CHAPTER IV

THE KAMPUCHEA IBROGLIO
The Kampuchean Imbroglio

Historically relations between China and Vietnam have not been friendly. But the Chinese and the Vietnamese Communist parties acquired the common objective of eliminating western influence from the region. The emergence, however, of the Sino-Soviet dispute and later the alignment of the Vietnamese Communist Party with the Soviet Union made the feeling of hostility inevitable between the two parties. Vietnam joined COMECON in June 1978 as a full member, and in November it signed a Treaty of Friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union, with the Soviets pledging to aid it, if attacked.\(^1\) The exchange of threats and blandishments between China and Vietnam became quite frequent.

In the Chinese view, the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty is something like the eye of a gun barrel, especially Article 6. They do not see why this treaty was necessary now, considering that no treaty of this kind was signed between the Soviet

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\(^1\) New Times (Moscow), November 1978, pp.6-7.
Union and Vietnam, when several years ago, the latter was the object of attack by the United States and its very survival was threatened. China maintains that it is the Soviet Union and Vietnam that are now flagrantly attacking Kampuchea, pursuing hegemonism in South East Asia and jeopardizing peace and security in Asia and the world.\(^2\) The Chinese propaganda line is that Vietnam is becoming a kind of Asian Cuba, little more than a pawn in the world-wide strategy of the Soviet Union.\(^3\)

About overseas Chinese, Beijing charged that Vietnam was adopting anti-China actions at the behest of the Soviet Union. On 10 June 1978 the People's Daily commentator spelled out the charges that "the Soviet Union was behind the scene, provocator and supporter of the Vietnamese authorities in ostracizing Chinese residents and attacking China."\(^4\)

The worst expectations of the Chinese were

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confirmed when Vietnam intervened in Kampuchea after signing the treaty with the Soviets. On 7 January 1979, the Soviet news agency, Tass declared that "this news will undoubtedly be received with profound satisfaction and joy by millions of people in the different parts of the world."5

The Indochina crisis was of crucial strategic importance to Thailand. Thailand's Foreign Minister, Dr. Updit Pacharingkul and his Chinese counterpart Huang Hua on 31 March 1978 signed an agreement on trade and another accord on scientific and technical cooperation.6 The Prime Minister of Thailand, General Kriangsak Chomen launched in Shanghai that he had deemed it very necessary to strengthen cooperation between Thailand and China.7

Vietnam's treaty with the Soviets and the Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea and the fall of Pol Pot government increased the tension in this region. The Chinese Communist Party Chairman and Premier Hua Guofeng on 13 January 1979 urged Thailand to cooperate with China in light of


7. Ibid., 3 April 1978.
Vietnamese aggression in Kampuchea. Hua told visiting Thai Deputy Prime Minister Sunthorn Hongladdarom that Sino-Thai cooperation would be helpful in promoting stable peace in the region.\textsuperscript{8}

Teng Hsiao-ping, then Deputy Prime Minister, paid a visit to Thailand from 5 to 9 November 1979 in the course of which he expressed support for the proposal by the ASEAN for a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in South East Asia. He also gave warning that the hegemonists had stepped up their expansionist activities in Asia, particularly in South East Asia.\textsuperscript{9}

The prolonged incursions of the United States into South Vietnam and North Vietnam, and the activities of the National Liberation Front forces from 1965 to 1970 involved Kampuchea in the Indochina war. In the context of the American decision to gradually withdraw from the military burdens of the Vietnam war, Kampuchea had to bear the brunt of America's military attacks. This fact became obvious during the Lon Nol period (1970-75) after the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk (March 1970).

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 14 January 1979.
\textsuperscript{9} Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1979 (London), p. 29391.
By then there was also an influx of Vietnam refugees into the border areas of Kampuchea. This adversely affected the domestic economy of Kampuchea and dissidence and party rivalries increased there.\textsuperscript{10} In 1975, with the coming of the Pol Pot regime into power in Kampuchea there was massacre of thousands of leftist intellectuals and its economy suffered due to famines and drought. This regime was involved in constant disputes with Vietnam over the border areas.

After Kampuchea's independence from France it had agreed to the "unjust and illegal" French frontiers based on the conditions (1) that the frontiers were non-negotiable, (2) that Kampuchea alone had the right to ask for minor readjustments in the French delineation of the frontiers or to resolve any ambiguities that might exist in that delineation.\textsuperscript{11} The Kampuchean leaders considered this posture of theirs as the key indication of Kampuchea's nationalism. But the Vietnamese did not consider the territorial gains made at the


\textsuperscript{11} David W.P. Elliott, n. 3, p.22.
expense of Kampuchea during these years as a major domestic issue, and took a more flexible stand on the border question. They viewed the border problem as a product of French monstrosity that had been imposed on them during the period of French colonialism. 12

Since Sihanouk's accession to power the Kampuchean leaders had been demanding compensation from Vietnam for the territorial losses they had suffered since 1954. But the Vietnamese expected a mutual bargaining position in which the borderline was to be readjusted and rationalized for the benefit of both countries. In May 1967, Sihanouk demanded that the Vietnamese make a unilateral declaration of respect for the recognition of Kampuchea's "existing borders." He further argued that Kampuchea had been given the sole right to interpret the "existing border." He also published official maps of Kampuchea showing the newly "corrected" land frontiers. The significance of these steps was lost on the Vietnamese and they did not publicly contradict

or even make private protests against Sihanouk in
the belief that such actions might diminish his
zeal in their struggle against the United States. 13

After June 1970 the United States had reft-
rained from using American ground forces in Kampu-
chea. But the Lon Nol regime was forced to rely
on ARVN forces and also depended initially on
their Vietnamese supporters in their war against
America. Thus until North Vietnam's Easter 1972
invasion of South Vietnam, Kampuchea became the
main battle ground of the Vietnam war. 14 Even
during the war, however, in the period 1970-75
the Khmer Rouge and the NLF clashed over territo-
rial issues, especially regarding the eastern
provinces of Kampuchea.

The great mandarin Thanh Caian of Vietnam
said in the 1860s:

In principle, our intention is not to take
possession of this country Kampuchea. We wish, following heaven's example, to
allow the population to live and exist in
peace. We do not wish the loss of this
little kingdom as do some others... The
Cambodians are savages whose nature is bad
and vicious. As often as they submit, so
often do they rebel, but they constantly
follow the rule and the law. 15

Communism in Indochina: New Perspectives
15. Milton Osborne, Before Kampuchea: Prelude to
Tragedy (Sydney 1979), p.193.
This perception has continued to guide the Vietnamese foreign policy outlook during the last 120 years.

The intensity of the dispute between the armed forces of the two countries increased after April 1975.\textsuperscript{16} Clashes occurred on land, in the sea and on offshore islands. Some of these clashes occurred in the Parrot's Beak province of Suoy Rieng and in the far north eastern provinces of Ratnakiri and Mundulkiri. The Kampuchean leaders apprehended that the Vietnamese might take advantage of the fluid political situation to make claims on territory north of the Brevie line. In the midst of such tensions, the patrol vessels of the two countries exchanged fire off the coast of the island of Phu Quoc in early May 1975.\textsuperscript{17} Further clashes occurred on the island of Tho Chan, which lay south of the Brevie line, later in the same month. Despite occasional negotiations between Pol Pot and the Vietnamese official Nguyen Van Linh, the Vietnamese naval units attacked Kampuchean naval barges on Paulo


\textsuperscript{17} David W.P. Elliott, n.3, p.27.
Wai island which lay north of the Brevie line.\textsuperscript{18} Paulo Wai remained in Vietnamese control until August, 1975 when the island was returned to Kampuchea. Thereafter there were no further border clashes until April 1976.

The Pol Pot regime which came to power in Kampuchea in April 1975, was given economic aid and military ammunition by China. The regime was also supported by Thailand and the United States which provided aid through various relief agencies. The U.S. objective was to reduce Kampuchea's dependence on Vietnam for its economic reconstruction and thereby to isolate the Vietnamese economy. But these efforts had the effect of putting Vietnam more and more into the Soviet camp.

A technical conference was held in Phnom Penh in May 1976 to discuss the border problem between Kampuchea and Vietnam. But owing to differences over the demarcation of territorial frontiers the Kampuchean leaders announced suspension of the talks.\textsuperscript{20} The Vietnamese realized that the

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\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.29.
\textsuperscript{19} Milton Osborne, n.15, p.197.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p.199.
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Kampucheans were not serious about a dialogue. In early 1977 the Kampuchean troops increased their pressure on the disputed border and the Vietnamese responded by reinforcing their military position on the border.21

The Kampuchean troops soon started striking at Vietnamese borders in April-May 1977. The diplomatic initiatives of both sides having failed, it was apparent that they were heading for a military confrontation. In late July and early August 1977, the Vietnamese launched several raids on the Kampuchean armed forces and struck into Kampuchean territory22 while general Vo Nguyen Giap was sent to the frontier areas. In early September 1977 the Vietnamese troops launched fresh raids into Cambodia. The Kampuchean troops thereupon carried out a number of quick raids into Vietnamese territory, reaching even 7 kilometres into the interior.23

The Vietnamese then decided to attack Kampuchea's eastern frontier areas. They gathered

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an estimated 30,000 to 60,000 troops with complete air, artillery and armoury support. Vietnam's major objective was to overthrow the Pol Pot regime which had earned notoriety for genocide, maladministration and to replace it with a new government having a popular base. By early 1978, the Vietnamese Communists had come to the conclusion that the Kampuchean troops were left with only two choices: either to back down and negotiate on Vietnamese terms or to face the destruction of a major part of their army and the replacement of their frontier administration by a new and hostile one. Thus it was the deteriorating socio-economic situation in Kampuchea that prompted the Vietnamese leaders to intervene there. The border conflict which further escalated in July-August 1978 also added to the gravity of the situation in Kampuchea.

This conflict in the period ending December 1978 did not arise out of a plan of alleged global expansion by the Soviets nor out of a design for

25. Ibid.
Vietnamese aggrandizement. Rather, the conflict got escalated when the two neighbours were trying to cope with the internal upheavals of revolutionary transformation. As negotiations failed, each side made use of force, Kampuchea's attacks across the border were met by Vietnam's counter attacks. Their rivalry increased with the Chinese support to the Pol Pot government (April 1975-December 1978) while the Soviet Union strengthened its economic and military ties with Vietnam during this period.

The situation took a new turn on 16 December 1978 when a full-scale war started between the Vietnamese and the Kampuchean troops. The Vietnamese initially advanced with ease and the Kampuchean border forces were taken aback and withdrew, but soon recovered and resorted to guerrilla warfare. Kampuchea's diplomatic relations with Vietnam were suspended. The situation, however, improved with the overthrow of the Pol


28. Ibid., p.260.

Thus the period 1975-78 was characterised by mutual suspicion and mistrust. The Kampucheans had come to believe erroneously, that Vietnam wanted to establish an "Indochina Federation" under Vietnamese domination but the Vietnamese had wanted merely a "special relationship" with Kampuchea. In other words, the Vietnamese desired to protect Kampucheans from the atrocities of the Pol Pot regime and help in rebuilding the nation.

Certain trends regarding the freedom struggle in the two countries need to be noted. The Communist movement became the sole representative of Vietnam's nationalism during the struggle against France. The Vietnamese Communists tended to de-emphasize class conflict and class struggle and to emphasize continuity with the pre-modern tradition of peasant opposition to foreign rule. Their main aim was to build socialism carefully and with a minimum of class conflict, while maintaining their nationalist identity.

The regime in Kampuchea exposed its brutal record when an estimated three million Kampucheans
died between April 1975 and December 1978 as is obvious from various reports. With China's support Pol Pot and his associates like Ieng Sary gained full control of the Kampuchean Communist movement. In 1978 the Pol Pot regime transferred about half a million Kampucheans to the west Vietnam border. Many of these deportees were assassinated in the western province of Pursat. This is clear from a report published in The Times. All this caused widespread social dislocation at the cost of the rural population.

The Pol Pot officials expressed the ideals of middle class Kampuchean nationalism. In 1977-78 they openly declared that Kampuchea would not only become a strong state again but would also win back "lost territories" from Thailand and Vietnam. They initiated a large-scale programme for the extermination of non-Khmer national minorities. Nearly 20,000 local Vietnamese were killed as also several ethnic Chinese and Chan Muslims.

30. The Times, 2 July 1980
In the 1960s it was not the Communist Party of Kampuchea that received substantial material or vocal support from the Soviet Union and China but the Sihanouk regime. This made the Kampuchean Communist Party leaders realize in the 1970s that radical policies, including struggle against revisionists within the party were necessary if the revolution was to be carried forth.

Animosity and mistrust has characterized Vietnam-Kampuchea relations at least during the regime of the Kampuchean Communists, 1970-78. In the 1960s itself, the Vietnamese Communists failed to recruit the Kampucheans into the Communist Party of Indochina.32 The Vietnamese opposed the anti-Sihanouk policies of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in the 1960s. The Lon Nol coup of March 1970 brought about a temporary alliance between the Communists of the two countries, although both sides differed regarding the terms of this alliance. The Kampuchean leaders therefore doubted the effectiveness of having close links with Vietnam in the 1970-78 period. But the Vietnamese insisted on the crea-

32. Ibid.
tion of a regional bloc in Indochina which would keep the Indochina region secure from external intervention. 33

In 1975 itself, the Kampuchean leaders had realized that there were elements within the Communist Party of Kampuchea and the Kampuchean army and civil administration which had been trained and influenced by the Vietnamese. But when political strife occurred especially on the Vietnam-Kampuchea border in early 1977, men like Ieng Sary viewed it as Vietnamese subversion. 34 These events followed the Kampuchean suspension of the border talks in May 1976 and coincided with the increasing clashes along its border. This made the Vietnamese feel that Pol Pot was eliminating the elements more friendly to them and was inimical to their interests. The Pol Pot regime regarded the Vietnamese as a danger and since early 1977 increased the military clashes on its border. But these leaders miscalculated in escalating the conflict against Vietnam.


34. Ibid., p. 40.
By early 1978, the Vietnamese officials and emissaries had realized that a military uprising was essential to overthrow the unpopular Pol Pot regime. Still they proceeded with caution, for fear that such a step might encourage China's military intervention against Vietnam. At the same time a massive exodus of the Hoa community to Vietnam and a build-up of the Chinese troops on their border created further problems for Vietnam. The Kampuchean leaders were being delivered fresh armaments by China. The Pol Pot troops made several raids on Vietnamese civilian settlements in March and April 1978 despite a Vietnamese offer for negotiations. The Phnom Penh regime, backed by China during this period (1975-78) was not willing to negotiate with Vietnam.

By middle 1978, the Vietnam leadership was convinced that the Pol Pot regime was trying to extend its stronghold over the entire Kampuchea and carry on an aggressive warfare with Vietnam. Hanoi viewed this as a threat to its security and

went on a propaganda offensive. Hanoi Radio broadcast some articles in Khmer and English as reported in several dailies. It called the Pol Pot regime "the most ferocious murderer in the history of mankind," and called on the world leaders to "stop this self genocide." 36

The current crisis therefore came to involve the Soviet Union and China on the side of Vietnam and Kampuchea respectively. The Vietnamese wanted to be assured of an effective safeguard in the event of an external aggression on Vietnam. The Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty of November 1978 served most of these purposes. It provided Vietnam the support of a superpower. Vietnam agreed to lend its ports and airbases to Soviet warships and aircraft for refuelling. The two countries also agreed to cooperate for constructing military communication facilities. In return for these concessions, the Soviet Union agreed to take action in response to a threat to Vietnam's security.

Hanoi's first dry season offensive against the Pol Pot regime was launched in December 1977.

itself. It gave the impression, according to one report, that Hanoi's aim was limited to occupying a zone along the frontiers, to serve both as a buffer zone against the Khmer border attacks and as a means of increasing the pressure on Pol Pot. 37

Later on, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, while visiting ASEAN countries on a goodwill mission, stressed the need for Vietnam's friendship and amicable relationship with all the ASEAN countries. This, however, could not mitigate the suspicions of Pol Pot and China about Vietnam's aggressive designs. 38

By early December 1978, Hanoi had come to the conclusion that there was little political risk in attempting the overthrow of Pol Pot. This assumption was based on five factors: (1) The widespread condemnation outside Kampuchea of Pol Pot's violation of human rights; (2) the consequent dissatisfaction and alienation of a substantial part of the Kampuchean population; (3) the decline in Chinese support for the leadership of Pol Pot; (4) the Friendship Treaty signed with Moscow in November 1978 which assured Vietnam of

Soviet support in case of any Chinese aggression; (5) the formation of National United Front for National Salvation (NUFNS) in December 1978, under the leadership of a Khmer Officer of an anti-Pol Pot front. 39

On 3 December 1978 the United Front for National Salvation was formed in the "liberated zone" of Kampuchea. It consisted of about 1500 square kilometres of Krak, Memot and Snoul districts held by the Vietnamese troops. The Vietnamese launched their major offensive on 25 December 1978, pouring in more than 100,000 troops and a section of the air force into the Kampuchean territory. By 10 January 1979 they entered Phnom Penh and advanced to capture Kompong Chahng. 40 During the next two days they captured this important military base and also gained control of major towns and land routes. Pol Pot was overthrown and a new regime led by Heng Samrin was installed with Vietnamese support.


The campaign in Kampuchea brought about fundamental changes in Vietnam's relations with the great powers and the South East Asian countries. It brought Vietnam closer to the Soviet Union. During this military operation the Soviets sent major military equipment to the Vietnamese, and a naval task force floated into the Vietnamese waters. But Vietnam's hopes for normalization of relations with the United States were pushed back. And the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in February 1979 ended Vietnam's hopes of dividing the United States from China on the Kampuchean issue.

China Teaching Lesson to Vietnam

The fall of the pro-China government in Kampuchea and the preceding incidents of confiscation of Chinese people's property, expulsion of ethnic Chinese, alignment with the Soviet Union and the border provocations, all these incidents irritated the Chinese. After the fall of Phnom Penh on 30 January 1979, Deng Xiaoping while he


42. International Herald Tribune, 26 September 1979.
was in the United States spoke of teaching Vietnam a lesson. 43 He said, "we could not dismiss the possibility of using armed forces against Vietnam ... to safeguard Chinese security and borders, we need to act appropriately, we cannot allow Vietnam to turn wild everywhere. In the interest of world peace and stability and the interest of our own country, we may be forced to do what we do not like to do." 44 In Houston, Deng reiterated support for Kampuchean, declaring that China would surely "support Kampuchea" as best she could, although China's means were limited. 45

China mounted an attack on Vietnam on 17 February 1979 but the Vietnamese fought them with considerable success. The Chinese were pushed back approximately 56 kilometres from the border, 46 with both sides making divergent claims. On 5 March the Chinese took the decision to with-

draw troops.

The war then lapsed into a prolonged negotiating phase. Hanoi first came in with a three-point proposal as the basis for negotiated settlement: 47 (1) the creation of a demilitarized zone to secure peace in the border region, and an exchange of prisoners; (2) restoration of normal relations between the two countries on the basis of the principles of peaceful coexistence; (3) settlement on the border and territorial dispute on the basis of the French-Chinese agreement of 1887 and 1895.

China responded by submitting an eight point proposal: 48 (1) A responsible solution of dispute and issues in the relations between the two countries through peaceful negotiation on the basis of five principles of peaceful coexistence; (2) Neither side should seek hegemony in Indochina, South East Asia or any part of the world, and each was opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony;


and Vietnamese troops should withdraw from Kampuchea; (3) The PRC-Vietnam boundary line, as delimited in 1957-58 should serve as the basis for negotiated settlement; (4) The two sides should demarcate their respective economic zones and continental shelves in Beiku Gulf (Gulf of Tonkin) and other sea areas in a fair and reasonable way; (5) Vietnam should respect China's sovereignty over the Paracels (Hsisha) islands; (6) Each side should treat all the nations of the other side residing in its territory in a friendly manner and must not persecute or illegally expel them; (7) The Vietnamese government should receive returning Vietnamese citizens who had been forcibly driven by Vietnamese authorities into Chinese territory; and (8) The restoration of railway traffic, trade, civil aviation, postal and telecommunication services and other bilateral ties should be dealt with by the department concerned of the two countries through consultations.

However, both parties regarded the negotiation as a continuation of their struggle. Despite fifteen rounds of negotiations they could reach no agreement, while each accused the other of insincerity. Vietnam itself learnt no lesson:
it not only continued but intensified the policies which China's lesson was designed to halt or slow down. Furthermore, the Vietnamese increased their expulsion of overseas Chinese creating a regional and global reaction against Hanoi. Vietnam also was not deterred from maintaining its influence over Kampuchea.

The Soviet role in the war was limited to issuing warnings to the Chinese and assuring Vietnam of their loyalty. An 18 February statement said that the Soviet Union would "honour its obligation" in the Treaty with Vietnam but it also stated that Vietnam would stand up for itself.49 The promise of loyalty to the treaty was reiterated by Brezhnev in a speech before the Supreme Soviet on 1 March.50

The benefits to the Soviets of Vietnam's successful retaliation in the war were that Moscow acquired firm rights to the use of the naval base at Cam Ranh, which Vietnam had been reluctant to provide. Rights to Cam Ranh would give the Soviet Navy a powerful new advantage and pose a

potential threat to Chinese, Japanese and western shipping lines. With an air base at Da Nang in addition, the Soviet forces would not only be placed astride major sealanes, but would also be able to provide their fleets with limited air cover. 51

Prospect for ASEAN-Vietnam Dialogue

Economic, political and regional cooperation in the region has always been the slogan of the ASEAN countries. But there was also the political calculus of this regional grouping to seek reassurance against both the Chinese and Vietnamese threats.

Relations between ASEAN and Vietnam did not alter to any significant extent through 1977, when the Second ASEAN summit was held in Kuala Lumpur. By the time China began to express friendship and solidarity with the five nations, the Vietnamese had taken a major initiative by sending emissaries on a series of visits to the ASEAN countries. A Thai-Vietnamese joint communique issued on 10

September 1978 stated that Pham Van Dong and General Kriangsak Chomanan the Thai Prime Minister had undertaken to refrain "from interfering in each other's internal affairs, from carrying out subversion direct or indirect to each other, from using force as threatening to use force against each other," this being interpreted as a pledge by Vietnam not to assist the Communist guerrillas in Thailand. Dong subsequently visited the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, at the conclusion of each visit signing a joint communique on lines similar to the Vietnamese-Thai communique. The concept of South East Asia as a Zone of peace and neutrality along the lines proposed by Malaysia and adopted by ASEAN was also supported.

All the suggestions of interdependence and mutuality of interest between ASEAN and Vietnam however were suspended with Hanoi signing the friendship treaty with the Soviets and its intervention in Kampuchea thereafter. The Foreign Ministers of the five ASEAN countries hastily assembled in Bangkok on 12 January 1979 and issued a statement calling for unilateral withdrawal of

foreign troops from Kampuchea. 53 The demand was reiterated in stronger terms at their annual meeting in Bali in June 1979, encouraged by the United Nations call for withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea. At their meeting in Kuala Lumpur the five Foreign Ministers restated their position that Vietnamese troops should withdraw from Kampuchea and that a UN team of observers should go to Thailand to assess the situation. It was agreed that Malaysian Foreign Minister Tunku Ahmad Rithauddeen should go to Hanoi, in his capacity as Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee to renew dialogue with the Vietnamese.

Vietnam's response was to accuse ASEAN of playing "double faced games." ASEAN nations, particularly Thailand and Malaysia were indirectly warned that if they did not change their policy towards Vietnam and continued to side with China, "they will face problems." 54 The matter was again taken up at the Indochinese Foreign Ministers Conference in Phnom Penh, where ASEAN countries


were urged to sign bilateral pacts with the Indochinese countries. "It is still not too late," the communique said, "for the ASEAN countries to realise that they themselves are covered by Chinese expansionism and hegemony."55

During the visit to Hanoi Rithauddeen was promised that Vietnamese troops would not violate Kampuchea's sovereignty. He was also told that peace and stability would return to the region if Thailand stopped aiding the remnant Khmer Rouge Army. In May–June 1980 the Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach visited Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Jakarta, making assertions during the visit that the Kampuchea situation was irreversible. Co Thach told Malaysian officials that if the Thais stopped collaborating with the Chinese on resupplying the Khmer Rouge, Vietnam might withdraw its troops from the border and thus defuse the tension there. The possibility of accepting Indonesian and Malaysian observers to monitor the activities on the Thai–Kampuchean border and even to witness the election to be

held in Kampuchea was also hinted at.

Thailand meanwhile invited Burma's Foreign Minister U Lay Maung to take the initiative to set up a meeting in Rangoon between Thai and Vietnamese Foreign Ministers. While U Maung was busy about this task it was announced that the Foreign Ministers of Kampuchea, Laos and Vietnam had met in Ho Chi Minh City on 24 and 25 January 1981. They had drawn up a three-point proposal for promoting peace in the region. The Indochina ministers expressed their hope for a conference between Indochina and ASEAN to discuss regional issues rather than the Kampuchean situation alone. Vietnam also offered to withdraw some of its troops estimated around 200,000 from Kampuchea, if Thailand undertook to curb the activities of guerrillas operating from inside its territory against Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea.

ASEAN turned down the Indochinese proposals on the ground that they ignored the call for withdrawal of foreign forces from Kampuchean territory and the exercise of the rights of Kampuchean people

57. Times of India (New Delhi) 4 February 1981.
to determine their own future. They insisted on an international conference and rejected the proposal for a regional conference as an attempt to bypass the former. At a meeting in Manila they sought to assure the Vietnamese of their security upon withdrawal of their forces from Kampuchea, through a proposal for despatch of a U.N. peacekeeping force to Kampuchea and disarming of all Khmer factions after the Vietnamese withdrew to prevent the pro-Chinese Khmer Rouge from coming to power. 58

Meanwhile, the Kampuchean Foreign Minister hinted in an interview that "there is a possibility of the Vietnamese remaining five to ten years but there is also a possibility of them leaving earlier." 59 Early withdrawal in the view of the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, would depend on destruction of Pol Pot and the removal of the resistance movement bases on the Thai-Kampuchean soil. Prince Sihanouk was most welcome to Kampuchea, he said, if he abandoned his linkage with Pol Pot. 60


59. Ibid., p. 31.

60. Ibid
The prince however was not so inclined, and on 4 September 1981 he agreed to head a government-in-exile, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, which comprised, besides himself, the former Prime Minister Khieu Samphen of the Pol Pot group and Son Sann, a former prime minister who now headed the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). 61

In their semi-annual conference in July 1982 the Indochinese Foreign Ministers agreed to the ASEAN proposal for an international conference on South East Asia to discuss the situation in Kampuchea. They also proposed to unilaterally withdraw a part of the Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea, 62 and a "safety zone" along the Thai-Kampuchean border that would allow only limited Thai and Kampuchean troops along the border. These were major policy decisions and not mere palliatives to counter any challenge the formation of the CGDK may have posed. In fact, the CGDK, whose elements lacked any ideological cohesion and proper organizational setup, 63 was already showing cracks in its ranks. ASEAN, however, ignored these proposals.


63. Hindustan Times, 16 April 1983.
In July 1982 Vietnam unilaterally pulled out six units of troops, numbering between 20,000 and 30,000. The Vietnamese said that they were doing this as a gesture of good will towards their neighbours but warned the ASEAN leaders and China that they would be forced to take effective measures should the withdrawal result in increased hostility towards the Kampuchean people. In spite of these conciliatory gestures by Vietnam however ASEAN has been maintaining that Vietnam's role in Kampuchea has been the "root cause" of instability in South East Asia. The ASEAN countries view Hanoi as playing a predetermined game of domination in Kampuchea, supported by its ideology and by its expansionist designs.

In December 1982 the CGDK guerrillas went on the offensive and heavy fighting took place till April 1983 around the CGDK military bases Phnom Chat and Nong Chan or near north of Highway Five on the Thai border. The CGDK guerrillas struck frequently into Kampuchea from their shelter in Thai territory. The CGDK's militancy was further strengthened in the second

half of 1983 with the induction of fresh arms from Beijing, Thailand and Singapore to their camps. Prince Sihanouk stated on 24 January 1984 that his guerrillas were operating as far as the Vietnamese border and carrying on insurgency in all 18 provinces of Kampuchea. 68

The Indochinese Foreign Ministers at their meeting on 12 April 1983 had proposed to create a security zone on the Thai-Kampuchean border from where troops and guerrillas of both sides would be withdrawn. 69 The Vietnamese leaders had also in May 1983 announced another partial pullout of troops, including one infantry division and six attached regiments and brigades. 70 The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' response to these moves was merely to ask Vietnam to agree to withdrawal of troops 30 kilometres from the Thai-Kampuchean border.

In June 1983 the Vietnamese transit routes to Kampuchea through southern Laos were reported to be disturbed by a new United Front of Laotian Guerrillas. These guerrillas, numbering about 4,000 were armed by the Kampuchean resistance groups. 71 Vietnam was also

70. The Hindu, 3 May 1983.
upset by the resumption of Sino-Soviet negotiations in 1983 and the inclusion of Kampuchea as an issue in their talks, since even a short-term Sino-Soviet rapprochement is likely to affect Hanoi's position in Kampuchea and would enable China to deploy its troops against Vietnam.

On 6 April 1984, in retaliation to the Vietnamese shelling of the Chinese border provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan, the Chinese launched a major attack on Vietnam's border. They attacked two hills in Vietnam's Lang Song province, 160 kilometres north of Hanoi. Quang Ninh (a province near Lang Son) was evacuated by the Vietnamese as a precautionary measure and vigilance on the border tightened. Later in the month Vietnam launched an assault on Ampil, the main KPNLF base, inflicting hundreds of casualties on the KPNLF forces. About 72,000 Kampuchean refugees were evacuated to Thailand to escape artillery fire.

The frequent clashes on the Sino-Vietnamese border...

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72. *Hindustan Times*, 1 August 1983.
border and the Thai-Kampuchean border brought into focus the problems of the resettlement of refugees. In 1983 more than 500,000 Vietnamese and Kampuchean refugees were estimated to be confined in temporary camps in Thailand or in the border areas. The influx of Indochinese refugees had commenced in 1978 when border disputes between Vietnam and Kampuchea occurred. In 1979 an estimated one million Indochinese reached Thailand, most of whom were resettled in the ASEAN countries and some in the United States. In August 1983 there were another 400,000 Kampuchean refugees scattered in temporary camps along the Thai-Kampuchean border. The United Nations and the world community were asked to provide aid and resettlement areas for them.

The perpetual flow of the refugees despite the launching of the Orderly Departure Programme (ODP) by the Vietnamese in early 1982 raised considerable apprehensions among the donor and recipient states. The attitude of the United States and ASEAN towards Vietnam was hardened because of it and world opinion on

75. Hindustan Times, 1 August 1983.
76. Ibid.
Vietnam's policy towards the refugee problem became distorted. The result was that it became more difficult for Vietnam to deal with the refugee problem through cooperative efforts and the repatriation process could not be pursued vigorously. The United States and the ASEAN countries did provide asylum to them, though quite grudgingly. 79

The outflow of the refugees however declined considerably after the Indochinese governments took security measures against illegal deportations and the Vietnamese launched the ODP in 1982. 80 The office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported on 21 December 1983 that the number of "boat people" fleeing from Vietnam by sea had declined to 30,000 as against 202,000 in 1979. 81 However, in January 1984 the alleged deaths of a number of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand caused serious concern among the Vietnamese authorities and increased their hostilities on the border regions. 82

78. Ibid., p.113.
81. Ibid.
82. Asian Recorder, n.68, no.10, 4-10 March, 1984, p.17636
In June 1984 the Vietnamese troops claimed to have captured Hill 547 on the Thai border, which served as the headquarters of the Khmer Rouge general staff.\(^{83}\) Vietnam also claimed that its troops had "put out of action" 5,500 Chinese on its border with Chia, which involved one Chinese regiment and nine battalions; 35 artillery positions were destroyed in the action.\(^ {84}\) The Chinese military presence along the border had increased prior to U.S. President Ronald Reagan's visit to China and continued when high level Sino-U.S. and Sino-Thai exchanges were going on, in the expectation that the Vietnamese would feel compelled to decrease their attacks on CGDK bases.\(^ {85}\)

Vietnamese troops are at present engaged in the routine task of defending the frontier mostly in the north and northwest of Kampuchea, to block the entry of the 40-50,000 anti-government rebels, 30,000 of which are still under the direct control of Pol Pot.\(^ {86}\)


\(^ {84}\) Ннан Дан, 5 June 1984.


On its own, the Phnom Penh regime cannot survive these attacks militarily, even though it is fully capable of running the administration by itself. This is why Vietnamese leaders declare in private that the situation in Kampuchea is "irreversible," though they do not make much public reference to this belief since January 1981 largely as a conciliatory gesture to the ASEAN nations. 87

Hanoi continues to regard the Kampuchean problem as a regional issue which can be solved at a regional conference in which general security issues can be discussed along with the discussions relating to its military presence in Kampuchea. 88 Hanoi apparently believes that time is on its side and sooner or later the world community will be driven to give full recognition to its military presence in Kampuchea. Vietnam's military sponsorship has in fact made it easier for the Kampuchean government to show that it can provide for the security of the people and win their loyalty. 89


89. M. Isayev, n.86, p.27.
The visit to China of Thailand's Supreme Commander General Arthit Kamlangek in May 1984 and the visit to the United States of Chinese Defence Minister Zhang Aiping in June 1984 have convinced Hanoi that China is their main enemy. The daily Nhan Dan of Hanoi commented on 7 June 1984 that Zhang's visit was a "new and dangerous step in the Chinese-U.S. military collusion" whose main purpose was to seek Washington's help for "furtherance of its expansionist experiment and hegemonistic ambition." 90

Although Vietnam is accused by many as being the major factor behind instability in South East Asia, in reality these factors are external and lie beyond the control of Hanoi. The attempts of the external powers - the United States and China, to establish patron-client relationship with the non-communist countries in the region and their covert and overt attempts to destabilize the existing regimes in Indochina, have only aggravated the present crisis. 91

The stalemate over Kampuchea continued in 1984 with claims and counter claims being made by the warring fronts. The Kampuchean Defence Minister Bou

90. n.84, 7 June 1984.
Thong claimed that between January and June 1984 more than 10,000 Khmer rebels had been killed, wounded or captured. But the PRK Government is aware that they are facing a political as well as a military struggle, and they have admitted that their opponents have scored some successes on their own and can operate inside the country.

The Heng Samrin government reminded its people on the fifth anniversary of the PRK on 7 January 1984 that the task of national reconstruction had begun in Kampuchea with the support of Vietnam and other socialist countries. However, because of the activities of external powers and the guerrilla activities of the CGDK the reconstruction efforts were hampered. But "complication" was inevitable, Heng Samrin said, "in the struggle by our people against the enemy's war of systematic destruction, and our national reconstruction." He expressed confidence that his government would prevail. The present stage of socio-economic reconstruction going on in Kampuchea with the willing assistance of Vietnam,

93. Ibid., p.56.
95. Ibid.
lends credence to such optimism: Peace and tranquility in Kampuchea and elsewhere in Indochina can well be restored provided the external powers abandon their efforts at destabilising the existing regimes in Indochina and mounting assaults on their borders.

Kampuchea has been so much affected by the events since 1960 that it cannot undergo rapid socio-economic transformation except with international assistance. Some assistance has been provided by United Nations agencies like UNICEF, UNESCO etc., but it is insufficient to meet the country's requirements. The bulk of assistance has come from Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The relatively improved living standards, development of foreign trade, higher literacy rate among the people and the growth of more industrial enterprises in Kampuchea is in no small measure due to its economic and technical collaboration with Vietnam.

Suggestions like the introduction of a peace-keeping force in Kampuchea after the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops have been rejected by the PRK leaders. They believe that after the Vietnam forces are withdrawn, the PRK troops will be in a position to safeguard national security. But as things stand, there is little prospect of any
changing political situation, unless some fresh initiative is taken by the ASEAN countries and China, or by the Indochinese countries. It is the Beijing-Bangkok-Washington axis which concerns the Indochinese countries most, and they have made it clear that external powers will not have any say in arriving at a future political settlement for Kampuchea.

The ASEAN countries have as much to gain from the cessation of hostilities in Indochina, as Vietnam itself. They have had to provide asylum to the Indochinese refugees, even though temporarily. Arming of the CGDK guerrillas has been a drain on their resources and their trade links have also been disrupted as a result of the frequent clashes on the Thai-Kampuchean border. Malaysia and Indonesia have been the foremost in demanding that steps be taken towards the resolution of the conflict. But no serious attempt can be made towards resolving the Kampuchean problem without taking into account the implications of a continued Sino-Vietnamese hostility. These issues are interrelated: if the Chinese can be prevented from extending their support to the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea via Thailand, then the Vietnamese will be left with a free hand to settle their score.
with China on their northern border.

The Vietnamese are keen to maintain their friendly ties with Laos and Kampuchea which is essential for their country's strategic defence. Vietnam's long northern border with China and geographical proximity to Kampuchea on the southwest makes the Vietnamese apprehensive that China may attempt to divide the country. The pattern of economic development in North Vietnam and South Vietnam has been uneven due to their different political setups till 1975. It is for these reasons that the Vietnamese need a stable political regime in Kampuchea and they can ill afford an expanding Chinese influence in Kampuchea either directly or through proxy.

The coalition government is at sixes and sevens because the non-communist factions are not getting much aid, since Chinese assistance is primarily directed towards the Khmer Rouge. In the first half of July 1984 the Khmer Rouge forces launched some attacks on the National Sihanoukist Army (ANS) men in the province of Siem Reap and forced them to provide the Khmer Rouge the captured Vietnamese prisoners and arms. The CGDK's morale is quite low, while that of the Vietnam-backed government still remains high.