Site 8 camp...The CIA men are teaching the Khmer Rouge “human rights!” (*La Figaro*, December 30, 1989; cited in Kiernan, 1993: 251).

The US not only helped the Khmer Rouge diplomatically and economically, but also supported the group militarily. In November 1980, Dr. Ray Cline, former deputy director of the CIA, made a secret visit to a Khmer Rouge operational headquarters inside Cambodia. John Pilger interestingly reported that in Washington, sources revealed to him a link between the US government and the Khmer Rouge (6). In the same year, the U.S also increased military aid to Thailand; the Thai military consequently resold the weapons to the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Serei alike at great profit (Hallsey, 2007: 103). Additional evidences of US military support for the Khmer Rouge appeared in newspapers. On 27 August 1981, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson reported that “through China, the CIA is even supporting the jungle forces of the murderous Pol Pot in Cambodia.” On 10 October 1983, *Newsweek* reported that the American CIA is working with the Chinese to supply arms to the forces of former Cambodian ruler Pol Pot.” (two sources above cited in Kiernan, 1993: 251).

Ben Kiernan has the most interesting evidence on the subject of the U.S. supplying weapons to the Khmer Rouge. He quoted a letter published by the *Far East Economic Review*, dated 4 June 1987, alleging that a U.S. consular official in Thailand had attempted to recruit a former British soldier “to a job of smuggling guns to Pol Pot with payment in gold. The American identifies himself with a card issued by the US Government,” claimed the “witness.” In the same year an Australian veteran told friends of his own involvement in secret American supply operations on behalf of the Khmer Rouge, claimed Kiernan (1993, p. 251).

As mentioned in the previous chapter about the involvement of the ASEAN states in providing military aid to the Khmer Rouge and in particular Thailand, more interestingly, Singapore also had connections with the group in transferring weapons from the West to the Khmer Rouge forces. Weapons from West Germany, the US, and Sweden were passed on directly by Singapore or made under license by Chartered Industries, which is owned by the Singapore government. Those weapons were reportedly sent to the Khmer Rouge forces. The Singapore connection allowed the Bush administration to continue its secret aid to the resistance, even though this assistance broke a law passed by Congress in 1989 banning even indirect “lethal aid” to Pol Pot (Pilger, p. 7). Also, there is a report from the Pentagon Inspector General’s Office saying that “US Army Special Operation lost control of millions of dollars of American arms and ammunition over five years...1 million worth dropped off the books in a two-month period, including Russian ammunition, anti-tank rounds, chemical agents, dynamite and c-14.” (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 252). According to *Indochina Digest*, “Sources in Bangkok say munitions sold in the black market make their way to the Cambodian resistance, including the Khmer Rouge”, wrote Kiernan.

In short, it was not only China and the ASEAN countries that played an important role in supplying the Khmer Rouge guerrilla forces along the border; the United States also took a major part, both directly and indirectly, in providing diplomatic, economic and military support for the Khmer Rouge throughout the 1980s and even into the early 1990s.

### 3.5 Conclusion

China, Democratic Kampuchea's mentor, responded immediately to Pol Pot's appeal after the Vietnamese captured Phnom Penh. Through Thailand, China supplied massive material and military aid to the Khmer Rouge. Along with ASEAN and the United States, China played a crucial role in appealing to the international community to blame Vietnam for its occupation of Cambodia and to promote the Khmer Rouge leaders' overseas image. Moreover, while ASEAN could not militarily force the Vietnamese troops to withdraw from Cambodia, except using its diplomatic efforts, Thailand functioned practically in transference of international aid and weapons to the Khmer Rouge forces through its border. Most interestingly, the United States also served as the most important supplier for Pol Pot's fighters by encouraging humanitarian aid to feed the group. Following the United States example, many western countries voted to maintain Democratic Kampuchea's seat at the UN, and provided other needs, including weapons to the Khmer Rouge forces.

Therefore, international support for the Khmer Rouge helped them rebuild their strength and enable them to play a significant role throughout the years of conflict. China, the ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand, and the United States viewed Pol Pot's forces as the only effective fighters who could guerrilla warfare against the PRK government and push the Vietnamese troops from Cambodian soil. Throughout the civil war period, the Khmer Rouge troops were fed, and militarily equipped—standing in stark contrast with the other factions, and were thus able to maintain their border camps because of those countries' support and aid.

## CHAPTER IV

### KHMER ROUGE AND PEACE SETTLEMENT

#### 4.1 Introduction

The turning point of the Cambodian conflict started at the time Gorbachev came to power in March 1985. The new Soviet leader brought a new era for his country's foreign policies which subsequently encouraged China to improve its relations with the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's new policies had implications for Southeast Asia, in particular Vietnam, which was maintaining a large number of troops in Cambodia. The time had come for the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Soviet leaders to think of new prospects to normalize their relations which had been complicated by the Cambodian conflict for almost a decade. When the aid from the Soviet Union was cut back, Vietnam promised to withdraw its troops from Cambodia by the end of 1989. Chinese fear of Soviet encirclement was cautiously over after the two countries had exchanged delegates and signed numerous economic agreements. The Beijing leadership also promised to end their military support for the Khmer Rouge, if Vietnamese troops in Cambodia indeed return home. These new global approaches played the most important role in getting Cambodia on the road to peace.

Throughout the late 1980s, titles of foreign media reports, including magazines and articles in journals, on the Cambodia issue came out with a steady stream of euphoric headlines such as: *Beijing's End the Game Strategy*, *The Last Battle*, *Back to Normalcy in Cambodia*, *Ending the Cambodian Stalemate*, *The Struggle for Peace in Cambodia*, and *Players set for the Final Accord*. In fact, all the Cambodian political factions had not showed any willingness to negotiate to end the conflict. The main interest for peace came from countries like ASEAN, the United States, and China, which played the most



important actors in bringing the various factions to meet each other in mutual dialogue to solve their disagreements. In this context, the Khmer Rouge faction became the main target of being excluded from a peace settlement mainly because of its horrific crimes committed during its time in power.

China had started to let go of its long-held stance of regarding Democratic Kampuchea as the only government that should be restored to power as Vietnam had provided some concessions showing its willingness to end the conflict, however Beijing still insisted on including the Khmer Rouge into a peace resolution. The ASEAN countries also wanted to see the Cambodian conflict come to an end. Besides maintaining its support for the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, ASEAN tried to bring all the Cambodian political factions to meet each other in three separate meetings (the Jakarta Informal Meeting) to design a plan for a settlement which would be brought to discussion in the Conference on Cambodia. Unlike ASEAN, the United States came out with a new approach to its policy concerning the Cambodian conflict. Washington's shift was seen in July 1988, when Secretary of State James Baker declared the American attempt to prevent the Khmer Rouge group from returning to power. The US leaders had repeatedly said their main goal was to stop Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge from going back to power. Nevertheless, despite this rhetoric they had not done much practical work to reduce the Khmer Rouge power and even remove it from a settlement.

#### **4.2 Moscow's Original Policy toward the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia**

The main opponent of China, the Soviet Union, was the principal supporter of Vietnam throughout the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. As the oldest socialist country in the world, the Soviet Union saw the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia as an important international conflict in which to challenge China and the West as well as enhance its ability to deploy its power in Asia. In this regard, for over a decade the Soviet Union gave Vietnam a large amount of aid, persuaded it to sign several treaty agreements, and supported the country to maintain its troops in Cambodia. In return, the Soviet Union was

allowed to set up a military base in Vietnam which subsequently reduced China's influence in Indochina.

Since 1965 the Soviet Union had provided aid to Vietnam, which was fighting the Americans in the Vietnam War. Vietnam required massive military assistance to fight the war, and China did not supply the amount of aid they needed; only the Soviet Union could fulfill its requirement. "By 1975 Soviet aid was three times bigger than Chinese" (Colbert, 1984: p.26). After the war, the Soviet Union still served as the biggest supporter of Vietnam which allowed it to reconstruct its national economy. "More than 6,000 Soviet technical experts were sent to work in Vietnam from 1975 to 1977, and within the same period, more than 15,000 Vietnamese graduated from advanced Soviet schools" (Morris, 1999: 209). "While Chinese aid ran at an estimated \$350 million a year until its complete termination in mid-1978, the Soviet committed itself to funding 60 percent of Hanoi's 1976-1980 Five Year Economic Plan at an ultimate estimated expense of some \$2.1 billion" (Colbert, 1984: 26). An official Vietnamese report in 1981 claimed that "Soviet aid provided 90 percent of Vietnam's food imports, nearly 70 percent of its fertilizer, nearly 90 percent of its cotton, and 80 percent of its metals (Colbert, 1984: p. 27). Since 1978, Soviet economic aid for Vietnam had been estimated at \$1 billion a year.

Though the Vietnamese leaders had not informed the Moscow leadership in advance about their plan of invading Cambodia, the Soviet Union was still willing to provide more aid to improve Vietnam's ability to sustain the costs of invading and maintaining its troops in Cambodia. In this respect, the Soviet Union played two important roles. First, the act of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia was criticized by many countries around the world, especially the United States, its Western allies and China. Those countries responded to Vietnamese act of aggression by cutting economic assistance and isolating Vietnam from the burgeoning post World War 2 free trade regimes. Replacing those losses of economic assistance, the Soviet Union underwrote Vietnam with aid for both their domestic economy and the occupation of Cambodia; the Soviet assistance was expanded. Second, Vietnam was accused by China of plotting the overthrow of

Democratic Kampuchea. China, along with ASEAN and the United States, implemented policies that threatened both Vietnamese domestic security and its troops in Cambodia. The Soviet Union helped Vietnam solve those problems by providing intelligence support and weapons such as missiles, advanced aircraft, and naval vessels that Vietnam could use to enhance its national defense capacities to meet any threats from China. According to the analysis of Buyszynski, “the Soviet military presence at Cam Ranh Bay was a convenient way of energizing Vietnamese truculence against China, a means of boosting Vietnamese confidence over the Cambodian issue without parlaying fear of Chinese invasion” (1989, p. 5). “In the two years following the Chinese invasion, Moscow supplied Hanoi with weapons worth \$2 billion—a more than tenfold increase over 1978. Although the arms deliveries slackened in subsequent years, aid was still estimated at an annual average of \$750 million” (Chanda, 1986: 397). Also, Chanda reported that “the number of Soviet military advisors stationed in Vietnam in 1986 was estimated to be around two thousand compared with just twenty-five in early 1977” (1986, p. 397). It is believed that much of the Soviet military aid to Vietnam was sent to the Vietnamese border with China and supplied Vietnamese and its counterpart PRK troops in Cambodia.

Besides supplying massive aid to Vietnam, the Soviet Union also provided some assistance to the Vietnamese client government, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). Some military and economic aid was sent directly to Cambodia, and some Soviet technicians and economic assistants were also reportedly sent to help the Phnom Penh government (led by Heng Samrin) as well. In backing Vietnam, the Soviet Union’s solution for the Cambodian conflict meant the destruction of all the anti-Vietnamese factions, in particular the Khmer Rouge group. More or less, “the Soviet’s support for the Heng Samrin government was consistent with doctrinal and ideological presumptions in regard to the spread of socialism in the Third World and the movement of pro-Soviet regime” (Buyszynski 1989: 3). Most Soviet aid to the PRK was provided through Vietnam, so it is difficult to contemplate on the actual amount. Removing the Khmer Rouge from power meant China’s influence in Indochina had been reduced, so the

Soviets could replace China's grip on the region by spreading its influence over the three countries of the Indochina states through aid to Vietnam and the PRK.

Throughout the period of the Cambodian conflict, Soviet interests were always linked with Vietnam's policy in Cambodia. Hanoi could maintain its troops in Cambodia certainly because of the support from Moscow. If Vietnam's interests were not served, the Soviet Union would never accept any solution, and this Soviet stance remained until Gorbachev came to power in 1985. When Gorbachev came to power, the Soviet Union underwent the greatest change in its domestic and foreign policies for some time; this included its attitude towards the conflict in Cambodia.

### **4.3 Shifting of the Cold War**

Mikhail Gorbachev appeared to be the symbol of change at the ending stages of the Cold War era. His liberalization policies forced the erosion of Communist hegemony not only in Eastern Europe, but also in Southeast Asia. Vietnam saw an obvious danger to its domestic economy if she still tried to maintain her some 150,000 troops in Cambodia while the Soviet support was being reduced. The Beijing regime was also moving cautiously toward a market economy while attempting to improve its relations with the new Moscow leadership. These were the main external causes which influenced the ending of the civil war in Cambodia. As the Party's first leader who was born after the Revolution, "Gorbachev made a full-scale attack on the country's policies introducing slogans that promised radical change: *glasnost* (openness), *perestroika* (restructuring), *demokratizatsiia* (democratization), and *novomyshlenie* (new thinking). It was "new thinking" that provided the carte blanche for revising the Soviet Union's foreign relations" (Becker, 1998: 463). As far as Gorbachev's new policies were concerned, improving relations with China, the United States, and the ASEAN countries was more essential than standing behind Vietnam and maintaining its troops in other countries like Afghanistan. "From US\$ 1.3 billion in 1984, Soviet trade with China increased to US\$ 2.2 billion in 1985. Under the agreements signed by the two countries, total trade turnover in 1986-1990 would be US\$ 16.2 billion (Chanda, 1986: 464). In November

1985, Gorbachev flew to Geneva to hold a summit with President Reagan, who told him, “You and the Vietnamese are paying a high and unnecessary price for the occupation [of Cambodia], which is illegal, which is condemned internationally.” The US leader explained to him “both Vietnam and the Soviet Union had a lot of gain from a political settlement which would open the way for constructive relationship with the US and countries of the region” (cited in Chanda, FEER, 1986, p. 22).

According to a Soviet expert (interviewed by Chanda, FEER, 1986, p. 21), the Soviet leader wanted to settle the Cambodian problem as soon as possible because it was giving the US an enormous advantage and depriving the Soviet Union of political and economic relations with Southeast Asia. The Soviet Union’s future goal, he said, “lies in the Pacific and Siberia.” In fact from a liberalist perspective, Moscow was suffering economically and politically from the Cambodian conflict since it was unable to develop its trade and political relations in Southeast Asia. Gorbachev saw the Soviet support [based on the US State Department, the Soviet Union gave Vietnam some \$2 billion in aid every year<sup>21</sup> of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia as the obstacle to improving Soviet relations with China and ASEAN. Likewise for the Chinese leadership, a peaceful international environment was the main goal to build its new economic strategy, which saw the importance of Sino-Soviet normalization. Moscow’s new leadership started cutting back its support to Vietnam and a plan was set up to reduce the payments on the Soviet military base in Cam Ranh. On analyzing the broad foreign policy towards Vietnam, the Soviet Union saw its role as the major donor of Vietnam and the support of its air and naval base in the country as becoming less important. With these changing policy shifts, Moscow urged Hanoi into a settlement.

The new political agendas emphasized by Gorbachev had a great impact on the Vietnamese policies toward Cambodia, causing the Hanoi leadership to consider a troop pullout and give some concessions to step forward in a potential settlement process. In August 1986, for the first time, Vietnam announced during the 11<sup>th</sup> conference of the

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<sup>21</sup> cited in Becker, 1987: 186



Indochinese Foreign Ministers that the withdrawal of all forces in Cambodia would be done by 1990. Buyszynski explained that “the Vietnamese had decided upon the principle of withdrawal in order to ease their own isolation and to improve relations with ASEAN and China” (1989, p. 11). The Vietnamese announcement came out after its successful dry-season offensive in 1985 which captured all twenty of the Khmer Rouge and allied camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. It was the biggest attack that Vietnamese forces, accompanied by the Heng Samrin/Hun Sen soldiers, had conducted in order to make sure that the resistance forces would not be able to threaten the Phnom Penh government and “dropped its demand that the Chinese threat would have to end before any full Vietnamese troop’s withdrawal from Cambodia” (Kiernan, 1993: 195). In January 1986, in the 12<sup>th</sup> conference of Indochinese Foreign Ministers, a joint communiqué was announced appealing to negotiations which would include all Khmer factions on the basis of a settlement which excluded the Khmer Rouge group, a position then supported by the Soviet Union.

During Heng Samrin’s visit to Moscow in May 1987, the Soviet position on the formulation of a settlement was clearly seen in the joint Soviet-Phnom Penh communiqué claiming that “national reconsideration should bring about a dialogue with all the opposition factions, excluding Pol Pot and his closest associates.” A few months after the visit, the Phnom Penh regime issued a similar statement calling upon the Sihanouk and Son Sann groups to participate in negotiations with the aim of ensuring the national reconciliation of all Khmer factions and preventing the return of the Pol Pot leadership. In this respect, it was clear that Vietnam and its Phnom Penh counterpart as well as the Soviet Union had advanced preconditions which prevented the Khmer Rouge from joining the settlement talks. Replying to the Phnom Penh statement, as the leader of the opposition political factions, Prince Sihanouk met PRK Prime Minister Hun Sen for the first time in Paris in December 1987. After the talks, Sihanouk promised to carry Hun Sen’s proposal of disarming the Khmer Rouge to Beijing. Beijing, however, rejected the proposal. Sihanouk then canceled his next round of talks with Hun Sen.

#### **4.4 China's Position**

When the political maneuvering of the Cold War was almost over, naturally, China also wanted to settle the Cambodian conflict. As the most important player since the beginning, China saw a peaceful resolution in Cambodia as an important step to improve its relations with the Soviet Union and Vietnam. At the same time, China maintained its strong support for the Pol Pot group in a possible peace settlement to ensure that the post-war government would continue to be under its influence. Throughout the settlement process, the Chinese wanted to see an agreement that gave equal benefits to all the Khmer factions, as such Beijing opposed any negotiations or agreements that excluded the Khmer Rouge.

The proposal initiated by Vietnam and the Hun Sen government mentioned earlier, was undoubtedly rejected by China while the United States and ASEAN kept quiet. The Beijing leadership objected to the plans because it wanted to see Vietnam giving more concessions since Vietnam was the primary agent which started the conflict. In the Chinese view, Vietnam needed to set a clear date of withdrawing all troops from Cambodian soil as a precondition, and then discussions for solutions to the conflict would continue, with negotiations including all the involved participants. To put more pressure on Hanoi, Beijing claimed that the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia was the most important obstacle to normalization with Moscow. Later, following private discussions between Soviet officials, diplomats, and analysts it was reported that “since Heng Samrin and many other PRK leaders were former Khmer Rouge, their argument ran, reconciliation among the Khmer Rouge, leaving aside some notorious figures like Pol Pot, should not be difficult” (Chanda, January 1987, 122). In a meeting between Gorbachev and Qian Qichen, the Chinese foreign minister, on 2 December 1988, both agreed to reduce military assistance to the warring Khmer factions in the event of a withdrawal of foreign troops from Cambodia. According to Chanda, “Western observers believe that Soviet pressure has led Vietnam to compromise on both the withdrawal of

Vietnamese forces from Cambodia and the acceptance of a Khmer Rouge component in a reconciliation government” (Chanda, FEER, 9 June 1988; cited in Simon, 1989: 591).

A Chinese news report from Moscow noted in June 1987 that Vietnam and the Soviet Union agreed to settle the Cambodian problem by political means with the involvement of all sides concerned. In this regard, the Chinese leaders saw that Vietnam had softened its stance, showing its willingness to end the war. China decided to drop its long-held stance that regarded Democratic Kampuchea as the only legal entity that should be restored to power. Also, Beijing accepted the Phnom Penh regime as a partner that would be included in the peace settlement. According to China, the monopoly of power by the Khmer Rouge or the Hun Sen government was a danger that should be removed. In mid-December 1988, Li Peng came out with a new statement claiming that China would end aid to the Khmer Rouge given the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. According to Peng, “if Vietnam withdraws its troops ....all sides may even gradually reduce such military support in step with the tempo of the troop withdrawal” (cited in McGregor, 1990: 277).

After ten years of having some sort of troop presence in Cambodia, Vietnam had a series of financial troubles caused by maintaining its troops in the country. Most aid provided by the Soviet Union had not been used to develop its own economy; instead Hanoi transferred large amounts of it to Cambodia to support its troops who were struggling to keep the Phnom Penh government intact and standing. In late March 1989, the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party announced, “We are shifting the direction of leadership over the strategy of foreign affairs gradually to open new capabilities and favorable conditions for developing the relations of co-operation with regional countries as well as with other countries in the world” (cited in Evan, 2004, 302). A week later, a joint statement in the names of the three Indochinese governments was released asserting that Vietnamese troops would be withdrawn from Cambodia unconditionally. All Vietnamese troops would be pulled out by 30 September 1989. The statement assumed that China and Thailand would accordingly end deliveries of weapons to the Khmer Rouge. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese confirmation did not

have any effect on the Khmer Rouge attitude which refused to hold any direct talks with the PRK regime. In this stage of the conflict, the Pol Pot group became the primary obstacle to a peace settlement as the other parties involved, including ASEAN, China, Vietnam, and the United State desired to see all the Khmer political factions hold talks to solve the conflict.

China was the key to getting the Khmer Rouge to agree to a settlement, even though “Chinese officials, privately, claim that they can exert little real influence over the Khmer Rouge leadership” (Chanda, Autumn 1989: 38). According to McGregor, “Beijing was reported to have put pressure on the faction to agree to the setting up of working groups in the forthcoming conference on the Cambodian conflict, and later on it persuaded them to agree to the sending of a U.N. fact-finding mission to Cambodia” (March 1990, p. 281). Finally, the Khmer Rouge leaders agreed to participate in the conference with a month-long session from July 30 to August 30 1989 in Paris, designed to start the process of reconciliation between the PRK and the CGDK. At the opening of the conference the Chinese representative expressed the Chinese stance that, “no party is excluded from settling the conflict.” A few months later, through *Renmin Radio* the Beijing defense of the Khmer Rouge went further<sup>22</sup>:

It is undeniable that the Khmer Rouge have made mistakes in the past, but they are now one of the important forces resisting Vietnamese aggression and also a component part of the legitimate Cambodian government.... A future government without the participation of the Khmer Rouge is not only unjust but will also be unable to realize internal peace.

As all the Khmer Rouge leaders were involved in mass murder in the past, the Hun Sen regime, along with some Western countries, demanded to use the term “genocide” in the documents for a negotiated resolution. China, however, strongly opposed the term because it would give Hanoi a justification for its occupation of Cambodia, Beijing

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<sup>22</sup>Renmin Radio, FE 0548 C1/1-2, FE/0554 C1/1. 35. ; cited in McGregor March 1990, p. 281

explained. Also, during the peace settlement there were some campaigns as well as petitions attempting to bring the Khmer Rouge leaders like Pol Pot to an established tribunal in order for them to take responsibility of their crimes, but all the appeals were opposed by China, as well as the United States and Australia. Raoul Jennar interestingly wrote, “the outcome of a Chinese-American policy carried out over the last 12 years...any agreement on Cambodia MUST include the Khmer Rouge, without taking into account their past crimes and without any specific arrangements to isolate the perpetrators of these crimes or to prevent their return to power” (1998, p. 131). China had promised with the Soviet Union as well as Vietnam to cut all its significant assistance to the Khmer Rouge in exchange for the Vietnamese troop withdrawal. During the August 1989 Paris Conference, the Soviet Union and the United States issued a joint statement calling on various countries to temporarily stop sending arms to the resistance factions, but China reportedly rejected the proclamation. China did not acknowledge the last stage of the Vietnamese withdrawal on September 26 1989, claiming by its spokesman for the Foreign Ministry that “there were still at least 30,000 Vietnamese soldiers in the uniform of the Phnom Penh regime’s army, that large amounts of Vietnamese weapons and military equipment had been left behind, and that there were many militiamen and “special agents” hidden among the “over one million illegal” Vietnamese settlers<sup>23</sup>” (cited in McGregor 1990: 281). Thus, during the peace settlement process in 1991, China still provided weapons to the Khmer Rouge forces.

In short, the Chinese stance to include the Khmer Rouge faction into a peace settlement remained unchanged until the final peace agreement in 1991. Any effort to remove the Khmer Rouge from the Cambodian equation was strongly opposed by the Beijing leadership. In this regard, without Beijing’s commitment, the Pol Pot faction would not have been able to go along with any power sharing agreement that put the Phnom Penh government on equal footing with the CDGK.

#### **4.5 ASEAN’s Position**

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<sup>23</sup> PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman, quoted by Xinhua, 28 September 1989, in FE/0575 A3/8.



ASEAN also wanted to see the Cambodian problem brought to an end. In this stage of the peace process, ASEAN saw Vietnamese objection to its demand for withdrawing all foreign troops from Cambodian territory. The 8-point proposal offered by the CGDK was supported by ASEAN, who called it a good solution that allowed all the Khmer partners to solve the problem by themselves and it provided concrete steps to bring about national reconciliation. Although the proposal was turned down, ASEAN was able to see that Vietnam was willing to withdraw its troops and let the PRK negotiate with the resistance groups to find peace for Cambodia. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported on 10 April 1986 that ASEAN ministers would finalize a detailed blueprint for a settlement of the Cambodian question (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 196):

The confidential outline attempts to satisfy Hanoi's demand that the withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia be coupled with cessation of Chinese arms supplies to the Khmer resistance by proposing to station an international peace-keeping force along Cambodia's land and sea borders. The sea border is being specified to assure Vietnam that China would not be able to continue the supplies once the land routes from Thailand have been closed in the wake of a successful settlement.

In the first round of the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) in July 1988, ASEAN successfully brought all the Cambodian factions to meet each other face-to-face for the first time. In Indonesia, PRK Prime Minister Hun Sen called for the formation of a national reconciliation council which would include his faction and the other three resistance groups with Sihanouk as chairman. In response to the Hun Sen's appeal, the Khmer Rouge issued a statement in November 1988 that, "as for the elements installed in Phnom Penh by Vietnam, the CGDK also does not reject them. We are willing to let them join in a four-party coalition government as a party of equal status to prepare a free, general election under the supervision of the U.N. observation group" (cited in Chanda 1989, p.34-35). According to Chanda, "The first-ever encounter between the nominal

leader of the Khmer Rouge, Khieu Samphan, and Hun Sen in Bogor in July 1988 brought home to Hun Sen the total contempt with which he was regarded” (Autumn 1989, p. 35).

In August 1988, there was great shift inside Thai politics. The military government led by General Prem Tinsulanonda was replaced by a new elected Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, who viewed the Cambodian conflict in a different way. For Chatichai, Indochina was a potential market place for developing the Thai economy; the former battlegrounds in the region should be replaced by spaces for trade and business. As the front-line state, Thailand wanted to see a solution to the Cambodian conflict as soon as possible in order to allow its government to improve relations with the Vietnamese and the Hun Sen governments. However, James Pringle claimed that “Chatichai...probably opposes the Khmer Rouge presence in Thailand...[but] factions in the Thai military still back the Khmer Rouge; and those factions have now taken over control of the Thai government” (*Bangkok Post* 14 February 1991, p. 5; cited in Vickery August 1991, p. 8). Thailand called for a quadripartite government which included the Pol Pot group; for Bangkok this was the best solution. Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila, "leaving anyone in the jungle is dangerous. It is better to have them in the government than out. The inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in a peace formula would give an "equal opportunity for every Cambodian who seeks to stand before the judgment of the people. To deny any Cambodian such a right would make a mockery of the call for self-determination and show contempt for the people of Cambodia" (cited in Ruangwasdisab, 1999: 41). According to Puangthong, “Siddhi remained firm on the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in any peace settlement until he resigned as foreign minister in September 1990” (1999, p. 41).

As the front-line state that had determined ASEAN policy toward Indochina for over a decade, Thailand took a bold move and stepped out of the pack. On January 25 1989, Thai Prime Minister Chatichai hosted PRK Prime Minister Hun Sen, accompanied by a twenty-four member delegation to Bangkok. Following his new policy toward the neighboring countries, the Thai premier was attempting to solve the Cambodian problem

by bringing Hun Sen and Sihanouk together; this opposed the stance defended by ASEAN. However, Hun Sen's visit did not focus much on the peace settlement process. The two leaders discussed future economic exchanges, in which Evan Gottesman said might therefore encourage a shift in Thailand's diplomatic stance between the two countries. Pansak, one of Chatichia's advisors, said of the visit, "For the first time, Thai policy is moral and realistic. We want to be a catalyst, to restrain violence" (cited in Becker, 1998: 482). "Concerning Bangkok's future goals which might abandon the three resistance groups, China became seriously angry with Chatichai's act while Washington even threatened to withdraw U.S trade privileges from Thailand" (Ruangswasdisab, 1999: 103). The friendly approaches to the Phnom Penh government were ended by a military coup against Chatichai in February 1991, which China immediately welcomed. The new military government led by Anand Panyarachun, who told Khieu Samphan in May 1991 that "Sixteen years ago, I was accused of being a communist and now they have picked me as Prime Minister. In any society there are always hard-liners and soft-liners, and society changes its attitude to them as time passed by" (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 218). Kiernan wrote that Army Commander Suchida Krapayoon, who told a visiting U.S. senator that he considered Pol Pot "a nice guy," and "as a settlement approached in September, Suchinda pleaded that Pol Pot had no intention of regaining power, and that it was time to treat him "fairly" (Kiernan, 1993:218).

ASEAN's concern over the possible return to power of the Khmer Rouge became a big issue in its considerations and policy to solve the conflict. In the UN resolution on the Cambodian problem in 1988, following ASEAN's request, the Security Council still condemned the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam. However, ASEAN added a new clause concerning the prevention of the Khmer Rouge from returning to power. The resolution was passed; thus ASEAN still successfully kept the CGDK's status as the legal government recognized by the UN but with some changing preconditions for the future. ASEAN's strategy to settle the problem was seen in its effort to bring all the Khmer factions to meet each other and to negotiate to find a way out of the deadlock. Through the foreign ministers of the six countries, ASEAN organized the Jakarta Informal

Meetings (JIM), which mainly concerned itself with the future political role of the Khmer Rouge. According to Hood, “On the second day of the JIM talks (July 1988), there was mutual agreement that the KR must not return to power and that all Cambodian factions must form a single temporary government. The main point of contention, however, still centered on the Khmer Rouge” (1990, p. 892). The second JIM meeting, took place in February 1989, was designed to elaborate the terms of a process of reconciliation between all the factions. The third meeting was held in February 1990, but it broke down due to the Khmer Rouge, who objected to the use of the word “genocide” in the final communiqué.

#### **4.6 Washington’s Position**

For almost ten years, United States’ policy toward the Cambodian conflict followed ASEAN’s path which supported the CGDK including the Khmer Rouge. This policy condemned the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, and totally rejected the PRK government. However, when the Cold War was coming to an end, Washington had remarkably shifted its policy by moving closer toward the PRK, this shift prevented the return of the Pol Pot regime. In the end the US dropped its recognition of the CGDK.

The U.S new stance was notably seen in July 1989, when Secretary of State James Baker came out with a statement of Washington’s vision to include the Hun Sen regime into any future Cambodian government. Since the fear that Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge group might return to power<sup>24</sup> had led to increased public pressure on its government, the United States’ main policy or “major political goal”, as James Baker called it, was to prevent the Khmer Rouge from recapturing power. In this regard, the U.S leaders attempted to acknowledge the PRK regime, which militarily would play the most important role after Vietnamese troops departed, as its forces would be combined with the two non-communist factions. The British newspaper, *the Times*, reported James Baker’s words

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<sup>24</sup> According to the *FEER* on 14 July 1986: A group of 2,000 Khmer survivors had written to Reagan and leaders in Asean countries, China, Japan and Europe, seeking action to prohibit the return of the Khmer Rouge.

saying “if Sihanouk insists on maintaining his unholy alliance with the Khmer Rouge, the U.S. will go along. Sihanouk, in turn, says he will continue to reserve a place for the Khmer Rouge in the coalition as long as the Chinese insist on it” (Talbot, The Times, August 14, 1989)

Washington hinted at a new attempt to review its policy toward the Cambodian conflict, especially its stance concerning the Khmer Rouge. This came out just a few months after the Bush administration came into office. The new administration apparently preferred a Cambodian resolution in which the Khmer Rouge would not have any role in a future coalition government. Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Kimmitt told a congressional hearing in June 1989 that “Washington has made clear to the noncommunist Cambodians that its ability to support them before a settlement and in any future coalition.... will depend on the extent to which the non-communists are seen as distancing themselves from the Khmer Rouge” (cited in Chanda, 1989: 39).

During the last few months of the Reagan administration, Washington apparently increased its support to the non-communist factions. “By October 1988 they had decided to request an immediate increase in overt, non-lethal aid to at least \$10.5 million, with a further increase to perhaps \$15 million the following year” (Clymer, 2004: 147). Prince Sihanouk was invited to visit the White House and meet Reagan on 11 October 1988. Just after the Bush administration came to the office, Congress authorized \$5 million and requested \$7 million for the Fiscal Year of 1990 for settling the Cambodian conflict. The new administration also agreed to increase assistance to strengthen the non-communist resistance in order to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power. New lethal aid was sought out to provide to Son Sann’s and Sihanouk’s factions directly through covert operations. “This policy initiative was justified by two arguments-that it would strengthen Sihanouk's and Son Sann's bargaining position with the PRK and that if fighting breaks out this aid would improve their ability to defend themselves against the Khmer Rouge” (Chanda, 1989: 41). Moreover, after the Vietnamese troops pulled out in September 1989, in which the US refused to acknowledge, “Washington still secretly sent prohibited



light arms to the non-communist Cambodian resistance to ensure they had a chance to get the upper hand should all-out fighting resume” (Becker, 1998: 493).

However, even into the late 1980s, the non-communist resistance forces reportedly still cooperated with the Khmer Rouge soldiers in launching joint-attacks against Hun Sen’s troops. According to the Phnom Penh government, in those attacks the resistance forces were seen using the same weapons. Thus, U.S. military aid had also reached the Khmer Rouge forces. There were some other reports of cooperation among the CGDK partners. In early October 1990, Sihanoukist commander Kien Van boasted that “the Khmer Rouge would provide him with 2,000 troops for an attack on Siem Reap province, as well as twelve tanks plus jeeps, trucks, and heavy weapons provided by China to the Khmer Rouge in the previous two months” (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 205). Also Sihanouk’s son Norodom Ranariddh added, as if he had been warned to keep Washington’s secret: “I have to say very frankly, and Washington will criticize me again—that against Siem Reap the Khmer Rouge will be the major attacking force” (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 205).

Additionally, the US only publicly announced a change in its policy to prevent the Khmer Rouge political return, but it had not implemented any significant measurements to flesh out the new policy. James Baker repeatedly pointed out that Washington made a greater effort to control the military threat of the Khmer Rouge, but he did not provide any indication of the nature of this effort. That is why Jannar Raoul came out and declared that, “It is also disquieting that Baker has said nothing about how the United States intends to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power” (1990, p. 2). Diplomatically, Washington could put pressure on China and Thailand to stop sending weapons and other assistance to the Khmer Rouge camps and move away from supporting the Khmer Rouge representative at the United Nations. However, none of those measures were carried out by Washington. Following the lead of ASEAN and China, the United States still voted for CGDK which kept Pol Pot’s official at the UN and insisted that the Khmer Rouge should have an equal role in the peace process as the other factions.

Because of the lack of effort from The United States to control the Khmer Rouge, its aid still flowed to the Khmer Rouge forces. Naturally, criticism was growing in the media as Vietnamese troops were no longer in Cambodia. Additionally some American politicians were questioning the U.S support for the non-communist resistance factions. Surprisingly, in July 1990 the Secretary of State James Baker made an announcement that the United States would withdrawal support for the CGDK at the United Nations. Following this, the United States for the first time acknowledged the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and made gestures to show its support for the Phnom Penh government. Baker declared that, “US wanted to do everything we could to prevent the Khmer Rouge for returning to power” (cited in Raoul, 1998: 1-2). And “perhaps, the U.S leaders just realized that the CGDK was tacit support for the Khmer Rouge, that was why Washington shifted its long-held stance” (Hood, 1990: 989).

The U.S. move caused Prince Sihanouk to express his anger, as did ASEAN, while China voiced regret. Therefore, “the U.S. immediately downplayed the significance of its diplomatic move in acknowledgement of ASEAN and Chinese protests, giving Beijing more breathing room and removing the immediate hope that the Chinese, too, would reconsider their support for the Khmer Rouge” (Hood 1990: 989).

#### **4.7 The Khmer Rouge and Peace Accord 1991**

The Khmer Rouge agreed to count the PRK as a member in any future peace settlement. Even so its stand was based on the 8-point proposal that Khieu Samphan signed, with the other two coalition partners in Beijing in mid March 1986. In the proposal, the CGDK called on Vietnam to pull out their troops in two stages supervised by the UN. If this step was taken the Phnom Penh regime would be accepted into negotiations with the CGDK in order to set up a quadripartite coalition government of Cambodia with Prince Sihanouk as the president and Son Sann as the prime minister. The PRK and its Vietnamese counterpart objected to the proposal simply because they wanted to negotiate with the CGDK, which would be represented by Prince Sihanouk on one side, and their PRK faction on the other side. Both sides would share equal representatives in the peace

settlement process. Not surprisingly, the Khmer Rouge rejected the idea because their faction would have fewer representatives than their Vietnamese-backed enemies if the negotiation partners were divided into two, the PRK and the CGDK.

Conversely, President of the CGDK Prince Sihanouk, after meeting with Hun Sen once in Paris, continuously threatened to resign from the post because he accused Pol Pot's soldiers of attacking his soldiers. At the same time, the Prince seemed eager to drop the coalition he had with the Khmer Rouge and move to hold peace talks with the Phnom Penh government. However, his meetings with Hun Sen were unfruitful given, since the fact that Beijing had showed their opposition to any negotiations that might have a negative effect on the other coalition partners, particularly Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. "Bowling to Chinese pressure, Sihanouk announced further talks would be useless, citing Khmer Rouge and KPNLF unwillingness to cooperate" (Hood, 1990: 981). Sihanouk could not move away from Beijing's pressure because he lacked international support, especially from the United States, which opposed his alliance with the Phnom Penh regime as it would have legitimized the Hun Sen government. Thus, lacking support from China and the US, his effort to distance the Khmer Rouge was unsuccessful.

Later on, Sihanouk and Hun Sen agreed to include the Khmer Rouge into a peace settlement. The two men met again in Bangkok in February 1990 to draft an agreement which focused on a principle of equal representation for the parties in the council called "The Supreme National Council." This new body would rule Cambodia until a new government was elected. The Council would consist of six representatives of the government of the States of Cambodia (SoC)<sup>25</sup> and six representatives from the Coalition, which placed Sihanouk as the leader. Thus, the Khmer Rouge would be counted into a settlement which included two of its representatives. This proposal would meet the wish of those who had struggled to place the Pol Pot faction into the peace settlement process. The agreement was signed in a later meeting between Sihanouk and Hun Sen in Tokyo in

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<sup>25</sup> A few months before the last Vietnamese troops left Cambodia, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) announced a series of reforms including the national anthem, the flag, the constitution, and its government's name. The PRK was replaced by the SoC (the State of Cambodia).

June 1990, in which Pol Pot's delegation subsequently boycotted. The Khmer Rouge leaders did not acknowledge the Supreme National Council (SNC) since they had fewer representatives than the Hun Sen government. Beijing did not have any reaction to the process of that negotiation, but the agreement was likely to be met with the Chinese demanded that no party be excluded from the peace process. Sihanouk, however, tore up the agreement after his coalition partner, the Khmer Rouge, refused to acknowledge it. Hun Sen later commented, "it is regrettable that Prince Sihanouk rejects all our accords as often as I enter into agreement with him" (cited in Kiernan, 1993: 197). According to Kiernan, "it seems unwise to rely on any future commitment from Sihanouk, who revealed in September 1990 that he 'would agree to anything the Khmer Rouge wanted'" (1993, p.198).

Meanwhile in the battleground, the Khmer Rouge tried to build up their strength by recruiting new troops and enlarging its controlled areas. American journalist Nate Thayer reported that "by 1989, with strong Khmer Rouge contacts, the vast majority (perhaps 80 percent) of their soldiers had been recruited since 1979." He added, "by 1989 the PRK's military, including village militia, numbered at least 150,000, while the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK) army remained around 35,000 strong. Even so, the NADK wielded considerably more clout than either the KPNLF or FUNCINPEC, which had only a few thousand troops each" (cited in Rowley, p. 208). The US intelligence services produced a report calculating the number of Pol Pot troops, which ranged from 28,000 to 60,000 and agreed on a common estimate of 30,000-40,000 (*The New York Times*, March 5 1989, Section 6, p. 25). The Khmer Rouge forces were recruited among sons of villagers who were honest, disciplined, and respectful of civilians. They were volunteer fighters who remained the best equipped, as China continued to supply them with weapons, and the most efficiently fighting forces of all the Cambodian contestants. According to Chandler, "by 1990, the Khmer Rouge troops had occupied the sparsely populated mountainous regions of Cambodia's northwest and southwest and threatened the deep-water port of Kampong Som city, the provincial capital of Kampot, and Cambodia's second-largest city, Battambang" (1996, p. 235).

Ben Kiernan wrote in 1988 that, Pol Pot secretly revealed plans to delay the elections until his forces control the entire country, when his officials would conduct the balloting process. Khieu Samphan added:

The outside world keeps demanding a political end to the war in Cambodia. I could end the war now if I wanted, because the outside world is waiting for me, but I am buying time to give you comrades to opportunity to carry out all the tasks...If it doesn't end politically, and ends militarily, that's good for us." Here is Pol Pot interrupted, saying that "to end the war politically could make his movement fade away": We must prevent this from happening (Kiernan, 1993: 203).

In late in 1989, immediately after the last Vietnamese troops departed the country, the Khmer Rouge leaders increased their propaganda campaign aiming to win Cambodians' hearts and minds. Chandler muses that "they worked harder at indoctrination and gathering forces among the poorest of the poor" (1998, p. 238). Moreover, Thayer described that, "Khmer Rouge fighters, including many sons of the village, mingling easily with peasants, as in hundreds of villages...making a remarkable comeback with a sophisticated political campaign aimed at gaining power in the elections proposed in a UN peace plan" (cited in Vickery, 1991: 9).

Throughout the year 1990 the five permanent members (Perm 5) of the United Nations—the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia—had sought a peace resolution which would be accepted by all the Cambodian factions. They drafted a framework which urged all the parties to set up an interim administration to run the country under UN supervision until free elections could be organized. The document also called on the four parties to set up a Supreme National Council as soon as possible to represent Cambodian national sovereignty and replace the CGDK's seat at the United Nations. By March, the Perm 5 came out with another step, the creation of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which would be responsible for civil and military missions to facilitate a neutral administration in the country and



organize free elections. By August, an initial agreement concerning this framework was reached by the Perm 5 for a Cambodian peace resolution. In the same month, China invited all the resistance factions to Beijing, where they announced their approval of the agreement. In early September, Hun Sen, who also accepted the framework, flew to Jakarta to sign the agreement with the three resistance leaders to form the Supreme National Council (SNC). Becker said that, “the Cambodian peace process was on a firm footing without the Cambodians. And it was being decided largely by diplomats who had no direct knowledge of Cambodia” (1998, p. 498). That autumn, the new SNC was voted to take a seat at the United Nations.

All the Cambodian factions were required to write down their acceptance on the Framework document formulated by the Perm 5 of the UN Security Council in order to make sure that they would accept the basis for settling the conflict. Throughout early and mid-1991, another agreement among the Cambodians also came out in the form of naming Sihanouk as the chair and Hun Sen the vice-chair of the SNC. On October 23 1991, the delegates of the four factions arrived in Paris, where they signed a peace accord to end the civil war which had lasted for nearly 12 years.

The Khmer Rouge did not block the agreement this time because the accord was accepted by China and it granted them a share of power with the other three factions. “Those brokering the peace had to recognize that the Khmer Rouge could not be kept out of an agreement, given its military clout and the fact that perhaps 10-15% of the 8 million Cambodian populations can be counted as its supporters” (Tasker, FEER, November 7 1991, pp. 27-30). Khmer Rouge radio claimed “the Paris accord as a great historical victory for our nation and our people—our country will be completely liberated” (cited in Tasker and Murry, FEER, November 7 1991, pp. 27-30). In November 1991 before returning to Phnom Penh, Khieu Samphan requested the Phnom Penh government to prepare a neutral SNC zone in the capital for the Khmer Rouge and the other resistance leaders. Sihanouk, as the chairman of the SNC, opposed Samphan’s request, saying that Samphan was asking for an area which carried similarities to the Vatican in Rome. In this

respect, Sihanouk displayed his close cooperation with Hun Sen. A few days later, Samphan led a group of Khmer Rouge delegates to return to Phnom Penh, where his group was prepared to stay in a villa. Within a few hours after his arrival, an angry mob stormed the villa and assaulted him causing a slight injury to his head. Right away, he was evacuated to safety and flown back to Thailand.

After the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) started its operations to make sure that the forthcoming elections would be run smoothly, and all the political parties would challenge each other through peaceful means, instead of using armed forces to seize power. UNTAC also had the obligation to disarm all the factions to ensure non-violence during the election campaign. However, the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm its forces and to allow UNTAC to access areas under its control, because they believed that Vietnamese troops still remained in Cambodia and UN had failed to control the Hun Sen administration. Finally, in April 1993, when the election campaign was about to start, the Khmer Rouge delegation decided to withdraw from Phnom Penh claiming that their security was not compromised. The Khmer Rouge boycotted the elections even while its foreign support had dried up. This foreign support which its forces depended on for throughout the 1980s, was no longer available, and even the Chinese had cut off all aid to the group. In this respect, the Khmer Rouge were isolated and became a threat to the peace building process.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

After nearly two decades of conflict, the Khmer Rouge were included in the peace agreement in October 1991. Several factors that contributed to the inclusion of their faction into the peace processes can be seen in the context of the late Cold War period. China played the most important role in insisting on a peace resolution that had to consist of the group. ASEAN countries like Thailand—the front-line state—through its foreign minister also attempted to see to it that Pol Pot's group was included in the peace settlement process. ASEAN as a community played its main role as a mediator to bring all the Cambodian factions to meet one another. Washington, since the beginning of

the conflict, was interested in getting Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia rather than preventing the Khmer Rouge from getting back into power, so her stance had a common cause with ASEAN and China. On the one hand, when the new Washington administration came to power in January 1989, the United States seemed to have reignited the conflict with the Khmer Rouge by announcing publicly their stance in preventing the group from returning. On the other hand, the US move could be seen mainly on paper and in public forums, in reality however, Washington had not implemented any concrete policies which would give teeth to her seemingly more direct stance.



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## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

Well-familiar with the global political context and recognizing the negative impacts brought about by the killing fields, the Khmer Rouge leaders implemented several reforms within their leadership to fit with a new political framework. This new framework had implications on their struggle against the Vietnamese and Phnom Penh governments, and also for their possibility of returning to power. Their main political agenda was to show to the world that their political faction along the border had nothing to do with the regime accused of killing almost two million people. As part of their foreign policy, the Khmer Rouge leaders launched numerous propaganda offensives.

One of the most important difficulties that their group faced throughout the entire 1980s was the crimes the faction committed against their own people when they ruled the country. The Khmer Rouge leaders regarded their previous recarnation as the main obstacle that had serious negative consequences for their foreign policy which attempted to gather support for condemning the Vietnamese act. In order to improve their credibility, they had repeatedly rejected all accusations claiming that there were never any mass human rights abuses of any kind committed under their rule. At the final stage of the group's power, they opened up the country for foreign delegates to visit and observe whether or not all their claims held any weight. However, what the delegates and journalists had seen during their tours in Cambodia were constructed falsities as the authorities chose what their guest would see and not see. Top Khmer Rouge leaders like Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, and Ieng Sary, through their interviews with foreign media, had denied all the information of any large scale massacre. According to the Khmer Rouge elite, all the executions and purges were done against those who had betrayed the revolution, mostly Vietnamese agents; and as such none of them had been wrongfully executed, as Samphan asserted.

As part of their policy to improve their image in the international community, the Khmer Rouge leaders announced several changes to their political system and leadership. A few months after their arrival at the border, under a new Khmer Rouge political front, the group announced a draft of its political program written in favor of Democracy. Later, Pol Pot, the man accused of being behind the killing fields, announced his retirement and Khieu Samphan would lead Democratic Kampuchea to struggle against the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. Meanwhile, to prove that their leadership had indeed restructured and had committed to significant changes, they announced the appointments of several new officials who were not members of the Communist Party. However, the new faces were just symbols that the Khmer Rouge leaders used to decorate their new image; none of them had any important post in the Khmer Rouge political body. Moreover, following the ideas proposed by China, Democratic Kampuchea changed their propaganda tune. Beijing advised the Khmer Rouge leaders to abandon the Communist ideology and sought to convince Prince Sihanouk to lead their front. After several trips of its top leaders to China, Khieu Samphan announced the dissolution of the Communist Party; this subsequently became the only Party in the history of communism that terminated its own existence.

Besides the proclamations of the supposed changes in their internal political affairs, the Khmer Rouge leaders had also appealed to all the Cambodian political factions in and outside the country, regardless of their political beliefs to join them in fighting against the Vietnamese aggressors, who were allegedly attempting to include Cambodia in their Indochina Federation plan. Under pressure, primarily from China, the ASEAN countries, and the United States, the other two non-communist resistance groups known as the FUNCINPEC led by Prince Sihanouk and the KPNLF led by former prime minister Son Sann agreed to join the Khmer Rouge faction to create the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). This helped legitimize Pol Pot's representative at the United Nations until the early 1990s. When the coalition was established, the Khmer Rouge benefited enormously from overseas aid and maintained its domination over the other two resistance groups as they were most numerous, well-equipped, and best trained.



The main supporters of the Pol Pot faction were China, ASEAN, and the United States. Those countries had their own interests in viewing the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia as an aggressive act following the Soviet Union's global hegemony, which was seen in a framework of the Cold War as attempting to have greater influence in Southeast Asia. Given these late Cold War dynamics, these countries demanded Vietnam to withdraw their troops from the country unconditionally. Vietnam had advanced the precondition claiming that its soldiers would not leave until the Khmer Rouge were completely wiped out and were not a threat to seizing power; thus Vietnam refused to pull out its troops from Cambodia. Therefore in order to pressure Vietnam into a troop withdrawal, China, ASEAN, and the United States provided aid to the anti-Vietnamese resistance, particularly the Khmer Rouge, and collectively supported the new coalition government to maintain its seat at the United Nations until the Vietnamese agreed to leave.

China was the biggest supporter of the Khmer Rouge since the beginning of the group's existence. Its policy toward the Cambodian conflict was primarily designed to put pressure on Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Cambodia and to protect from the Soviet Union's encirclement. As a long ally time with Pol Pot's movement since the early 1970s, and because the Khmer Rouge forces proved to be the strongest fighters against Vietnamese troops, China played the most important role in supporting the faction during the entire decade of the 1980s. Militarily and economically, through Thailand, China provided the Khmer Rouge with massive material aid, weapons, and money. Via the Chinese embassy in Bangkok, senior Khmer Rouge officials could withdraw 5\$ million at a time, and if they needed to purchase more weapons and other supplies the officials had an 80\$ million annual limit. Beijing supplied weapons to the Khmer Rouge until early 1990; the year in which the Chinese government sent heavily armored tanks to the guerilla forces. China also helped the Khmer Rouge actively in the diplomatic arena. During the 1980s, Beijing promoted the notion that the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia was an aggressive act following the Soviet Union's ambition in the region. At the United Nations, Chinese representatives condemned Vietnam, who maintained its troops in Cambodia, and proposed many solutions which demanded a complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from the country. China also played a large role in

combining the Khmer Rouge faction with the other two resistance groups in order to legitimize its military support for Pol Pot's forces. China also made sure that the legitimate representative of Cambodia was still in the hands of the anti-Vietnamese factions. Beijing contributed significant agency in providing political support to the Khmer Rouge group as well. The Chinese instructed the Khmer Rouge leaders to change their propaganda campaign and reform their internal policy to allow for a coalition with the other resistance groups. Any suggestions to expel some of the more notorious Khmer Rouge leaders from the leadership were immediately opposed by China.

Moreover, another important supporter of the Khmer Rouge faction was ASEAN, who saw the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as an act of violence against the independence and sovereignty of a nation recognized by the United Nations. The presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia was not only threatening to the ASEAN country—Thailand, but also threatened the whole region with danger. In this respect, ASEAN set up several strategies to put pressure on Vietnam by appealing to the international community to condemn the Vietnamese act, mobilizing all the resistance factions, and urging the international community to aid the anti-Vietnamese forces. The results of the ASEAN strategies provided the Khmer Rouge with significant benefits. For example through ASEAN's effort at the United Nations, during the Cambodian conflict a majority of countries around world voted in favor of Democratic Kampuchea. As an ASEAN member, Thailand contributed a greater role than the other ASEAN members in the Cambodian conflict, especially in its support for the Khmer Rouge. The Bangkok government allowed Chinese military aid to be sent to its territory before it was transported to the Khmer Rouge camps by the Thai military, who actively served as the transporters. Some reports estimated that during the 1980s Thailand's army funneled US\$100 of arms annually to the Khmer Rouge. Generally, the ASEAN countries attempted to pressure Vietnam to pull its troops out of Cambodia; this however did not mean that they wanted to see the Khmer Rouge return to power.

On the other side of the Pacific, subsequent administrations from the United States also provided various levels of support to the Khmer Rouge. Generally speaking, Washington's policy toward the Cambodian conflict was seen within the same context as

China and ASEAN's viewpoint. To keep Democratic Kampuchea's seat at the United Nations, Washington led the Western world to vote for the political entity during all of the 1980s. The U.S. administration also indirectly provided economic aid to the Pol Pot group. Some international organizations such as World Food Program and World Relief, supported by the US government, played very important roles in rebuilding the Khmer Rouge forces as most of the humanitarian aid was brought into their camps; this happened as other larger camps controlled by the Khmer Rouge's coalition partners still needed more aid to feed their people. For several years, the US had quietly provided economic aid to the Khmer Rouge worth some 85\$ million. Additionally, Washington was reported to have some military connections with the Khmer Rouge troops as well.

In the context of the late Cold War period, Vietnam agreed unconditionally to withdraw its troops from Cambodia after the new leadership in Moscow had come out with a new foreign policy stance toward the Cambodian conflict. While the Cold War was moving to an end, the Cambodian conflict was also brought in line with that greater conflict. The Khmer Rouge became the biggest question mark in regards to a future peace settlement. Since China, ASEAN, and the United States made clear with several policies to solve the conflict, Pol Pot's group included a signature in the peace accord in October 1991. After the peace accord, the Five Permanent Members of the United Nations set up a committee to prepare for the general election. The Khmer Rouge boycotted the elections in 1993, and returned to the border to continue their guerilla war. In the new context of international relations following the Cold War, this Southeast Asian proxy war was already over; China, ASEAN, and the United States had no more interest in using Pol Pot's troops. Thus the Khmer Rouge did not gain any more foreign support, and the group began to fade into obscurity as they went into self-imposed isolation after the peace accords and general elections. They became seen as an illegal rebellion threatening to the peace resolution and national reconciliation.

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<sup>26</sup> John Pilger, based in London, has won numerous awards for his reporting from Indochina His 1979 TV documentary, *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia*, is credited with alerting much of the world to the horrors of the Pol Pot regime and the US bombing that preceded it

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