
KAMPUCHEA

Sihanouk to cover for Pol Pot again

by Ramtanu Maitra

U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig has approved a plan to bring the Peking-backed Pol Pot regime back to Cambodia, arm-in-arm with Prince Sihanouk, some of whose family was murdered along with 3 million other Cambodians during Pol Pot's 1975-1979 rule.

The proposal for a united front government in Cambodia is the latest in a series of Peking-Washington efforts to sabotage ongoing negotiations between some Southeast Asian and Indochinese nations to peacefully settle the Cambodia issue. According to reports, Chinese leaders have now successfully arranged for a meeting between Sihanouk—a longtime ally of both Peking and Washington—and Pol Pot's premier, Khieu Samphan, to take place soon in Pyongyang, North Korea.

Haig's approval came to light with reports of his recent meeting in Washington with Singapore's Deputy Premier Rajaratnam. After Rajaratnam had explained how Sihanouk and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge would form a united front to keep Vietnam militarily engaged, Haig said, "The scenario you have painted I do not find discomforting."

According to a recent article in the *New York Times*, a State Department spokesman said that the United States would welcome the rallying of Cambodian nationalists "in opposition to the continuing Vietnamese occupation of their country, and we believe such respected figures as Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann have a role to play in seeking solutions."

Last-ditch effort

The refurbishing of the Pol Potist "Democratic Kampuchea" group, by placing Sihanouk and Son Sann on top of the Khmer Rouge, is essentially a last-ditch effort by Peking and its allies to save their Kampuchean card. It is widely recognized in the region itself that it is no longer possible to maintain the diplomatic fiction of "Democratic Kampuchea"—which still holds the U.N. seat for the country—particularly when conditions within Kampuchea under the Heng Samrin government are internationally recognized to be greatly improved and stable.

Peking, and its principal allies in the region, Thai-

land and Singapore, are hoping to stave off the diplomatic pressure mounted from Hanoi for a negotiated settlement of the Kampuchea issue which would involve de facto recognition of the Heng Samrin government. Peking hopes to continue to keep ASEAN and Indochina apart while Peking looks for the opportunity to go to war against Vietnam again.

Meanwhile, some ASEAN countries are opening the door, though only a crack, to talks with the Indochinese states. Earlier this year, just prior to the Nonaligned foreign ministers meeting in New Delhi, the three Indochinese states (Kampuchea, Laos, and Vietnam) made a new comprehensive proposal for peaceful settlement of differences between them and ASEAN, including the convening of regional talks.

The ASEAN response has been formally negative, with insistence on their proposal for a U.N. conference on Kampuchea. However, Malaysian Foreign Minister Rithauddeen met with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach at New Delhi. He later told the press at Kuala Lumpur, "We feel that we should . . . keep a low profile so as not to jeopardize the prospects of finding a political solution to the problem." Meanwhile, Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar, following a recent meeting with Romulo, stated that "the door was open to any proposals" provided they were "constructive for the settlement of the Cambodian problem."

Khmer Rouge legacy

But Sihanouk, known as the "clown prince" in diplomatic circles, will do anything to regain his puppet throne. As recently as October 1, 1980, in *The Times* of London, Sihanouk insisted that "in no case and in no circumstances" would he consent to play any political role in Cambodia. Then in a recent telephone interview with the French daily *Le Monde*, Sihanouk worried that the Chinese have not replied to his overture for a united front against the Vietnamese. "The Chinese leaders probably want time to consider the matter and consult with their Khmer Rouge friends," he proffered. "We will have to play on their terms."

Inside Cambodia, a recent issue of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported that "it is difficult to stop at any hamlet along Cambodia's highways without being led by people—some silent in their anger, others weeping—to the graves. Each village seems to have its local Auschwitz. While outsiders want the Vietnamese out of Kampuchea, the Khmers feel they have been liberated from the horrors of Khmer Rouge rule and want the Vietnamese to stay as long as the threat of a return of that bloody regime remains real. It is a remarkable testimony to the terror the Khmer Rouge inspired that, two years after the end of Pol Pot's rule, it is difficult to find a Khmer who would like the Vietnamese to leave now."