

# China muzzles Khmer Rouge, makes a deal on Cambodia

by Linda de Hoyos

The People's Republic of China has shifted its stance on the conflict in Cambodia to emerge as the primary arbiter among the warring factions in what purports to be a bid to secure peace. For Beijing, the aim is not actually to bring peace to Cambodia, a nation which has known war in one form or another since 1970. This is hardly a consideration for Beijing, which sponsored the genocidal rule of the communist Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979, and thereafter financed and trained Khmer Rouge troops against the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh. But even the Beijing foreign policymakers could see that if China persisted in standing behind the Khmer Rouge's recalcitrance, after Pol Pot's troops have proven over the last 12 years that their chances of unilateral seizure of power through military means are extremely slim, China stood to lose out on the geopolitical chessboard of Southeast Asia as a whole.

The Chinese foreign policy goal, which is now apparently overriding its long attachment to the Khmer Rouge, was made explicit by Foreign Minister Qian Qichen on July 27, speaking in Kuala Lumpur on the occasion of the summit of Asean heads of state. "We believe relations between China and Asean will inevitably enter a new stage of even greater accomplishment. China wishes to further cooperate with Asean in the fields of politics, economics, trade, science and technology, and security."

Among knowledgeable circles in several capitals of the world, it is also understood that the Chinese approach to Asean has the imprimatur of the Group of Seven industrialized countries, which have essentially ceded control of the Southeast Asian rim to Beijing.

## Beijing takes charge

The Chinese decision to drag the Khmer Rouge to the bargaining table was signaled by the presence of Chinese President Yang Shangkun in Thailand for the meeting of the newly formed Cambodian Supreme National Council in late June. The meeting, characterized as a breakthrough, determined that Prince Sihanouk would be the president of the Council. A national anthem and flag were decided upon, as symbols of good faith for the negotiations yet to come.

It was further determined that the next Supreme National Council meeting would be held in Beijing. The compromise thrashed out in Beijing revolved around the plan for a settle-

ment put forward by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. This plan, which has been pushed by Beijing and Washington as the only possible route to peace, calls for the dismantling of the Phnom Penh government, the transfer of most government functions to a U.N.-designated group, which would also oversee the total disarmament of all sides, and general elections to determine a new government.

Vietnam and Phnom Penh have opposed the plan, which would effectively place Cambodia under U.N. trusteeship.

Japan's stated interest in playing a major role in the U.N. "peacekeeping force" to be deployed to Cambodia may also have prompted China and Vietnam to reach a compromise.

While the Chinese muzzled the Khmer Rouge, an agreement was reached during the talks in Beijing and then later in Pyongyang between Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Prince Sihanouk to create a 12-member Cambodian commission, which would begin to seek foreign aid and take the first steps in operating as a proto-government. It was announced, for example, that the Supreme National Council will represent Cambodia at the fall meeting of the Mekong Committee, which is planning the Mekong Development Project of seven dams on the river, most in Cambodia.

This decision apparently overrides the Khmer Rouge's objection to any reconstruction projects for Cambodia funded from the outside.

At the same time, the Supreme National Council, which holds the Cambodia seat at the U.N., announced that it would set up headquarters in Phnom Penh and is ready to receive ambassadorial credentials.

For their part, Vietnam and Cambodia are backing off from their vows never to join a government with the Khmer Rouge and their demand that the "Pol Pot clique" be brought to trial for crimes against humanity during their genocidal rule. On Aug. 20, Chea Sim, National Assembly president for the Phnom Penh government, made a speech in which he pointedly left out the word "genocidal" in referring to the Pol Pot years, speaking instead of "the severe disaster which affected Cambodian society between 1975 and 1979."

To seal the arrangement, Hun Sen visited Beijing again, where he met with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Xu Dunxin.

## Vietnam: the other partner

As Hun Sen and Prince Sihanouk were meeting in Beijing July 22-24, Vietnam and China announced that they would have a bilateral meeting, also to be held in Beijing, to promote improvements in relations. Accordingly, on Aug. 8, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien opened formal talks with his Chinese counterpart Xu Dunxin for normalization of relations between the two countries. Also on the scene were Vietnamese Defense Minister Le Duc Anh, who has been credited with executing the shift in Vietnamese foreign policy toward China, and Deputy Prime Minister Dong Sy Nguyen. According to the Bangkok press, the result of the meetings is that border problems—not Cambodia—are the major obstacles to full normalization. It was announced that Vietnamese Prime Minister Do Muoi would visit Beijing in October.

Vietnam's decision to renew ties with China—a relationship which at one point was like “lips and teeth,” as some diplomats put it—is based in part on their mutual concern: maintaining the preeminence of the Communist Party under conditions in which communist parties are dropping like flies in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Even more important, Thailand and other Asean countries have made a settlement of Cambodia the condition under which full trade and economic relations will be re-established with the Asean countries. This is also a condition for the United States' lifting of the trade embargo it imposed on Vietnam in 1979. Bereft of funds from the Soviet Union, with a depleted and decrepit economy and millions of unemployed, the Vietnamese communists have been placed in the ironic position of being able to retain power only if they are able to open their country to the West, and of course that is no guarantee.

Accordingly, after the success of the normalization talks in Beijing, Vietnam announced new cabinet changes—overturning the decisions just made at the 7th Communist Party Congress in June. What the western press likes to call “a western-style reformer,” Vo Van Kiet was elected prime minister. Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach and Vo Nguyen Giap were expelled from the cabinet—both of them are anathema to the West. Nguyen Manh Cam, the ambassador to the Soviet Union, was appointed foreign minister. Cam reportedly speaks fluent Russian, English, and French—indicating that China is not the top item on Hanoi's foreign-relations agenda.

For its part, the United States has not been supportive of the compromise struck in Beijing. “We in the United States are not interested in any shortcuts that would result in only a partial settlement,” U.S. Secretary of State James Baker intoned Aug. 1. “We are firmly behind the Perm 5 plan and that approach”—the U.N. trusteeship concept. Baker is reportedly insistent that national elections be held, rather than the Supreme National Council evolving to become the government. “We need something that will bring peace,”

retorted a Phnom Penh spokesman.

The French news service AFP has suggested that U.S. displeasure is behind renewed circulation of stories of living MIAs in Vietnam, and also the “news” report from U.S. intelligence that Pol Pot was seen skulking around the June Supreme National Council meeting in Thailand.

## China widens its sphere

However, the harsh treatment of its Asean allies doled out by Washington is one of the biggest boosts to Beijing's prestige in Southeast Asia. Asean has tolerated from the U.S. economic warfare—in its International Monetary Fund or trade-war guise—and total neglect on most other issues.

Thai-U.S. relations are described by the Thai press as being at their “lowest point,” with 11 outstanding issues of contention. All U.S. military and financial assistance was cut when the Thai military carried out a coup in February of this year against the government of Chatchai Choonhavan. Relations have not been restored. Articles are appearing in the U.S. press attacking the Thai military, and U.S. officials in Bangkok are demanding that Thailand sever its ties with Burma (Myanmar).

Washington is now threatening Thailand with “Super 301” trade-war measures on the issue of pharmaceutical and intellectual copyrights. But one sign of the times, is the announcement that a Thai commerce delegation would go to Beijing July 26 to consult with communist leaders on how best to deal with the U.S. Super 301 threat. Thai Prime Minister Anan Panyarachun will go to China in late September.

It is primarily in the military arena that Beijing is seeking to forge strong bonds with Southeast Asia. Thailand's Gen. Suchinda Khrarayun, Army commander in chief, traveled to Beijing on invitation from the Chinese Armed Forces—which are controlled by other members of Yang Shangkun's extended family. Even Laos sent a high-level military delegation to China in late June.

And while the entire world's press was focused in late August on the collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Soviet empire, the big headline news in China was the visit to Beijing of Saw Maung, military dictator of Burma, with which Beijing shares heroin production and transport routes. The *Working People's Daily* of Rangoon characterized the trip as advancing Sino-Burmese friendship “government to government, people to people, and most important, military to military.” Chinese President Yang Shangkun greeted the Burmese general as a Chinese emperor would the head of a tributary state: “The magnitude of the closeness of the two countries, for instance, is as if one could hear the rooster crow from the next compound.”

But Yang Shangkun is a very old man. The word is that neither he nor the pathological communist regime he represents is expected to last much longer.