

## Southeast Asia by Sophie Tanapura

### 'Proximity talks' on the table again

*ASEAN and Vietnam exchange proposals, but will diplomatic sparks light a fire under the Kampuchean talks?*

**O**n July 8, foreign ministers of the six ASEAN countries issued a joint communiqué proposing new talks between belligerents in the Kampuchean conflict. The proposal came out of preparatory talks for the two-day ASEAN summit in Kuala Lumpur.

The previous proposal, drafted by Malaysia, caused a clamor of dissension within the tripartite Khmer resistance Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), since it de facto recognized the Vietnam-backed government of Heng Samrin. Coalition leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk faced near mutiny from the factions led by Son Sann and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. The Malaysian proposal called for indirect, "proximity talks" between the coalition and Heng Samrin's government, through a third-party ASEAN mediator.

The modified proposal, submitted by Thailand and preliminarily given the green light by China, calls for face-to-face talks. Heng Samrin's government would participate as part of the Vietnamese delegation.

The ASEAN proposal also calls for withdrawal of foreign forces from Kampuchea—i.e., Vietnam's occupation force—creation of a U.N. supervisory commission, and U.N.-supervised free elections.

The ball is now in Hanoi's court. The sticking point for Vietnam is that the Thai formulation implicitly rejects the legitimacy of the Heng Samrin government. On July 5, a Vietnam News Agency release jumped the gun on the official release of the proposal, saying that Vietnam would reject it.

Ranking Malaysian foreign ministry officials, however, downplayed the press release as premature.

sent its own proposal to the ASEAN countries, setting out five points: 1) withdrawal of Vietnam from Kampuchea, predicated on 2) the removal of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge as a political and military force, 3) creation of a security zone on both sides of the Thai-Kampuchean border, 4) similar security guarantees for the Chinese-Vietnamese and Lao-Thai borders, 5) self-determination for Kampuchea by the holding of free elections, supervised by an international task force.

ASEAN treated the proposal as little more than a sign of Hanoi's intransigence, dictated from the vantage point of their military success on the battlefield. During their dry-season offensive earlier this year, Vietnamese troops shattered the remnants of the Sihanouk and Son Sann factions, while smashing Khmer Rouge base camps along the Thai border.

Outside of the nations directly involved, however, there is no reason to believe that either of the two dominant powers in the region, China and the Soviet Union, is particularly interested in changing the status quo.

Instead, both Vietnam and ASEAN are looking for a sign from Washington to aid in ending the stalemate. Secretary of State Shultz's 13-day Asian tour placed him in Kuala Lumpur for the ASEAN summit. The ASEAN countries were counting on Shultz to throw the weight of the Reagan administration behind their mod-

ified proposal.

Likewise, Vietnam, in a second initiative mediated by the Indonesian foreign minister, floated a proposal to Washington calling for direct, bilateral talks over the issue of American servicemen missing in action in Indochina. The MIA issue is the primary roadblock to normalization of relations between the two countries.

The American response has been ambiguous at best. As far as the ASEAN proposal is concerned, Shultz said Washington wants the Southeast Asian nations to take the point in the discussions—i.e., expect no direct support from Washington. As for the Vietnamese proposal, the State Department is known to oppose it.

More alarming, was Shultz's flagrant public embrace of the Khmer resistance, including his visit to a refugee camp, and personal meetings with leaders of the Sihanouk and Son Sann factions, where he made vague promises of U.S. "assistance."

Then word came that the U.S. Congress approved \$10 million in assistance, including a loophole allowing for military aid. First, the total dollar figure is puny, and will do little more than finance continued hit-and-run actions. More damaging, it is common knowledge that the only effective fighting force within the coalition is Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

In an interview with *Time* magazine, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach said Hanoi would pull out of Kampuchea if Pol Pot were ousted from the Khmer resistance and China and Thailand would cease aid to the rebels. Then, he said, the Heng Samrin government could work out an accommodation with a Sihanouk-led coalition.

But Chinese leader Deng Xiao Ping told Sihanouk, "You must not try to get rid of Pol Pot. Otherwise, China will let you down."