KAMPUCHEA:

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S FLASHPOINT

by

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According to Thailand's military supreme command, on 23 July 1983, near the village of Ban Khiong Chak on Thailand's southeastern frontier with Kampuchea, Thai ranger and marine units clashed with elements of the Vietnamese Fourth Infantry Division who were said to have intruded on Thai soil. The Vietnamese, though supported by 60mm grenade launchers fired from a nearby hill base, reportedly were driven off with "some losses." One commentary on the incident, broadcast over a Bangkok transmitter with close ties to the Thai Army, noted that the incident was not the first of its kind since the closing weeks of 1978 when Vietnamese forces invaded and occupied most of Kampuchea. The same commentary went on to charge that "the Vietnamese soldiers have often deliberately violated Thai sovereignty with incursions into Thai territory and by firing . . . artillery . . . and grenades, causing damage to Thai homes and loss of Thai lives."[1]

Just what constitutes "Thai territory" along the Thai-Kampuchean border is, by the Bangkok government's own admission, subject to some interpretation. But there is no doubt that Thai-Vietnamese military clashes have been going on for nearly two years. Moreover, the political context in which these clashes are taking place—i.e. the unresolved international dispute over Kampuchea and the persistent problem of 150,000 border refugees—is aggravating the danger of the Thai-Vietnamese confrontation. The fighting at Ban Khiong Chak, like similar preceding and, no doubt, future incidents, has implications not only for Thailand's neighbors in ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, founded in 1967 and in addition to Thailand comprising Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore) but also for the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the Soviet Union, all of which have taken sides and all of which diplomatically, logistically, and strategically have been drawn into the Kampuchean problem.

It is appropriate to note that the Thai-Vietnamese military clashes appear to be the inevitable consequence of the stepped-up, anti-Vietnamese resistance in Kampuchea itself, a resistance that has the political and covert material support of Thailand, Singapore, and other ASEAN nations, as well as the PRC. On 22 August 1982 the Thai Army commander-in-chief, General Athir Kamlang-Ek, said that Vietnamese forces were intensifying their operations against Kampuchean resistance groups and that the fighting was resulting in "spillovers across the border into Thailand."[2]

Today some 30,000 DK forces, known as the "National Army of Democratic Kampuchea," continue to wage a largely guerrilla-style war against the 180,000 Vietnamese forces now in Kampuchea and their 8000 or so allies, the PRK's "People's Volunteers." The DK forces, together with officials and supporters, popularly continue to be referred to as "Khmer Rouge" (Red Khmers or Cambodians), the term used to designate the Cambodian communists during the Vietnam War. Pol Pot, internationally odious because

of his bloody leadership while in office in Phnom Penh (1975-79), formally relinquished the DK premiership in 1981 to DK President Khieu Sampan.[3] Pol Pot continues, however, as commander of the now underground DK government's "National Army." Additionally, the Kampuchean resistance comprises the 10,000-man military force of the Kampuchean National Liberation Front (KPNLF), formally headed by former Cambodian premier Son Sann, and the 2000-man Moulinaka (*Mouvement de Libération Nationale du Kampouchea*). The latter is led by Cambodia's longtime ruler (1956-70) Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who, after considerable ASEAN pressure joined Khieu Sampan and Son Sann at the head of a "Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea" (CGDK). Both the KPNLF and the Moulinaka are based in a string of more or less permanent refugee camps and hamlets just inside the Kampuchean border along the Thai frontier. Along with the DK, they periodically assert that they are engaged in regular operations against the Vietnamese and PRK forces.

Claims by the CGDK of the extent of these operations, such as ambushes, raids on Vietnamese garrisons, and demolition of depots and lines of communication, must be taken with reservation. The drumfire of victories claimed by the DK's media over the years has been especially steady, unrelenting, and, in the end, less then fully convincing. Nevertheless, the increased severity of the Vietnamese military reaction along the border in the course of 1983 suggests that the stepped-up operations by the CGDK were beginning to have an effect on Hanoi, and in political terms as well. In early September 1982 a clandestine DK transmitter, believed to be based in the PRC's southern Yunnan province, broadcast a claim that DK forces had killed or wounded nearly 500 Vietnamese military in what was called "an upsurge of guerrilla fighting" in previous weeks.[4] Widely roaming DK assassination squads reportedly were wreaking havoc among PRK officials: the PRK Deputy Agriculture Minister, Nhem Heng, and two of his advisers were killed by such squads in August. By October 1982 KPNLF units also claimed to have begun to intensify their operations against "Vietnamese positions" between the towns of Sisophon and Poipet, resulting in "heavy fighting."[5]

Even after the Vietnamese began in January 1983 to strike back more intensively at the Moulinaka and KPNLF encampments among the border refugee settlements, insurgent operations went on. By mid-May 1983 Moulinaka commander In Tam claimed that some 2000 CGDK guerrillas now were in control of a number of "liberated zones" inside Kampuchean territory.[6] Except for their attacks on the rebel strongholds in the border refugee camps in the early months of 1983, the Vietnamese military campaign against the CGDK "has not gone well for the Vietnamese," according to one US observer reporting from the Thai border in May 1983. He added that the Vietnamese "have taken tens of thousands of casualties, and officials in Hanoi admit that troop morale has faded."[7] Also, by the end of May 1983 the anti-Vietnamese resistance in Kampuchea, according to Bangkok press reports, was accelerating its "harassment raids on Vietnamese supply routes deep inside Kampuchea," and KPNLF forces were reportedly organizing for still further attacks.[8] Meanwhile, the KPNLF also was stepping up its international propaganda campaign. In early August 1983 the KPNLF released photographs of what it said were its troops entering an unidentified village in the interior of Kampuchea. KPNLF sources offered the photographs as proof of the results of the KPNLF's new "aggressive"

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policy which was said to have begun the previous September when Son Sann, in an order of the day, reportedly said to his forces: "Henceforth let us move East," adding, "Our sacred duty is to liberate our motherland from the Vietnamese aggressors."[9] The question of the CGDK's foreign support also increasingly seemed to be entering the limelight. Not much credibility was given to Laotian sources which asserted in early July 1983, on the basis of an Indian press report, that thousands of Chinese advisers now were assisting the DK's troops. But there was no contradiction when CGDK President Prince Norodom Sihanouk said in early May 1983 that Singapore had provided 3000 automatic rifles to the KPNLF, and that the People's Republic of China had been supplying an equal number of weapons to the Prince's own Moulinaka forces. Still larger supplies of Chinese weapons, according to Sihanouk, were going to the Khmer Rouge.[10]

Whatever the extent of the threat posed by the CGDK's forces, perhaps as alarming to the Vietnamese was the reality or the suspicion of growing disloyalty among PRK officials. In the course of June 1983 and the following months, "mass arrests" by the Vietnamese were reported to have taken place among PRK military, civil servants, and even simple villagers, particularly in the northern provinces of Oddar Meanchey, Siem Reap, and Battambang. Those arrested were suspected of being followers of the KPNLF and Sihanouk's Moulinaka. Protest demonstrations by Kampucheans against the arrests were followed by a new wave of more than 7000 refugees fleeing to the Kampuchean border settlements. Refugee tales that PRK President Heng Samrin himself had been arrested in early July were denied by Phnom Penh. But there was no contradiction to the report that some 30 high-ranking PRK officials had been detained, among them the governor of Siem Reap province and his deputy, and senior military and party officials.[11] On 17 June 1983 a Thai Army spokesman announced that Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea had disarmed the entire 286th division of the PRK Army, based in Oddar Meanchey, and arrested its commander and senior officers. According to the same Thai source, a number of the division's members subsequently had joined the CGDK resistance forces.[12] Perhaps less worrisome to Hanoi, but at least as embarrassing, has been the steady trickle of deserting Vietnamese military in Kampuchea and Laos who seek refuge in Thailand and who in various petitions have insisted that they "were not willing soldiers invading neighboring countries."[13] Troubling, too, for Hanoi has been the evident Kampuchean resentment of and resistance to Vietnamese-imposed conscription, to forced resettlement programs for Kampuchean villagers, and especially to the influx in the past two years of Vietnamese farmers as permanent settlers in key rural areas. This alleged "Vietnamization" of Kampuchean agrarian society envisages that as much as 20 percent of the Kampuchean rural population eventually will be composed of ethnic Vietnamese.[14]

To the Vietnamese the military forays of the KPNLF and Moulinaka into the interior of Kampuchea, and their use of bases in the refugee camps along the Thai-Kampuchean border, demanded a drastic clean-up action. Even as they were continuing their operations against the guerrillas, ensconced in the Cardamom Mountain range as well as on the border, Hanoi and its PRK ally decided on a wide-ranging frontier campaign. On 31 January 1983 some 4000 Vietnamese troops, supported by light artillery and tanks, attacked the Nong Chan refugee camp just inside the northwestern Kampuchean border. During this operation there were heavy fire exchanges between Thai and Vietnamese troops. On 31 March 1983 and throughout the first week of April, about 1000 Vietnamese troops, augmented by about 600 PRK "people's volunteers," attacked the refugee settlements of Phnom Chat and Chamkar Kor, aided by artillery, rocket, and Soviet T-54 tank fire. Thai officials claimed that the Vietnamese attacks again had resulted in "spillovers" of Vietnamese artillery and mortar shells falling into adjacent Thai territory.[15]

The attacks were not unexpected. By 20 January 1983 the Thai military Supreme

Command had reported that 3000 fresh Vietnamese troops had arrived at the border area and that intensified operations could be expected. Thai-Vietnamese confrontations also were intensifying. The Thai command reported that in the preceding week Thai military had killed 20 Vietnamese troops in five clashes with Vietnamese forces who had intruded into Thai territory while "in hot pursuit" of anti-Vietnamese insurgents.[16]

On 4 April 1983 came yet another Vietnamese assault. This time it was directed against the refugee settlement of O Smach. Just as Phnom Chat and Chamkar Kor, at the time of the Vietnamese attacks on them, had served as regimental headquarters for a force of at least 3500 troops of the DK's "National Army of Democratic Kampuchea," O Smach (also dubbed "Sihanoukville") had been the headquarters of the Moulinaka.[17] At least 40,000 Kampuchean refugees from the Phnom Chat and O Smach settlements found a temporary refuge by crossing into Thailand. It is official Thai policy that Kampuchean refugees, with rare exceptions, not be given permanent sanctuary in Thailand; they are expected to return to Kampuchea, and the exceptions are officially required to move to other countries.

The attack on O Smach brought a particularly sharp Thai verbal protest. According to Bangkok military officials, during their pursuit of DK "National Army" units some 150 Vietnamese soldiers not only had gone well into Thai territory, but they also were said to have attempted to take up an entrenched position in the Phmom Pra hill border area of Thailand. According to the Thais, the Vietnamese intruders ultimately had been driven off by Thai F-5 jets. Bangkok also claimed that there had been hand-to-hand combat during the incident and that five Thais had been killed. In separate statements to Western and Soviet ambassadors in Bangkok, the Thai government charged Vietnam with provoking a military conflict with Thailand through repeated border violations in the past year, and also lodged another protest with the UN Secretary General.[18] On 21 December 1982 the Thai government already had sent a similar protest over alleged Vietnamese border violations to the UN. Perhaps most significant was a strong US State Department condemnation, issued on 31 March 1983, of the Phnom Chat attack, followed shortly thereafter by the US airlift to Thailand of US weapons, including long-range howitzers and antiaircraft missiles, all meant as an earnest show of American support for the Bangkok government in what seemed to be the deepening border crisis.

The possibility of future, more severe, artillery exchanges should not be minimized. A new American-assisted acceleration in the upgrading of Thai border weapon systems, as part of the $66 million in US arms credits for Thailand for the 1983 fiscal year (over $100 million is requested for 1984), likely foreshadows still further dueling along the Thai-Kampuchean frontier. On 2 February 1983, even before the Phnom Chat and O Smach incidents, Thai military sources had claimed that about 200 Vietnamese had been killed or wounded in an artillery exchange with Thai forces near the Nong Chan camp seized by Vietnamese troops two days before.[19] On 7 July 1983, Thai military sources charged that the Vietnamese, despite the above-cited earlier Thai protests, had launched an artillery attack on the Kampuchean refugee camp at O Bok, near O Smach, sending yet another 300 refugees fleeing into Thailand.[20]

New, concentrated Vietnamese assaults on the closely clustered frontier refugee settlements—which, it must be emphasized again, continue to serve as major CGDK recruiting grounds and guerrilla staging areas—reportedly are being planned for the coming months, particularly on KPNLF strongholds near Bang Sa Ngae. "Spillovers" on Thai soil of such attacks are a near certainty. Meanwhile, Hanoi is stepping up its own claims of alleged Thai border violations. On 23 August 1983, for example, Hanoi's VNA news agency asserted that in the preceding week alone Thai aircraft had strayed over the Kampuchean border seven times during reconnaissance sorties, and that

the same week "saw 72 intrusions by armed boats from Thailand into Kampuchean waters."

The Vietnamese perceive a serious danger in the floating Kampuchean refugee population; living in CGDK-dominated, PRC- or ASEAN-supplied camps; and being afforded a safe haven across the Thai frontier in the event of a Vietnamese attack (almost as if Thailand were a protected rear base area for guerrillas in the manner of the old Maoist "people's war" tactics). Their concern is illustrated by what Southeast Asian media these days like to refer to as Vietnam's "Berlin Wall." By mid-May 1983 the Vietnamese completed construction of a land-mined and bamboo-spike-studded trench, six meters wide and 25 kilometers long, in Kampuchea near the Thai border. Apparently designed as both an antipersonnel and an antitank barrier, the trench begins about 12 miles south of Aranyaprathet and runs in a northeasterly direction.[21]

The trench is to be extended in stages, sealing off as much of the Thai border and refugee camp region as possible. As one Bangkok daily editorialized, whereas the Berlin Wall was designed to keep East Germans inside their country, the objective of the Vietnamese trench seems to be to prevent "many of the Kampucheans who had fled the fury of the Vietnamese dry season offensive" (i.e. at Nong Chan, Phnom Chat, and O Smach) from "going back to the jungles of Western Kampuchea to join one or the other of the three guerrilla factions of Democratic Kampuchea."[22] This characterization is not altogether correct, because the Vietnamese appear to be equally concerned over the continuing flow of Kampucheans who—because of conscription, forced resettlement, food shortages, political purges, newly found loyalties to the anti-Vietnamese factions, or simply the lure of opportunity at the border with its extensive black markets and smuggling economy—decide to trek toward the Thai frontier and the refugee settlements.

The scope of this article excludes a detailed review of Thailand's complex refugee problem, including the more than 600,000 Indochinese refugees who have come to the kingdom primarily since the 1975 communist victory over South Vietnam, the 120,000 or so refugees still remaining in various camps inside Thailand, the problems of "third country" relocations of the refugees, and, above all, the problems of 200,000 inhabitants of the murky, racket-ridden world of refugee settlements along the Thai-Kampuchean border, some of them just inside Kampuchea but others straddling the frontier or located de facto inside Thailand.[23] As already noted, this difficult-to-control, floating mass has become an indispensible base of recruitment, training, and command for the main CGDK factions. Realizing the increasing security threat this refugee border community and its ASEAN-supported CGDK staging areas pose for Vietnam's stabilization and development policies and those of its PRK client regime in Kampuchea itself, Thai authorities in the first half of 1983 sought to "rectify" the uncertain border line. Some camps previously said to be "straddling" the frontier now were said by Bangkok officials to be in Thailand, and their Kampuchean residents were moved further eastward into Kampuchea; simple cartographic annexation by the PRK's mapmakers also has moved the earlier mentioned Nong Chan camp into Kampuchean territory.[24] Bangkok has strongly denied Phnom Penh's charges that the Thais have forcibly annexed refugee camp territory along the border, replacing old border markers with new.

The problem, again, is not just the dispute over the location of the frontier itself, though this too has an aggravating effect on Thai-Vietnamese relations. Rather, it is the inextricable relationship of the frontier problem with that of the refugee settlements serving as manpower, supply, and operational bases of an anti-Vietnamese "countergovernment," the CGDK, and its military organizations, engaged in an ongoing guerrilla war and backed by Thailand, ASEAN, the PRC, and the United States.

Ignoring annual UN General Assembly resolutions since 1979 demanding that it withdraw its forces from Kampuchea, Vietnam appears to be solidifying its military presence under the PRK's aegis. Periodic

announcements made by Hanoi in the past two years that it is withdrawing some of its forces, and is prepared to consider a phased withdrawal of all of them, are regularly contradicted by Thai military and intelligence sources. Such Vietnamese troops as have been withdrawn have merely been rotated, according to the Thais, their replacements arriving sometimes even before the others pull out. Thus, in mid-May 1983 the spokesman for Thailand's influential National Security Council, Squadron Leader Prasong Sunsiri, announced that 13,000 Vietnamese recruits had been sent from Vietnam through southern Laos before a much-publicized announcement by Hanoi early in May 1983 that it was withdrawing 15,000 of its troops from Kampuchea as another example of its good intentions.[25] According to Sunsiri, the route followed by the incoming Vietnamese troops—running from the south Laotian town of Xeno into Champassak in northern Kampuchea—was being developed by Hanoi as part of its regular Kampuchean troop rotation channel.

The importance of the new route also may be seen to lie in the progressive military consolidation of the three Indochinese states under Hanoi's aegis. Indeed, in June 1983 anti-Vietnamese Laotian resistance sources claimed that Vietnam had been developing a new "Ho Chi Minh Trail," actually comprising two roads, Routes 13 and 23, running from the city of Hue in Vietnam's Binh Tri Thien province, and from the town of Vinh in Nghe Tinh province, respectively, through southern Laos into northwestern Kampuchea. Subsequent reports have indicated that in mid-August 1983 construction was completed on the strategic "Highway no. 9," which begins in the Vietnamese coastal city of Dong Hoi and ends in the Laotian border town of Savannakhet, located on the Mekong River just across from the Thai city of Mukdahan, in Nakom Phanom province. Thai sources claim that some 12,000 Vietnamese troops are stationed in the Savannakhet area, along with a number of "Soviet, Polish, Cuban and Czechoslovakian advisers."[26]

Altogether some 40,000 troops of Vietnam's standing army of 1 million (still Asia's second largest, after the PRC's) are stationed in Laos, comprising almost as large a force as Laos's own 46,000-man, rapidly modernizing Army.[27] In Kampuchea, Vietnam's 180,000-man contingent, augmented by the PRK's largely Vietnamese-officered "people's volunteer" corps of 8000 (projected to increase to exceed 20,000), confronts a Thai Army of about 160,000. It is the People's Republic of China, which in the past three years repeatedly has promised to come to the aid of the Bangkok government in the event of a Vietnamese attack, that provides the strategic balance in the region.

But whether that balance will hold and prevent a major conflict will depend in large part on the degree to which the Thai-Kampuchean frontier becomes, even more than it already is for Hanoi, a chronic Lebanon-like crisis, threatening the long-term security of the PRK and therefore of Vietnam, continuously diverting precious development resources and impeding Kampuchea's and ultimately Vietnam's political and economic stabilization. The question, in short, is how much longer Hanoi will put up with the running, festering sore of its Thai-Kampuchean frontier problem. The Vietnamese "clean up" strikes against Nong Chan, Phnom Chat, O Smach, O Bok, and other border settlements, and the simultaneous construction not only of the frontier trench, but also of a logistical support network of new nearby supply roads and Vietnamese-PRK military encampments, suggest that Hanoi may be wearying of the "let's bleed Vietnam white" strategy of its opponents in the Kampuchean embroglio. Sustained and more intensive Vietnamese border "clean up" campaigns in the future, prompted by the pattern of daily attacks from the CGDK's armed units and by the refugee drain toward and across the Thai-Kampuchean border, inexorably would increase the frequency of clashes with Thai military and the severity of "spillovers" of the fighting on Thai soil.

At what point in such a scenario the Chinese would feel obliged to intervene and, as they did in February 1979, cross the Vietnamese-Chinese border with

their troops and teach Vietnam another "punitive lesson," would seem to depend largely on the progress being made to reach a diplomatic solution to the Kampuchean question. This is not the place to review the tortuous course of the diplomacy of the Kampuchean problem and the seemingly endless tactical variations in policy projections of the chief antagonists.[28] Suffice it to note here that the politico-strategic interests of two sets of parties to the dispute are involved. These two different levels of interests do not necessarily converge. The first set involves the Kampuchean people; Vietnam and its allies, the governments of the PRK and the "Lao People's Democratic Republic" (LPDR); and ASEAN. The second set comprises the three superpowers principally involved in the Kampuchean question: the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. The respective concerns and policy positions of the members of each set have crystallized and may be summarized briefly as follows.

The vast majority of Kampuchea's 5.9 million inhabitants today, survivors of the holocaust of the Pol Pot era and of the fighting and political conflicts that preceded it, probably prefer neither the Hanoi-imposed PRK, nor the CGDK, though both doubtlessly have and are likely to gain a further following. The PRK regime marks, after all, an improvement over the bloody horrors of the Pol Pot years, and recently, though food shortages persist, there has been an improvement in agricultural production and official economic policy has been sufficiently flexible to accord a place to "the flourishing private sector."[29] But Kampuchean nationalism, a factor in Pol Pot's own anti-Hanoi policies, angrily chafes against continuing Vietnamese dominance, even as PRK President Heng Samrin pronounces the "Kampuchean situation" to be "irreversible" and merely echoes Hanoi's vague conditions for a Vietnamese withdrawal—i.e. the Chinese must stop "colluding with US imperialism," end their aid to the "Pol Pot remnants" (presumably this includes the other CGDK factions), and refrain from "causing trouble along the Kampuchean-Thai border."[30]

As for the CGDK, its appeal is limited by its internal leadership squabbles and by widespread realization that within the CGDK the odious Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge faction remains the largest military force, its interests jealously guarded by Beijing. Even in ASEAN, the CGDK's strongest supporter, there is disappointment over its limited effect thus far. At the 24-25 June 1983 ASEAN Ministerial Conference in Bangkok, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Mokhtar Kusumaatmadja, declared that the CGDK yet had to show itself to be a "truly effective force" in solving the Kampuchean question, "the first time an ASEAN minister had made such an assertion in public."[31] Although during the past years CGDK President Norodom Sihanouk and CGDK Premier Son Sann have visited various world capitals to solicit support, it was noteworthy that at the same Bangkok conference ASEAN ministers urged the United States, Australia, the European community and their other "dialogue partners" to give even "non-lethal military aid such as communications equipment or boots" to the CGDK, so as to bring increased pressure on Vietnam.[32]

CGDK President Prince Norodom Sihanouk retains popularity among older Cambodians today, but the younger generation in Kampuchea is more skeptical. Meanwhile, the Prince's quarrels with CGDK Premier Son Sann, and Sihanouk's repeated threats to resign, further have impaired the CGDK's image. Even so, for thousands in Kampuchea today who are unwilling to see their nation steadily "Vietnamized," or are fearful of Hanoi's purges, the CGDK seems the only alternative to apathetic acquiescence in the "irreversible" status quo, or to permanent flight. The problem is that serious policy differences appear to exist within the CGDK leadership over the course to be followed to a Kampuchean settlement.

For example, in an address in Melbourne, Australia, in early May 1983, Son Sann stressed that neither a continuation of Vietnamese domination, making of Kampuchea a "pro-Soviet Communist state," nor protracted military struggle and an eventual "liberation" of Kampuchea from Hanoi's rule, which likely would turn the

country "once again" into a "pro-Peking Communist Cambodia," was acceptable or apt to bring peace. Therefore, creation of an independent, "strictly neutral," and "non-Communist Cambodia, which poses no threat to any country near or far," is "the only possible solution to the Cambodian problem," according to Son Sann.[33] Meanwhile, Sihanouk, reportedly increasingly dissatisfied with the allegedly "narrow" anti-Vietnamese approach of the CGDK, accused his coalition partners of leading the CGDK into a "dead end." Sihanouk therefore suggested a "national reconciliation" of all Kampuchean factions, including the PRK, and the creation of a "national union" government which would end the fighting and hold "free elections" for a new Kampuchean government. The Khieu Sampan-Pol Pot faction opposed this idea, however, according to Sihanouk.[34] And, indeed, at about the same time, Beijing media asserted that if the CGDK remained united it could achieve "military victory" over the Vietnamese. It was noted in the Singapore press that this Chinese view was in marked contrast to that of Sihanouk, who had said that it was "unrealistic and ridiculous" to expect that the CGDK's forces could defeat the Vietnamese.[35]

It is precisely this kind of Chinese talk of "military victory" that gives rise to Hanoi's basic, often-repeated position in the Kampuchean controversy: that only if the "Chinese threat" to Vietnam and, indeed, to Southeast Asia is removed can there be a complete Vietnamese military withdrawal. Beijing, needless to say, has ridiculed what it calls "the myth of the 'Chinese threat,' " charging instead that Vietnam has "long cherished designs" to control all of Indochina.[36]

ASEAN countries, meanwhile, have been caught increasingly between strong Chinese pressure to maintain a hard-line position, in conformity with past UN General Assembly resolutions calling for a complete Vietnamese withdrawal, and a more "flexible," conciliatory approach periodically offered by Hanoi. Such "flexibility" currently would involve a conference of the five ASEAN countries, Vietnam, and Laos (the PRK would not attend, lest its presence be interpreted as an ASEAN recognition of the legitimacy of the Heng Samrin regime), with an open agenda and no preconditions. At least two ASEAN members, Indonesia and Malaysia, appear to favor this "five plus two" formula of direct negotiations with Hanoi. Particularly in Djakarta, but also in some other ASEAN military and political circles, there is the belief that long-term national and regional security interests compel a more pragmatic approach to the Kampuchean question. Such a new approach recognizes the danger to Southeast Asia's future of a rapidly modernizing, resurgent China, and the value of a unified, strong, but independent Vietnam as a geopolitical "northern tier" barrier and strategic balance to China's influence in the region.

In the early months of 1983 the prospect of a direct ASEAN "dialogue" with Hanoi seems to have been of particular interest to some ASEAN quarters.[37] But in his 1 August 1983 visit to Thailand, ASEAN's "frontline state," PRC Foreign Minister Wu Xuequian emphasized that his government would have none of it. Though acknowledging Hanoi's "gesture" of seeming to wish to be reconciled with its Southeast Asian neighbors, Wu stressed that Vietnam had not basically changed its position and had not indicated that it was prepared unconditionally to withdraw its forces. Instead, Wu promised to increase Chinese support for all factions of the CGDK. The essence of the Chinese Foreign Minister's position was well summarized by one Thai newspaper columnist: "Wu's message: Bleed Vietnam Until Hell Freezes Over."[38] After Wu's visit, talk of a new diplomatic "flexibility," let alone of a "dialogue" on the basis of the "five plus two" formula, all but disappeared from ASEAN discussions, at least for the moment. Thailand's vulnerable position, and Beijing's assurances of support to Bangkok, clearly are critical. As Indonesian Foreign Minister Kusumaatmadja has put it, "We can only go as fast as the Thais are willing to go."[39] And

how fast the Thais are willing to go clearly is influenced by their border conflict with Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea.

The idea of eventually having to work out a quid pro quo directly with Hanoi is not forgotten, however. For one thing, ASEAN realizes that the present hard-line policy is driving the Vietnamese deeper and deeper into the Soviets' embrace. Cut off from major international money markets, development resources, and most foreign aid programs of major donor countries, Hanoi pays for her heavy dependence on Soviet assistance by granting access to her military facilities. Authoritative calculations in the Australian press indicate that since 1976 the Soviets have provided $5 billion in economic aid, plus some 3700 technical advisers, to the three Indochina countries, and that in addition, Soviet military assistance since 1979 has amounted to more than $2 billion.[40]

According to an analysis by the Thai National Security Council in August 1983, 15 Soviet warships, including submarines, now operate out of Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay, and two floating piers recently were added to the harbor. Soviet Bear 95-D reconnaissance aircraft and the 95-F antisubmarine version of the same plane use Cam Ranh Bay for regular missions over the South China Sea. Kampuchea's Kompong Som has become the port of call for up to ten Soviet-bloc ships a month.[41] Meanwhile, the Soviets are strengthening Laos as a new forward base for Vietnamese operations against the CGDK insurgents along the Thai-Kampuchean border. Thirty-four MiG-21s were recently sent by Moscow to Vientiane as part of an extensive Soviet-assisted program of modernization and reorganization of the Laotian military forces.[42] Hanoi no doubt takes account in its policy calculations of the concern in ASEAN, both over the expanding projection of Soviet military power in the Southeast Asian region through its Indochina facilities, and over the accelerated buildup of Laos as a logistical support system in the Thai-Kampuchean border conflict.

Hanoi also seems prepared to wait a while longer for pressures to build up in ASEAN, the CGDK, and between these actors and the People's Republic of China. Laotian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Soubanh Srithirath, after a recent Indochinese foreign ministers' conference in Phnom Penh, declared in mid-August 1983 that since a military solution in Kampuchea through the CGDK was impossible, ASEAN "would have to accept dialogue" with Hanoi. As reasons for this, Soubanh noted the failure of the nonaligned nations at their March 1983 summit in New Delhi to accept the CGDK as Kampuchea's legitimate government, and the division within ASEAN, particularly because of China's persistent, hard-line position, as to what course to follow. He also put confidence in the increasing consolidation and stability of the PRK regime in Kampuchea itself.[43]

There is a clear indication of impatience in the recent observations of Indonesian Foreign Minister Mokhtar Kusumaatmadja that the Kampuchea question "consumes the energy and attention of ASEAN member countries to a large extent," preventing "more devotion" to other regional policy problems.[44] The history of proposals and counterproposals, the endlessly discussed nuances of interpretation of the policy statements of others—in short, the continuous pulling and hauling of ASEAN, CGDK, and Indochinese diplomats over the Kampuchea question—suggest that there is an active search for a solution, at least at this level. The second level of diplomacy on the Kampuchean question, that of the superpowers, does not give the same impression. Rather, it seems certain that insofar as Beijing and Moscow are concerned, there are advantages in maintaining the status quo so long as the fighting along the Thai-Kampuchean border stays at its present level and the various Southeast Asian antagonists and factions retain their present political and diplomatic dependence on their respective superpower supporters.

Soviet pronouncements fully back Vietnam's offer of a direct dialogue with ASEAN, deride the allegedly obstructionist tactics of the United States and the PRC, and perceive "increasingly loud demands" even

in such ASEAN countries as Thailand for a "normalization of relations with the states of Indochina" and increased contact with them.[45] The strategic benefits to the USSR of its Indochinese facilities and presence may be regarded as outweighing the costs for some time to come. As for Beijing, at little cost in military supplies and advisory personnel it can try to continue to make the Kampuchean conflict not only into Vietnam's "Vietnam," but the Soviets' as well. The PRC's basic position of relentless insistence on a Vietnamese commitment to withdraw her forces before any agreement on the structure of a new post-withdrawal Kampuchean polity is designed to humiliate Hanoi and Moscow. Meanwhile, a divided and uncertain ASEAN, interested in a compromise with Vietnam but unwilling to risk an open breach within its ranks or a formal rupture with the Chinese on the Kampuchean issue, also remains in Beijing's interests.

Kampuchea is an issue on which the United States, at a time of periodic strains with the PRC over such questions as the status of the Republic of China (Taiwan), or mutual trade, can side with Beijing—and ASEAN well knows it. Consistently and carefully the United States has stayed within general policy principles and has supported the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and the right of Kampucheans to establish their own government.[46] The United States has refused to be drawn into such controversies as the "five plus two" formula or a new "national union" Kampuchea government. Firmly rejecting any diplomatic relations with Hanoi, the United States believes it to be unnecessary to do more in the dispute. In his discussions with ASEAN foreign ministers in Bangkok at the close of June 1983, US Secretary of State George Shultz said, "We follow your lead," adding, "We know that the chances of persuading Vietnam to change its course are greater if the message comes from its neighbors."[47] From experience ASEAN knows that by "neighbors" in this case the United States seems to mean first of all the People's Republic of China.[48] Among themselves, ASEAN leaders reportedly have complained that the United States "is a little too passive" in the Kampuchean issue.[49] However, confronted with a host of other international problems, Washington obviously sees no merit at this point in applying more leverage, except perhaps to prevent intra-ASEAN or ASEAN-Chinese differences over Kampuchean policy from becoming more serious. In the meantime the United States, though it can hardly view the Soviet military presence in Vietnam with equanimity, certainly will not feel displeased over the serious financial and diplomatic cost to Vietnam of its continuing Kampuchean embroglio.

It is precisely this inclination of the superpowers toward the status quo, each seeing at least for now more advantage than liability in its present stance, that might escalate conflict along the Thai-Kampuchean border. Soubanh Srithirath may confidently assert that the Hanoi-backed PRK is consolidating its authority throughout Kampuchea. But the Soviet-assisted military buildup of Laos, the construction of a new "Ho Chi Minh Trail," and the campaigns against Nong Chan or O Smach suggest that the consolidation is far from complete. Sooner or later the intertwining problems of the border camps, the CGDK, the persistent flow of refugees, and Thailand's de facto role as a political and logistical protected rear base for all three will have to be addressed by Hanoi. That is, they will have to be addressed unless Hanoi also is prepared to accept the status quo, thereby simultaneously being severely "bled" and periodically infused with new Soviet-bloc blood. Either prospect is not likely to make for much stability and peace in Southeast Asia.

NOTES

1. Radio Bangkok, "Voice of Free Asia," 28 July 1983 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service reports, hereafter FBIS, 3 August 1983).
2. *The Nation Review* (Bangkok), 23 August 1982.
3. On the fall of Pol Pot and the establishment of the PRK, see Justus M. van der Kroef, "Cambodia: From 'Democratic Kampuchea' to 'People's Republic,' " *Asian Survey*, 19 (August 1979), 731-50.
4. *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 4 September 1982.
5. *The Bangkok Post*, 5 October 1982; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 October 1982, p. 14.

6. *Agence France Presse* dispatch, Ta Tum, Cambodia, 16 May 1982 (FBIS, 23 May 1983).

7. Al Santoli, "The New Indochina War," *The New Republic*, 30 May 1983, p. 20.

8. *The Nation Review*, 30 May 1983.

9. *The Bangkok Post*, 3 August 1983.

10. *Agence France Presse* dispatch, Kuala Lumpur, 6 May 1983 (FBIS, 6 May 1983), and Radio Vientiane, 3 July 1983 (FBIS, 5 July 1983).

11. On the PRK arrests, *The Bangkok Post*, 3 and 6 August 1983; *The Nation Review*, 20 July 1983; *Agence France Presse* dispatches, Bangkok, 3 August 1983 and Phnom Penh, 5 August 1983 (FBIS, 3 and 8 August 1983).

12. *The Bangkok Post*, 17 June 1983.

13. *The Straits Times*, 6 June 1983.

14. *The Bangkok Post*, 20 June 1983.

15. Ibid., 1 and 4 February and 1 April 1983; *Bangkok World*, 1 February 1983; *Nation Review*, 4 February 1983.

16. *The Straits Times*, 21 January 1983.

17. On the O Smach incident, see especially *The Bangkok Post*, 6 April 1983 and *The Nation Review*, 5 April 1983.

18. Ibid.

19. *The Straits Times*, 3 February 1983.

20. *The Bangkok Post*, 8 July 1983.

21. *The Straits Times*, 24 February 1983.

22. *The Nation Review*, 1 June 1983.

23. On the Kampuchean and other Indochina refugee problems, see, e.g., J. Patrick Hamilton, *Cambodian Refugees in Thailand: The Limits of Asylum* (New York: US Committee for Refugees, 1982); Royal Thai Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Questions and Answers Concerning the Problem of Displaced Persons from Indochina* (Bangkok: Royal Thai Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 1981), also cited in FBIS, 4 September 1981; and Radio Bangkok, "Voice of Free Asia," 9 September 1981 (FBIS, 11 September 1981).

24. John McBeth, "Meddling With the Map," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 July 1983, pp. 30-31.

25. *The Nation Review*, 17 May 1983.

26. *The Bangkok Post*, 23 June 1983; *The Nation Review*, 17 August 1983.

27. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1982-1983* (London: IISS, 1982), pp. 80, 88-89, 94-95.

28. See Justus M. van der Kroef, "Kampuchea—The Diplomatic Labyrinth," *Asian Survey*, 23 (October 1983), 1009-32, and *Kampuchea—The Endless Tug of War* (Baltimore: Univ. of Maryland, 1982)(Occasional Papers in Asian Studies, no. 47).

29. Far Eastern Economic Review, *Asia 1983 Yearbook* (Hongkong: Far Eastern Economic Review, 1983), p. 130.

30. SPK dispatch, Phnom Penh, 17 August 1983 (FBIS, 18 August 1983).

31. *Asiaweek* (Hongkong), 8 July 1983, p. 7.

32. *The Straits Times*, 28 June 1983.

33. *News-Weekly* (Melbourne), 25 May 1983, p. 9.

34. *The Bangkok Post*, 14 June 1983; *Le Monde* (Paris), 31 May 1983 (FBIS, 1 June 1983); Colin Campbell, "Decades of Strife Have Made Sihanouk an Artful Survivor," *The New York Times*, 17 July 1983, p. E5.

35. *The Straits Times*, 20 June 1983.

36. *Renmin Ribao* (Beijing), 22 July 1983, p. 6 (FBIS, 25 July 1983). On the PRC's position toward Vietnam in the Kampuchean question, see also *Beijing Review*, 16 May 1983, p. 11; 27 June 1983, p. 13; and 1 August 1983, p. 9.

37. "A Dialogue With Vietnam?" *Asia Research Bulletin*, 13 (July 1983), 1067.

38. Sutthichai Yun in *The Nation Review*, 1 August 1983. On Wu's Thailand visit, see also *The Nation Review*, 31 July and 2 August 1983.

39. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20 January 1983, p. 22.

40. *The Age* (Melbourne), 14 June 1983. Cited also, *The Pakistan Times* (Rawalpindi), 16 June 1983.

41. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 August 1983, p. 24.

42. *The Bangkok Post*, 15 August 1983.

43. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 August 1983, p. 15.

44. *The Indonesia Times* (Djakarta), 23 and 25 June 1983.

45. See, e.g., M. Yelin, "The Indochina Countries' Struggle to Create a Zone of Peace in Southeast Asia," *Far Eastern Affairs* (Moscow), No. 2, 1983, pp. 145-56; *Izvestiya* (Moscow), 6 August 1983 (FBIS, 22 August 1983); and Radio Moscow, 13 June 1983 (FBIS, 14 June 1983).

46. See, e.g., "U.S. Interests in Southeast Asia," *Current Policy* (US Department of State), no. 295 (July 1981), pp. 1-4.

47. *The Japan Times* (Tokyo), 29 June 1983.

48. Justus M. van der Kroef, "The United States and the Cambodian Problem: Political Realities and Policy Options," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 9 (November-December 1981), 69-84.

49. Eduardo Lachica in *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 23 June 1983.