

@CHAPTER = CAMBODIA

The Bush administration has never come to grips with an inherent contradiction in its policy on Cambodia. While repeatedly professing opposition to a Khmer Rouge return to power, the administration has consistently supported the position of Prince Sihanouk that a coalition government headed by Sihanouk and including the Khmer Rouge was the only way to forestall civil war following the September 1989 withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia.

Since 1979 when the Vietnamese invaded Khmer Rouge-controlled Cambodia, the main aim of the United States and its friends in the region -- China and the countries making up the Association of South East Asian Nations ("ASEAN") -- was to get the Vietnamese out. To this end, the U.S. supported the creation of the tripartite Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea ("CGDK"), which included the Khmer Rouge and the non-Communist forces of Sihanouk and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front ("KPNLF"). By the end of the Reagan administration, the U.S. seemed to be moving toward a position of opposition to the return in any guise of the Khmer Rouge which, under the leadership of Pol Pot, is estimated to have killed at least one million Cambodians between 1975 and 1979.

Since its ouster, the Khmer Rouge has continued to violate the human rights of thousands of refugees in camps it controls along the Thai-Cambodian border, and there is no indication that its policies or personnel have fundamentally changed. It is not alone in violating human rights: the Phnom Penh government and the non-Communist factions do as well. But the scale of Khmer Rouge killings in the 1975-79 period makes its inclusion in any future government particularly repugnant.

In January, at his confirmation hearing, Secretary of State James Baker promised, "The U.S. will continue to work for a new Cambodia, free of both Vietnamese occupation and the Khmer Rouge." This was essentially a reiteration of the Reagan administration's formulation. In February, during his visit to Beijing, President Bush reportedly requested the Chinese government to halt or reduce its supply of arms to the Khmer Rouge, an appeal that had been made in the past to no avail.

But if these gestures were welcome, Secretary Baker turned around in March and announced that the Khmer Rouge had to be accepted as a "fact of life," and he advocated support for a four-party government composed of the current Hun Sen government, the Khmer Rouge, and the non-Communist factions, with Sihanouk as head of state. This became the operative administration policy toward Cambodia in 1989.

The quadripartite solution became part of what was called the "comprehensive peace settlement," supported by Sihanouk, China and ASEAN, under which the Khmer Rouge would share power with the other factions in an interim administration that would hold elections under international supervision. Under the plan, the Khmer Rouge could return to four key ministries -- defense, interior, foreign affairs and information -- and incorporate its army into an army of "national reconciliation."

Administration officials defended the plan on the ground that the Khmer Rouge was less dangerous inside than outside the government. The actions of China were seen as crucial -- if China, the major arms supplier of the Khmer Rouge, could be persuaded to go along with elections, the U.S. argued, it might cut off the arms supply if the Khmer Rouge lost. Agreeing to an interim role for the latter, administration officials contended, was the only way to turn off the arms tap.

But nervousness in Washington about the return of the Khmer Rouge was evident by April when the Vietnamese announced their plans to withdraw from Cambodia by

September 30. A policy review by the administration led to the determination that the U.S. should supply arms to the non-Communist factions to strengthen them against both the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh. The plan was to supply 12,000 rifles and other light arms, primarily to Sihanouk's forces.

(The Bush administration continued to provide covert non-lethal aid of some \$20-24 million a year for uniforms, vehicles, food and training, and overt aid of \$5 million for medicine and tents to the non-Communist factions, according to *The New York Times* of November 16, 1989. U.S. military intelligence officials continued to participate in a Bangkok-based working group responsible for buying arms for the non-Communist factions. The working group is composed of representatives of the Thai, Malaysian and Singaporean governments and the non-Communist factions, and the arms it buys, including U.S. weapons, are paid for by Singapore.)

In May, Vice President Quayle visited Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand, met with Sihanouk and used the visit to advocate U.S. military aid. Such aid was seen as an important bargaining chip to assure a full Vietnamese withdrawal, to force Hun Sen to undertake serious negotiations for a political settlement, and to bolster Sihanouk's position vis-a-vis the Khmer Rouge. The administration did not want the Khmer Rouge back, Quayle said, but at the same time he publicly allied the U.S. with Sihanouk, who thought Khmer Rouge participation in an interim government essential.

The aid proposal was greeted with some skepticism in the region, but by the beginning of June, an administration proposal for covert military aid had been sent to Congress. Quayle, in a speech to the Heritage Foundation, said that military assistance was part of U.S. "moral responsibility" to keep the Khmer Rouge from returning to power. How the administration could maintain its backing of Sihanouk, who was committed to a Khmer Rouge role, and uphold that responsibility was not made clear.

The plan to provide lethal aid drew initial strong support from Representative Stephen Solarz, but other leading members of Congress were deeply opposed, seeing it as the first step toward military "re-engagement" in Indochina. In a debate on the issue during a June 5 Senate hearing, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Kimmitt stressed that the administration's objective in recommending the aid was to bolster Sihanouk's bargaining position.

At the Paris opening of an international conference on Cambodia on July 30, Secretary Baker stated that "[t]he United States strongly believes that the Khmer Rouge should play no role in Cambodia's future" and that "the strength of U.S. support for any Cambodian government will directly and inversely depend on the extent of Khmer Rouge participation, if any, in that government." But at the same time, he said that the United States was prepared to back Sihanouk's call for inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in an interim government and indicated to Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, in a private meeting during the conference, that the United States agreed the Khmer Rouge should have a role.

Such an agreement was contrary to the spirit and perhaps the letter of U.S. Public Law 100-502 of October 18, 1988, which states in its fifth paragraph that the United States

@QUOTENOIND = in cooperation with the international community should use all appropriate means available to prevent a return to power of Pol Pot, the top echelon of the Khmer Rouge, and their armed forces, so that the Cambodian people might genuinely be free to pursue self-determination without the spectre of the coercion, intimidation, and torture that are known elements of the Khmer Rouge ideology.

When the conference failed to produce a settlement, the administration blamed

Hun Sen for having "shown no willingness to compromise to create a coalition government," simply because he refused to allow the Khmer Rouge to become equal partners in a coalition. An unnamed administration official, interviewed after the conference, said, "Our lead in this is Prince Sihanouk and it is his judgment that [the Khmer Rouge be included] to prevent civil war."

After the conference, as administration policy came under more Congressional fire, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Solomon testified at a September House hearing on Cambodia that while letting the Khmer Rouge sit in an interim government might not be "particularly morally impressive," it was the only realistic path to pursue. He went on:

@QUOTENOIND = Should the Khmer Rouge, responsible for genocidal violence of the 1970's, be totally excluded from the political process with only a military option? Or, should it, less its top leadership, be given a limited stake in a transitional political coalition that would, under international supervision, face elections?<%-20> <%0> We firmly believe that the chances are much better to get this problem under control if you have a structured political settlement than if you just leave a situation that is totally unstructured or constrained, where civil conflict is virtually a certainty.

@NOIND = Later the same month, Assistant Secretary Solomon called Sihanouk "our horse in this race."

By the end of September, the Vietnamese had substantially completed the unilateral withdrawal of their troops from Cambodia. At this point military aid to the non-Communist factions took on a different light. Secretary Baker rejected a Soviet-initiated arms moratorium in the region, but kept the supply of lethal aid to the non-Communist factions on hold. One of the major proponents of such aid, Representative Solarz, began to call for a restudy of the justification for military assistance.

In October, the perennial question arose as to which of the governments and factions should represent Cambodia at the United Nations. The administration spoke in favor of continued U.N. recognition of the CGDK, thereby allowing the Khmer Rouge delegate to represent Cambodia at the U.N. (The Soviet delegate, by contrast, argued that the seat should be left empty until a political settlement was reached.)

Similarly, the administration supported a General Assembly resolution calling for a "comprehensive political settlement" of the Kampuchean problem, which was understood in the debate to mean support for the quadrapartite coalition that includes the Khmer Rouge. The administration supported a resolution containing the vague formulation calling for the "non-return to universally condemned policies and practice of a recent past," rather than a more direct condemnation of the mass murder committed by the Khmer Rouge. Also, significantly, this phraseology does not suggest that the Khmer Rouge should not return to power, only that if it returns it should not act as it did before.

This weak stance was in non-compliance with the expressed provisions of Public Law 100-502, which states in its sixth paragraph:

@QUOTENOIND = [The U.S.] should seek the support of the member nations of ASEAN and other nations for the inclusion, in declarations and resolutions promulgated by the United Nations pertaining to the Cambodian conflict, of the principle that those responsible for acts of genocide and massive violations of internationally recognized human rights shall not return to positions of political power in Cambodia upon withdrawal of the foreign occupation forces.

Thomas Pickering, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, explained the U.S. position in a letter to Asia Watch shortly after the vote. In a curious turn of logic which plagues U.S. policy on Cambodia, he stated:

@QUOTENOIND = The United States Government remains unequivocally opposed to a

return to power of the Khmer Rouge. We therefore support the resolution submitted by the ASEAN nations, with nearly eighty co-sponsors, calling for a comprehensive political settlement<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>[That resolution] is aimed at the elimination of the Khmer Rouge threat through the democratic process under stringent international safeguards.

@NOIND = These "stringent international safeguards" were not specified in either his letter or in the U.N. resolution.

As the civil war intensified in Cambodia, Secretary of State Baker came up with the "Baker formula." Under this plan, which was a variation of the "quadrupartite solution," the Bush administration began actively seeking to gain acceptance for the "minimal participation" of the Khmer Rouge in a transitional Cambodian government. This was seen as an attempt to break the international diplomatic deadlock, since a solution freezing out the Khmer Rouge is said to be unacceptable to China and thus would not stop the fighting. Opposition to this plan was expressed in a November 29 letter to Secretary Baker signed by 187 representatives and 26 senators, which read:

@QUONONINEND = We are concerned that any U.S. effort directly or indirectly to promote a power-sharing role for the Khmer Rouge -- no matter how minimal -- would represent an implicit legitimization of a movement the world finds abhorrent and would constitute a profound shift in our policy.

In December, Representative Solarz called for an interim United Nations role to help forge a political settlement, a concept which the Australian government independently proposed as well in December. Both the Australian and British governments have sent diplomats to meet with Hun Sen officials. While the Bush administration has made no official response to these new developments, they provide an important opportunity for the administration to reassess its role in Cambodia and to match rhetoric with reality by truly working to isolate the Khmer Rouge.