

Small steps taken on Kampuchea issue

by Linda de Hoyos

The former prime minister of Thailand, Gen. Kriangsak Chamanan, returned on Jan. 25 from a 10-day visit to Vietnam to announce that the communist regime had offered new proposals for a resolution to the regional crisis posed by the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea. What these proposals were Kriangsak did not say, but in the press, news has emerged of several small but important steps taken by Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos that could ease the hot political climate in the region.

First, a tentative agreement has been reached whereby the Red Crosses of Kampuchea and Laos would work with Thailand in the repatriation of refugees from the Indochinese countries.

Also, for the first time progress was registered in talks between Thai and Lao officials on the development of the Mekong River. As proposed in Lyndon LaRouche's Pacific Basin development program, the Mekong River Basin, if properly controlled, could produce up to 37 million tons of food a year. The initial project agreed upon by the two countries would provide for the digging of sandbars along the river to prevent flooding. The Mekong Committee of Thai and Lao officials is studying a hydrographic survey of the river to plan further projects.

General Kriangsak, who led a Thai delegation of 20 parliamentarians to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, has been instrumental in achieving growing cooperation between Thailand and Laos, nations alike in culture and family. In December, the Thai government announced agreement on the construction of a "hot line" between Bangkok and Vientiane in case border disputes should arise; the line will be installed by the Mekong Committee. At the same time, the Lao government made a concession on the issue of U.S. servicemen missing in action, and granted a U.S. request for a three-day visit to the country.

The hope is that these measures will stand all countries concerned in good stead if international pressures produce an explosion of conflict in the area.

Soon after General Kriangsak had left Hanoi, the conference of foreign ministers of the three Indochinese countries issued a communiqué stating their agreement with the "5-2 formula" for negotiations set by the ASEAN countries—Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Singapore. Under that notion, Laos and Vietnam would ne-

gotiate for Kampuchea, thereby obviating the need for ASEAN recognition of the Heng Samrin regime.

But without such talks, the communiqué warned, "Disagreements between the two groups of countries will be aggravated, thus possibly leading to an explosive, uncontrollable situation that China could take advantage of to provoke a large-scale war in Southeast Asia." Given that the ASEAN countries also demand a withdrawal of Vietnam's 160,000 troops in Kampuchea, Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savestila declared that the Vietnamese warning was "a clear message that either ASEAN prepares to engage in regional dialogues in the manner prescribed by Vietnam or face the consequences of Vietnam's military escalation beyond the Cambodian border."

According to Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach, in his discussions with General Kriangsak, there will be no "dry season offensive" by Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea this year, unless there are provocations from the Khmer resistance forces. Right on cue, the Chinese-armed troops of Pol Pot, whose regime of genocide was ended by the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in 1979, staged their biggest attack yet Jan. 27, temporarily taking the important supply town of Siem Reap in western Kampuchea. The Pol Pot forces managed to kill 50 Vietnamese soldiers and destroy military and government installations before retreating back toward the Thai border.

So far the Vietnamese have not responded in kind, but the major concern of Thai security officials is not the intentions of Hanoi but of Moscow, which has turned Vietnam into a near satellite. The Soviets, reported Thai National Security Council chief Prasong Soonsiri at a Pacific Security Conference in Seoul, Korea, Jan. 21, "are giving private assurances to several ASEAN leaders, that the Soviet Union is capable of controlling its client [Vietnam]." Moscow's strategy in Southeast Asia, Prasong warned, parallels its strategy in Western Europe: to drive a wedge between the Western allies through the use of "peace campaigns" while at the same time building up Soviet military strength.

According to Prasong, the Soviets have expanded the American-built port of Cam Ranh Bay. Four Soviet Bear-D (reconnaissance) and Bear-F (anti-submarine warfare) aircraft have been there since 1980 and were joined in November by 10 TU-16 bombers. The number of Soviet naval vessels ported there has increased steadily from 7 in 1980, to 10 in 1981, to 24 in 1982.

"Cam Ranh Bay has become the center for rapid operations of the Soviet fleet in the area from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean," Prasong stated, and Soviet naval forces can now reach the strategic Malacca Straits in two to three days. The Soviet takeover of Cam Ranh Bay coincides with the build-up of the Soviet Pacific fleet—from 60 vessels in 1975, the year the United States withdrew from Indochina, to 720 vessels now. Given this relentless drive for strategic superiority in the area, Prasong concluded, Southeast Asia will become "the site of a stepped-up struggle for influence and domination and increasing conflict."