

Cambodia development pushed by Japan

by Linda de Hoyos

After more than a year of hotly contested debate, including near-riots in the chambers of the parliament, the Japanese Diet June 15 passed the government's bill sanctioning Japanese participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations abroad. By July 2, a 15-man Japanese delegation from seven ministries had arrived in Cambodia to plan how Japan's forces might contribute to the U.N. "peacekeeping" effort in Cambodia, which has been under ceaseless war since the United States brought down the Sihanouk government in 1970.

The swiftness of Tokyo's intervention into Cambodia, once the bill was passed, is one sign of the significance with which Japan views Cambodia's future. On June 20-22, Tokyo was also the site of an international Conference on Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia, which brought together representatives of 32 nations, 12 international organizations, and the European Community Commission. The conference organized \$880 million to begin the rebuilding of Cambodia, with Japan contributing up to \$200 million, and the United States pledging \$135 million.

Japan's interest in Cambodia, however, is strategic. Although the 13-year war that began with the Vietnam invasion of Cambodia in 1979 is over, Cambodia's 4-5 million people continue to be chief pawns in the intricate superpower game in Southeast Asia. From 1970 to 1990, Cambodia was ripped apart by the contesting powers of Beijing and Moscow, with the United States backing Beijing. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia in 1989, Japan, in tandem with the government of Chatichai Choonhavan of Thailand, acted to clear the way for peace negotiations, which had as their basis a Japanese commitment to reconstruct Cambodia as part of an overall strategy to build up Southeast Asia (see p. 45).

At the same time, the U.N. Security Council, led by Britain, the U.S., and France, with the cooperation of Beijing, pushed for a comprehensive settlement that would effectively place Cambodia's government under a U.N. trusteeship. This plan is operative now, and there are 100,000 troops of the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in the country. Observers in the region have likened the U.N. presence to the reimposition of western colonial rule over the region.

The U.N. forces are charged with overseeing the cease-fire and the repatriation of 360,000 Cambodians currently holed up in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. Only

27,000 have been repatriated so far, allegedly due to lack of facilities and supplies for the returnees. In June, U.N. forces began the second phase of the peace plan: cantonment of the Armed Forces of the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh and the three guerrilla forces fighting that government.

At this point, the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge, the strongest and best armed of the guerrilla factions, balked. On June 10, Dutch troops attempting to corral Khmer Rouge troops were denied entry into the Khmer areas. On June 12, Phnom Penh and Khmer Rouge troops exchanged fire in northwestern Cambodia. On June 13, Khieu Samphan, who acts as the Khmer Rouge's public face, said that he would not attend the reconstruction conference in Japan.

The Khmer Rouge then proceeded to place new conditions on its participation in the peace plan: The U.N. must offer verified proof that all Vietnamese military personnel have left Cambodia (although the consensus from diplomats and others is that Hanoi has pulled out), and dismantle the Phnom Penh administration. From New Zealand, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen chimed in on June 16 that "there are many problems, so patience is needed" with the Khmer Rouge. On the same day, Thai Foreign Minister Arsa Sarasin emerged from a meeting in Bangkok with Khieu Samphan to report that the Khmer Rouge would be going to the Tokyo conference the following week.

There, Khieu and his defense minister, Son Sen, sat in stony silence as the assembled delegations deliberated on Cambodia's reconstruction needs. The Khmer Rouge is now objecting to the \$111 million of the money pledged at Tokyo that is designated to go to Cambodia's state sector and balance of payments support, charging that this will only prop up the Phnom Penh government.

Khmer Rouge and the China factor

The Khmer Rouge has its own internal reasons for objecting to the peace process, not the least of which is its desire to rule over the entire country. The reconstruction of Cambodia also goes against the Khmer Rouge's natural inclination. As protégés of the Chinese Gang of Four at the height of the nihilistic orgy of the Cultural Revolution, the Khmer Rouge during its rule in 1975-79 ripped down whatever remained of the country's infrastructure after five years of U.S. bombing, emptied the cities, and destroyed all vestiges of civilization and intellectual thought as the imposition of "westernization" on Cambodia.

A third factor, Japanese and other sources indicate, is the Khmer Rouge's desire to stall the peace process until the monsoon rains come. In the meantime, the Khmer Rouge is raking in money from its gem-mining operations in the border town of Pailin, which the Khmer Rouge retrieved from Phnom Penh late last year. The Khmer Rouge is afraid that UNTAC will disrupt its trade routes, offered one UNTAC source to Reuters. Phnom Penh Prime Minister Hun Sen also

thinks that the Khmer Rouge is balking in order to gain more concessions in the Supreme National Council, the nominal government composed of all Cambodian factions.

However, the Khmer Rouge's actions to push Cambodia to the brink of war again, come precisely at the moment that Beijing has also dramatically aired its strategic demands upon the region. On May 8, Beijing and the Denver-headquartered Crestone oil company signed an agreement to exploit oil in a 10,000-square-mile area of the South China Sea, also claimed by Vietnam, and near the Spratly Islands which are claimed by six countries in the region. With a representative of the U.S. embassy in Beijing present at the signing, the Chinese announced that they were prepared to use their increasingly commanding naval capability to protect Crestone's operations.

At a July 2 conference in Indonesia on the Spratlys, Chinese Foreign Ministry official Zhao Weihong warned nations outside the region to stay out of the dispute, and a Foreign Ministry spokesman in Beijing announced China's "indisputable sovereignty" over the Spratlys.

Other disputes are also moving to the front burner in relations between Beijing and Hanoi. A conflict over a sliver of territory along the 600-mile frontier between Vietnam and China has delayed the reopening of a rail link between Hanoi and Beijing, Vietnam reported June 12. On July 3, Vietnam reported that in May a gunfight had broken out between border guards at Friendship Pass, where Vietnam's Route 1

crosses into China. No one was killed, but amidst source reports that the Chinese are flooding Vietnam with drugs, Vietnam has threatened to shut down the pass if China does not abide by customs regulations.

As one Hanoi official told Reuters: "People think that relations are okay between Vietnam and China but they are not. I think China wants to know the attitude of the small countries and the big countries in this area." An Asian diplomat in Hanoi explained that "at the end of the Cold War, the superpowers no longer have a concentrated presence in the South China Sea. They [China] are now the biggest power in the South China Sea. This is a strategic point. . . . If they occupy it, they become a strong power and can dictate to the countries of Southeast Asia." The South China Sea is also the key shipping lane for oil and other critical resources flowing from the Mideast and elsewhere to Japan.

While China presses its claim for the South China Sea, Japan is moving to develop the rich oil fields off the Vietnamese coast in the South China Sea. In June, the Idemitsu Oil Development Co. and Teikoku Oil signed contracts with the state-run PetroVietnam to drill for crude. Mitsubishi Oil, C. Itoh, and Marubeni are also bidding for exploration rights in the huge Dai Hung (Big Bear) oil field off Vietnam.

Thus, new strategic fault lines are being drawn in Southeast Asia. For Japan, a leadership role in Cambodia's reconstruction is a strategic necessity, if the entire region is not to be de facto ceded to Beijing.



U.S. civil rights leader Amelia Robinson (fifth from right), on tour in Croatia, is shown here in Zagreb with representatives of Mothers for Peace and the Schiller Institute. On July 2, she issued a call for an international effort to stop the execution of Croatian citizens Martin Sablic, Zoran Sipos, and Nikola Cibaric who were sentenced to death by Military Tribunal in Belgrade, Serbia on June 26.

In a statement on the case, Croatian Vice Prime Minister Mate Granic appealed to human rights organizations to help prevent this "legal crime" and to protect other prisoners of war awaiting a similar fate.

Mrs. Robinson promised the help of the Schiller Institute, of which she is a board member, to save the lives of these men, and to stop the continuing trials.