

“THE MASTERS OF THE KHMER ROUGE”: CAMBODIA BETWEEN
CHINA AND VIETNAM, 1954-1975

A Senior Honors Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Science
University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor's of Arts in History with Honors

By
Scott Ross

DECEMBER 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: “The Masters of the Khmer Rouge”	1
Chapter One: The Early Years.....	9
Chapter Two: Differences among Allies.....	30
Chapter Three: Changing Allegiances.....	46
Chapter Four: Consequences for Cambodia.....	63
Chapter Five: The Forces Coalesce.....	82
Conclusion: “Not the End of the War, But the Beginning”	117
References.....	121

Introduction: “The Masters of the Khmer Rouge”

In January 1968 the Communist Party of Kampuchea launched the first military operations of the Cambodian Civil War.¹ Although the opening campaigns of this insurgency were small scale affairs aimed primarily at seizing weapons from government outposts, they constituted a major turning point in the history of the Khmer Rouge, as the world would come to know the revolutionary leaders. The beginning of armed revolution represented the end of an era during which the Cambodian communists – however begrudgingly – had dutifully adhered to the policies of peaceful resistance and political participation handed down to them by their “elder brothers” in the Vietnamese Worker’s Party. It is hence rather ironic that in 1969 Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia’s former king and then Head of State, would attribute his nation’s instability entirely to the doings of Vietnamese communists, declaring that “if one day war is imposed on Cambodia ... that war could only be the work of the Vietminh or Viet Cong, who are the masters of the Khmer Rouge and who never cease to carry out their intention to swallow our land.”²

The belief that Cambodia’s revolutionaries were little more than a Vietnamese puppet was held not just by the prince, but also by many Western observers, including the United States government. For these parties – who had for two decades watched the Vietnamese arm, advise, and collaborate with their Khmer counterparts – it seemed like

¹ Cambodia is often referred to by the indigenous pronunciation Kampuchea. Although I have opted to use the term Cambodia when referring to the country, I have preserved the usage of Kampuchea in official titles such as the Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party and Democratic Kampuchea as it is not common practice to alter the name to Cambodia in these cases.

² Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 281.

simple common sense that the communists in Vietnam and Cambodia would be natural allies. Even Western leftists followed this reasoning, producing early apologies for the Khmer Rouge government based on its presumed affiliation with Hanoi.³ The incipient rivalry that emerged between the two nations following the 1975 victory of the Khmer Rouge flew in the face of all Cold War logic. That, within a few years, the two communist countries should be at war defied all expectations.

It is understandable that outside observers would be perplexed by the Cambodia that took shape under the leadership of the now-infamous Pol Pot. Although it is common to view the post-World War II history of the Indochina Peninsula through a lens of Cold War superpower competition, to do so leaves vital pieces missing from the puzzle. The ascendancy of the Khmer Rouge was the product of two decades of Cold War factionalism, ancient national rivalries, and old-fashioned realpolitik colliding in Cambodia and producing a complex and often counterintuitive series of events. Each of these concepts is an integral part of Cambodia's Cold War history, but none is sufficient to explain it in alone. Nevertheless, it was in the context of the Cold War that the international political forces discussed in this thesis were first introduced to the nation of Cambodia.

In 1946 war broke out in Indochina as France attempted to reassert its colonial authority following the defeat of Japan in World War II. It was resisted by the Viet Minh, a Vietnamese national liberation movement headed by Ho Chi Minh, president of the

³ A classic example of this is a 1977 article by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman attempting to discredit reports of communist abuses in postwar Vietnam and Cambodia. The authors consistently defend both the Vietnamese and Cambodians in a Cold War context of communist vs. noncommunist, without mentioning the fact that many of the Khmer Rouge abuses were being perpetrated along national/racial lines against their fellow communists in Vietnam. "Distortions at Fourth Hand," *The Nation*, 6 June 1977, available from <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/19770625.htm>; internet; accessed 1 December 2008.

Indochinese Communist Party. Although this might easily have remained a regional affair, the fact that the Viet Minh espoused a communist ideology turned the First Indochina Conflict into a matter of global interest. The United States had hesitated to support France's neo-colonial ambitions, but its Cold War doctrine of containment impelled it to begin providing massive material support to the French war effort.⁴ This was matched in turn by Chinese support for the Viet Minh. In the name of ideological solidarity the People's Republic of China, following the success of its own socialist revolution in 1949, became the first country to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and began providing military aid to Ho's forces. Up through the 1954 Geneva Accords, which granted Vietnamese independence, "China bore full responsibility for guiding and supporting the Vietnamese revolution."⁵ The informal alliance between the Chinese and Vietnamese communists would be a longstanding one, and the PRC would remain North Vietnam's primary sponsor and a vital source of foreign aid in the ensuing years.

Cambodia was involved in this conflict from the very beginning, albeit only in a supporting role. In the opening stages of the war, Viet Minh forces relied on Cambodian territory to smuggle weapons from Bangkok's black market. It was to ensure the security of these arms routes that the Vietnamese-led Indochinese Communist Party decided to begin organizing local resistance forces in Cambodia under its purview. Son Ngoc Minh, an ICP member of mixed Khmer-Viet parentage, was tapped to head a Cambodian communist movement. The Viet Minh then set about recruiting Cambodian fighters,

⁴ Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 6-7.

⁵ Qiang Zhai, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954," *The China Quarterly* 129 (March 1992): 103-104, 106.

providing them with arms and training, and even putting together the rudiments of a revolutionary government. The nascent communist organization was joined together with other Khmer rebels under the aegis of the Unified Issarak Front, a hodgepodge coalition of Viet Minh-allied independence forces.⁶ In this manner Cambodia joined the anti-French struggle, meanwhile providing the Vietnamese with smuggling routes, sanctuaries, and a secure buffer zone on their western flank.

Although the Cambodian communists were ostensibly autonomous, the Viet Minh maintained operational control. Even after the Indochinese Communist Party was dissolved in 1951 (splitting into the Vietnamese Worker's Party and the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party), Hanoi remained in charge of the military effort.⁷ At the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina, the DRV continued playing their "elder brother" role by representing the United Issarak Front who had been denied a place in the negotiations. This close relationship, did not last, however. Having won independence at Geneva, the Vietnamese opted to support the neutralist government of Prince Sihanouk. They maintained ties with the Cambodian revolutionaries, but refused to sanction armed resistance, a policy that would breed deep resentment among significant elements of the Cambodian party by the mid-1960s. In spite of this change of heart, however, Hanoi was never able to win over Sihanouk's trust or good will. Coming from over half a millennium of national decline, the entire spectrum of Cambodian political consciousness was pervaded with suspicion of Vietnamese intentions.

⁶ Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co, 2004), 39-40.

⁷ Thomas Engelbert and Christopher E. Goscha, *Falling out of Touch: A Study on Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards an Emerging Cambodian Communist Movement, 1930-1975* (Warrnambool, Victoria: Amazon, 1995), 43.

Hence, even through major changes in government, from 1954 to 1975 Cambodia would consistently maintain a foreign policy that – when not outright hostile – was deeply distrustful toward the Vietnamese. As mentioned previously, Sihanouk believed the entire Cambodian resistance to be nothing more than a puppet of Hanoi. When he was toppled in 1970 by General Lon Nol, the chief of the Cambodian armed forces, the coup was based on accusations of that the prince had allowed Vietnamese communists to occupy Cambodian territory, thereby selling out the nation’s neutrality policy.⁸ Nol followed his seizure of power with a nationwide pogrom against Vietnamese civilians living in Cambodia.⁹ When the Cambodian Civil War brought Pol Pot to power in 1975 he introduced a deeply racist and anti-Vietnamese brand of nationalist communism. Hanoi was seen as an existential threat to a constantly-diminishing Cambodia, and the Vietnamese race itself was identified as aggressive and expansionist at its core.¹⁰ Pol’s rule would be marked by an effort to defend the country from “Vietnamese influence” via purges of “pro-Vietnamese” party elements, constant military provocations against Hanoi, and the expulsion or elimination of the country’s entire remaining ethnic Vietnamese population.¹¹

Beijing shared Pol Pot’s wariness about Hanoi’s influence in Cambodia, but for far different reasons. Indochinese unity – be it through political unification or simply a strategic alliance – was inimical to Beijing’s long-term national security interests, which

⁸ Sak Sutsakhyan, *The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 14.

⁹ William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 132-133.

¹⁰ Ben Kiernan, “Pol Pot and the Kampuchean Communist Movement,” *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*, Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua eds. (Armonk, NY: Zed, 1982), 230-232.

¹¹ Kanika Mak, “Genocide and Irredentism under Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979),” Genocide Studies Program Working Paper No. 23 (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2004), p. 4.

centered on preventing the rise of potential challenger states along China's periphery.¹² Thus even as China poured aid into the DRV to assist it in driving out Western military forces, the Chinese were actively interested in stymieing Vietnamese influence in Cambodia and worked hard to that end. China's relationship with the DRV was, in effect, a tug-of-war between supporting Hanoi's domestic war effort, while simultaneously countering its broader political ambitions. With the intensification of the Sino-Soviet rift in the 1960s this strategic contention took on new significance. As Hanoi moved gradually closer to the Soviet camp, leaders in Beijing became obsessed with the threat of Soviet-Vietnamese "encirclement." Hence Cambodia – already a point of strategic contention – became a site of outright Sino-Viet political (and eventually military) competition.

Largely due to the complementary goals of nationalists in Cambodia and China, the two countries would draw steadily closer through this period. The shared interest in limiting Hanoi's reach would allow Beijing to, counterintuitively, win over both Prince Sihanouk and Pol Pot. The Chinese also were assisted by their geographical distance, however, and the greater freedom of action that afforded them. China's primary concern at this time was one of choice – diminishing Vietnamese strength would be advantageous, but was not integral to Chinese survival. Hence Beijing could afford to avoid getting too deeply involved in Indochinese affairs and could conveniently abstain from taking a position on difficult issues. The Vietnamese, on the other hand, faced much greater stakes. They were engaged in a vital struggle over the physical integrity of their nation. Their Cambodia policies were not made out of convenience, but out of necessity. They

¹² Anne Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance, 1970-1979*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California – Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), 16-18.

could not play both sides of the field and make friends as the Chinese did, but instead did what was necessary for their war effort – in turn making enemies throughout Cambodia. Coinciding as this did with the decline in Sino-Viet relations, Vietnam found itself in 1975 finally reunified and independent, but by no means secure.

These growing differences were suppressed as the communists in Cambodia, China and North Vietnam united to defeat the regimes of Lon Nol in Cambodia and Nguyen Van Thieu in South Vietnam. But after both communist movements emerged victorious in 1975, the alliance began to unravel rapidly. The simmering hostilities exploded in the form of the genocidal horrors of Pol Pot's rule and the 1978 invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam. These matters have been the subject of a great deal of study. In journalistic terms, most Cambodia scholarship concerns itself with questions of “who” and “what” - telling the story and attempting to explain the big events of the period, in particular the “killing fields” of the Khmer Rouge.¹³ This thesis focuses instead on the historical processes and the underlying trends surrounding and driving the events that other writers have studied in more detail. Essentially the “why” and “how.” In particular I have identified regional political processes – namely the Sino-Viet strategic competition – as the most significant force in question. This is in contrast to other scholars who locate this era of Cambodian history within a framework of the global Cold War.¹⁴

¹³ Some key examples of this include Ben Kiernan's *How Pol Pot*, Philip Short's *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare*, and David P. Chandler's *Brother Number One* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), all of which have been absolutely invaluable to this study.

¹⁴ For this perspective see Michael Haas, *Genocide by Proxy* and Ben Kiernan, “The Impact on Cambodia of the U.S. Intervention in Vietnam,” *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*, Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huyuh eds. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993). Kenton Clymer has written extensively on America's Cold War dealings with Cambodia including the article “A Casualty of War: The Break in American Relations With Cambodia, 1965,” *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco eds (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); and his two-volume review of American government documents *The United States and Cambodia, 1870-1969: From curiosity to confrontation* and *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon,

It is my contention, however, that the dominant international forces in Cambodia's Cold War history were regional, rather than global, in scope and the most important factors therein were the competing strategic interests of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the People's Republic of China. In the pages ahead I will analyze the ways in which – during the years of 1954 to 1975 – Cambodia's most salient international political realities were the product of Chinese and Vietnamese strategies in keeping with traditional Southeast Asian relationships and self-interested realpolitik. Obviously these competing interests would play a major role in the overt Sino-Viet rivalry of the late 1970's; the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the persistence and prominence of national self-interest in Vietnamese and Chinese policy toward Cambodia by highlighting these trends well before they rose to the surface and manifested in open hostility.¹⁵ I will also demonstrate that – even during the periods of warmest relations among these nations – this kind of realist thinking was far and away the most important factor in determining communist approaches to Cambodia. For all the importance attached to ideology, the international system that established itself in Indochina was effectively a continuation of centuries of political history.¹⁶ The dictums of radical Maoism, Marxism-Leninism, Polpotism, and Western anticommunism served to influence perspectives and behaviors of the actors, but rather than rewriting the game, they constituted simply an addendum to the age-old rules of international power struggles.

2004).

¹⁵ A few sources studying Indochina from a similar viewpoint include Anne Gilks' *Breakdown*, Thomas Engelbert and Christopher E. Goscha's *Falling out of Touch*, Thu-huong Nguyen-vo's *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992) and a number of works by Qiang Zhai which can be found cited in the bibliography.

¹⁶ Even in Cambodia – widely recognized as history's most extreme attempt at social engineering – socialism was seen as simply a tool of national aggrandizement. Philip Short quotes Pol Pot as describing it as a means "of defending the country and preserving the Kampuchean race forever." *Pol Pot*, 343.

Chapter One: The Early Years

In May 1954, representatives from nine countries met in Geneva, Switzerland to negotiate an end to the war in Indochina. The participants divided themselves into two blocs, reflecting the Cold War camps. On the Communist side were the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam. Delegations from the United States, the United Kingdom, France and South Vietnam constituted the other bloc. Stuck in the middle were Laos and Cambodia. While the issues to be discussed – working out the terms of independence for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and establishing a ceasefire between the French colonial forces and Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh rebels – were straightforward enough the terms of the Cold War had changed everything. Indochina had been established as a front in the global ideological showdown and the relocation from the battlefield to the negotiating table did not make the dispute any less bitter.

Cambodia – which had already been declared independent the previous November and needed only to work out a plan for the withdrawal of Viet Minh forces – would not be excepted from this debate.¹ The Cambodian resistance had close ties with the Vietnamese communists, who were not prepared to give up the gains they had won on the ground. The Vietnamese-organized Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party and its allies in the United Issarak Front (UIF), an ad hoc coalition of Cambodian resistance groups, had been extremely useful for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in broadening the war against France and reducing the pressure against southern Vietnam,

¹ Thomas J. Hamilton, "Principles to End the War in Indo-China to be Aired Today," *New York Times*, 25 May 1954, 1, 3. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 83335193. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

but they had a broader strategic importance.² A 1931 Indochinese Communist Party article had established the prevailing view that Vietnam's struggle was intrinsically linked to that of its neighbors, arguing, "If the Vietnamese revolution succeeds but French imperialism is lurking in Laos and Cambodia the revolutionary power in Vietnam will be shaky."³ This attitude would inform Vietnamese planning throughout the fight for Independence. A favorable outcome for anti-French (even if not communist) forces in Cambodia and Laos was seen as vital in establishing a sphere of influence to insulate Vietnam from external threats. This was in keeping with the historical Vietnamese strategy of using buffer zones to hedge against periodical Chinese aggression.⁴ In their postwar planning the leadership in Hanoi anticipated Communist parties in Laos and Cambodia forming the basis of parliamentary governments that would be independent but militarily and politically weak, and reliant on Vietnam for survival. This arrangement would then allow the DRV to steer Cambodian politics in a direction beneficial its own security.⁵

Outside of this postwar scheming, the interest of Cambodian and Vietnamese revolutionaries at the Geneva negotiations were essentially one in the same. In this respect, the DRV lobbied tirelessly on behalf of its Cambodian allies, beginning with a push for representation for the United Issarak Front who had not been invited to the conference. This effort initially drew support from the Communist delegations, even eliciting a statement from the Chinese Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai that,

² Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 38-39.

³ Gareth Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards Kampuchea 1930-1970," *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 60.

⁴ Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 27.

⁵ Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 69-70.

“any attempt to ... deny the existence of ... the resistance governments of Khmer and Pathet Lao is doomed to failure.”⁶ When this approach failed the Communist camp argued that any settlement must treat all three of the Associated States of Indochina as one battlefield, rather than addressing them individually.⁷ This bore the advantage of painting all the rebels – be they Khmer, Lao or Vietnamese – as part of one unified struggle, thereby allowing the Cambodians to reap benefits won on their soil by Viet Minh fighters.⁸ The DRV discussion proposal was also padded in ways intended to benefit the Cambodian rebels. Unlike the proposal submitted by the royal government of Cambodian Prince Sihanouk, the Communist document conspicuously lacked vital elements such as “the complete withdrawal of all Vietminh forces from Laos and Cambodia, the disarmament of all irregular forces,” and “international control of a settlement.”⁹ These omissions are illustrative of what the Communist camp had in mind – without Viet Minh withdrawal, dissolution of guerilla groups, and international oversight, there was no real chance for a meaningful, enforceable peace. The KPRP could continue to prepare for and wage insurgency and Viet Minh cadres – now operatives of a foreign power – would be there to help them.

The Western powers – and the royal government of Cambodia – broadly rejected these attempts by the Communist camp to grab what they saw as illegitimate spoils. They

⁶ Zhou Enlai, “Foreign Minister Chou En-Lai’s Statements at the Geneva Conference,” *People’s China* 10 Supplement (16 May 1954), 10.

⁷ Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong and Others, Regarding the Second Restricted Session, 19 May 1954. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Record no. 206-Y0049. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

⁸ “Laos and Cambodia,” *NYT*, 4 June 1954, 22. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 84122901. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

⁹ Draft Memorandum, “A Comprehensive Solution for Restoring Peace in Indochina,” Prepared by the Vietnam Group of the Chinese Delegation Attending the Geneva Conference, 4 April 1954. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Record no. 206-00055-04 (1). Accessed 14 October, 2008. Hamilton, “Principles to End the War,” 3.

understood that to give in on these points meant legally recognizing the legitimacy of the Cambodian rebels and granting them safe-zones that would effectively become Viet Minh-administered independent territories.¹⁰ For the Cambodian government, whose chief concern at all times was its own independence and territorial integrity, the prospect of a physical partition (like the one being discussed for Vietnam) was a dire threat. In order to justify denying the Cambodian rebels any traction, Phnom Penh and the Western powers attempted to characterize UIF forces as Viet Minh “invaders” rather than the members of an indigenous uprising.¹¹

On this last point the truth was somewhere between the two camps’ arguments. While Issarak (independence) movements had operated previous to and independent of Vietnamese involvement, Ho Chi Minh’s Indochinese Communist Party saw the anti-French struggle in Cambodia as an extension of its own battleground. With that mindset, Vietnamese communists had built the movement in Cambodia from the ground up. Even after the nominally-independent KPRP was founded in 1951 and joined forces with other Issarak groups in the UIF, the Viet Minh provided the direction and most of the military strength of the Cambodian struggle.¹² The mixed Khmer and Viet forces made

¹⁰ Tillman Durdin, “What Defense for Laos, Cambodia?,” *NYT*, 6 June 1954, sec. E, p. 6. and “Cambodians Win Red Concessions,” *NYT*, 22 July 1954, p. 5. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document IDs 83338187 and 83768234. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

¹¹ Tillman Durdin, “Greater Freedom Spur to Cambodia,” *NYT*, 10 Mar 1954, p 2. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 84111276. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

¹² Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 42-43. Central Intelligence Agency, “Communism and Cambodia,” ESAU Documents, February 1972, pp. 6-7, available from <http://www.foia.cia.gov/CPE/ESAU/esau-53.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 October, 2008. Philip Short describes the role of the Viet Minh in assembling a Cambodian communist movement from scratch in detail in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Pol Pot*, particularly pages 53-57 and 97-105. Vietnamese reactions to the poor military performance of their Khmer counterparts are highlighted on page 57. Ben Kiernan, “Origins of Khmer Communism,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 8 (1981), 170-172, discusses the formation and relative composition of mixed Khmer-Viet military units and independent Khmer units supported by Viet Minh. By 1954 he concludes that 3,500 Khmers were fighting for the UIF, but the majority of them were inexperienced recent recruits. Elizabeth Becker, *When the War was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 1998), 72, suggests that no more than 5,700 Khmers allied with

considerable gains – in April 1954 the resistance controlled 40% of the country and a population of 800,000 and a Communist campaign on the eve of the conference had pushed government forces to the brink of collapse. This eleventh-hour offensive, however, had been conducted entirely by Viet Minh forces crossing the border.¹³ Western assertions that the UIF was merely a DRV puppet were further bolstered when many (perhaps even most) Issaraks laid down their arms following the French transfer of power to Sihanouk in 1953, leaving the KPRP one of the few still active resistance groups.¹⁴ Hence while the UIF at large was not necessarily a Vietnamese proxy, the ubiquitous Viet Minh role in the Cambodian resistance certainly belied any claims to it being an autonomous or primarily indigenous movement. Knowing this, the Western camp staunchly opposed conceding victories won by the Viet Minh to the Cambodian resistance.

In the face of this unified opposition, the solidarity of the Communist camp dissolved. The Viet Minh, buoyed by their recent defeat of 16,000 French troops at Dien Bien Phu, were eager to push a belligerent line demanding benefits for the Cambodian rebels at Geneva even if it meant tanking negotiations.¹⁵ Their adamancy nearly ground negotiations to a halt until Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai prevailed upon them to compromise.¹⁶ Worried about international – particularly American – involvement were the war to continue unabated, Zhou engaged in active diplomacy to resolve this and other

the Vietnamese and there were at least 3,000 Viet Minh fighters in Cambodia – enough to result in “Vietnamese predominance.”

¹³ Short, *Pol Pot*, 102-103.

¹⁴ Jean-Marie Boucher, “The Relationship Between Cambodia and China, 1954-1970” (Ph.D. diss., University of London [School of Oriental and Asian Studies], 1978), 134.

¹⁵ Yang Kuisong, “Changes in Mao Zedong’s Attitude toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973,” Qiang Zhai trans., Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 34 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, February 2002), p 8.

¹⁶ Chang Pao-Min, *Kampuchea Between China and Vietnam* (Kent Ridge, Singapore: Singapore National Press, 1985), 16.

sticking points in the negotiations. He met with the new French Prime Minister Pierre Mendes-France to discuss Laos and Cambodia, and arranged private discussions between DRV Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong and the Cambodian delegation leader Tep Phan. Zhou's efforts to produce a compromise went beyond the Cambodian issue. He leaned on Dong not to "haggle" over the specifics of Vietnam's partition agreement and finally convinced Ho Chi Minh to compromise on the issue in an early July meeting near the China-Vietnam border.¹⁷ Zhou's efforts to save the conference were successful, though as far as the Cambodian rebels were concerned, the settlement had left them high and dry. While the DRV had won for itself an independent state, its battlefield victories in Cambodia had not yielded any benefits for the KPRP. Cambodian rebels were granted no regroupment zones, their Viet Minh allies were forced to withdraw across the border and, with no legal status, the KPRP was lawfully compelled to disband.

The behavior of the Chinese undoubtedly frustrated the representatives of the DRV who did not seek peace at any price, but a settlement favorable to their interests. This was not what Zhou Enlai's diplomatic efforts had produced. Indeed after a June 23 meeting with the Chinese premier, Mendés-France reported that "China had not sought the slightest compensation for the concessions which she had made regarding Laos and Cambodia."¹⁸ Dispatches from the chief American delegate Walter Bedell Smith similarly reveal a Chinese willingness to dispense with Viet Minh demands.¹⁹ Zhou even

¹⁷ Tillman Durdin, "Chou Pushes Geneva Talks with Laos and Cambodia," *NYT*, 21 June 1954, p. 1. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 84123647. Accessed 14 October, 2008. Qiang, "China and the Geneva Conference," 111-112.

¹⁸ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 15. Kiernan quotes a telegram report from Mendes-France. For an English-language account of this meeting see The Ambassador in France (Dillon) to the Department of State, 24 June 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-1954*, vol. XVI, *The Geneva Conference*, John P. Glennon (ed.), Department of State, Washington 1981, 1239-1241.

¹⁹ The United States Delegation to the Department of State, Geneva, June 17, 1954 – 1 p.m., *The Geneva Conference*, 1171. Smith writes that Zhou, "Said Chinese did not desire anything in Laos and Cambodia,"

told his French counterpart that he was “urging the Viet Minh to become reconciled not only with France but also with the Vietnam of Bao Dai” - the figurehead emperor of the Western-sponsored government in Saigon. At this point in the negotiations the DRV representatives were still considering returning to war rather than acknowledge the Republic of Vietnam and Zhou’s comments constituted a stunning endorsement of a partition plan (and conspicuously undercut Hanoi’s bargaining position).²⁰

While the Vietnamese complied with their allies and backed down from their demands, they were unsettled by the willingness of the Chinese to sell out the interests of the Indochinese communists. One French negotiator reported that in his discussions with the Viet Minh they seemed to “fear the development of Chinese control over their actions, present and future.”²¹ They could not be faulted for doing so. China’s insistence on winning a peace even at disadvantageous terms went beyond the scope of simple paternalistic micro-management. After all, if the Vietnamese were willing to risk years of more violence to win the day, why should they not have that option?

The fact of the matter was that while China had proven its importance as an ally by providing extensive material support to the Viet Minh, this support was as much grounded in geographical as ideological considerations.²² While the PRC’s communist

and “that he was willing to see Laos and Cambodia as independent states 'in same manner as India and Burma'” (geographically intact, non-communist, and officially neutral).

²⁰ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 58. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 166 ff. 58. A caveat to Mendes-France's report must be noted. James Cable, a British official at the conference, reports in his book *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (New York, NY: St Martin's, 1986), 94, that on June 11 the DRV representatives had secretly proposed to the French that if they would give up North Vietnam a partition deal could be worked out, although this may very well have been a ploy to get negotiations – which had completely stalled – back on track. The key factor is that Zhou was likely unaware of this initiative and hence when he signaled the acceptability of a partition deal two weeks later, would have thought he was slyly undercutting the DRV negotiators to butter up the French, thereby revealing his self-interested angle.

²¹ Note from the adviser to the US Delegation to the Special Adviser, 15 June 1954, *The Geneva Conference*, 1150.

²² Qiang, “China and the Geneva Conference,” 104.

solidarity may not have dimmed, the political reality had changed. With the expectation that the Geneva conference would be a bust, American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had recently given a number of speeches that discussed a program of “united defense” in Indochina. This concept entailed the formation of a “South-East Asian NATO,” and was understood to include the possibility of American troops deploying in Indochina.²³ Dulles’ words rang loudly in Beijing, whose overarching concern in Indochina was the threat that a Western troop presence posed to its southern border.²⁴ Having secured the creation of a territorially-intact DRV to serve as a buffer zone it was now in China’s interest to conclude an agreement as quickly as possible.²⁵ The establishment of neutral regimes in Laos and Cambodia achieved China’s aim of removing Western military power from the area and successfully undermined the justification for Washington’s proposed regional alliance. It had further occurred to the Chinese leadership that its strategic interests in Indochina did not coincide with Vietnam’s. While Hanoi meant to assemble a bloc of friendly governments, planners in the PRC called for hedging against the emergence of a rival by diffusing power along its

²³ U.S. Department of State, “Security in the Pacific: Address by Secretary Dulles,” *Department of State Bulletin* 30 (27 April 1953), 972. Smith-Bidault Meeting, Geneva, May 7, Afternoon: The United States Delegation to the Department of State, *The Geneva Conference*, 713.

²⁴ Qiang, “China and the Geneva Conference,” 104. Qiang explains that “Indo-China was one of the three fronts ... which the CCP perceived as vulnerable to foreign intervention. To eliminate the French troops in northern Vietnam would consolidate China’s southern border.” Walter Bedell Smith further reported (The United States Delegation to the Department of State, Geneva, June 17, 1954 – 1 p.m., *The Geneva Conference*, 1171) that “[British Foreign Secretary Anthony] Eden said Chou's major worry seemed to be US intentions [in] that area and conviction we were attempting establish bases for assault on China.” Although the absence of American troops in Indochina made the conflict a less acute threat to China than the Korean War had been, it is apparent that the PRC felt it was dealing with a matter of national security in addition to its realpolitik opposition to deepened American influence, which both Qiang Zhai (“China and the Geneva Conference,” 104 and *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 54) and Ben Kiernan (*How Pol Pot*, 142-143) identify as the PRC's primary preoccupation.

²⁵ Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 54 quotes a member of the Chinese delegation named Qian Jiadong, who explains that the PRC’s major concern at the time was that “after the DRV drove the French out, the United States would come in. Therefore, it would be better to stop the war for the moment and rest for a few years before completing unification.”

borders. What appeared as concessions then, were in fact net advantages for Beijing.²⁶ In this light, it is no surprise that one VWP member would later recall, “We did not realize that the Chinese plans were merely to establish peace on their borders, a zone of security, and northern Indo-China was enough for them.”²⁷

The one area in which Zhou held the line was over the potential that a Western military presence could return to Indochina in the form of security alliances or foreign aid. While he had readily abandoned the claims of the Cambodian communists, when Tep Phan pressed to retain the right of Cambodia to form alliances to preserve its security the Chinese premier suddenly grew contentious. Even after the final text of the agreement granted Cambodia a limited right to form alliances to provide the “effective defense of their territory,” Zhou persisted in his opposition, warning against the formation of any Indochinese military alliances in his final remarks at the conference’s closing session.²⁸ This sudden obstinacy was of course an extension of China’s concerns about Western influence in its backyard, and offered no consolation to the DRV delegates who had watched their battlefield successes disappear one by one at the negotiating table.

While Geneva had yielded disappointment for Hanoi, the Cambodian royal government could hardly have fared better. Sihanouk’s country had emerged territorially-intact and free of foreign troops. He now embarked on the task of establishing a foreign policy as a modern state. After flirting briefly with the prospect of close ties to Washington, Sihanouk embarked on a tightrope walk of official neutralism that lasted until a military coup deposed him from power in 1970. By maintaining a strict policy of

²⁶ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 16-18. Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 61.

²⁷ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 140, from Ben Kiernan’s interview with Hoang Tung.

²⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Text of Final Declaration,” *Department of State Bulletin* 31 (2 August 1954), 164. Durdin, “Cambodians Win,” 5.

non-alignment, he hoped to maintain congenial relations with both the Cold War camps while binding himself to neither. In theory, he could then play the two sides off one another to gain material and political support from both, but avoid picking sides in the global dispute. In practice it was a clumsy process of contradictory statements and inconsistent postures that seemed to confuse everyone about his true intentions.²⁹ In the short-term, however, it was a remarkably effective strategy for keeping his country afloat and relatively unaffected by the war that was brewing in neighboring Vietnam.

In May of 1955 the governments of Cambodia and the United States signed the kingdom's first military aid deal. While the agreement lasted Washington would be the nation's largest source of foreign aid, eventually providing \$300 million for its police and military over an eight year period (American aid comprised 30% of the military budget in the early 1960's).³⁰ By and large, however, it was a hands-off relationship. Sihanouk's neutralism was largely acceptable to the leadership in Washington as long as he did not swerve too far toward China.³¹ After the prince rejected the offer of membership in the American-led Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, the US elected not to strain its ties with pro-West allies in Bangkok and Saigon by appearing overly interested in a country that appeared soft on communism. Sihanouk, meanwhile, felt no desire to complicate his dealings with China, the region's dominant power, by associating itself with the American camp.³²

²⁹ Sihanouk's trips to China and the United States in late 1958 provide an example of this, wherein he discussed "increasing cooperation" with Beijing before traveling to New York and warning that Zhou may not "keep his word" to maintain a peaceful Taiwan policy. "Sihanouk Ends Peiping Visit," *NYT*, 26 August 1958, p. 11 and "Cambodian Quotes Chou on the Isles," *NYT*, 13 September 1958, 6. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document IDs 91404677 and 79698663. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

³⁰ Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (Boulder, CO:Westview, 1984), 63.

³¹ Kenton Clymer, "The Perils of Neutrality," *Diplomatic History*, 23:4 (Fall 1999), 613.

³² Michael Leifer, "Cambodia and SEATO," *International Journal* 17:1 (Winter 1961-1962), 127-128.

For all its military and political might, however, the relationship with the United States would not be Cambodia's most important in the years ahead. Though they were not nearly as powerful as the United States, the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam would be most directly involved in the issues facing the newly-independent Cambodia. The recent experience of fighting the Viet Minh troops on Cambodian soil and centuries of Vietnamese expansionism made Vietnam the prince's primary foreign policy concern. Hostility toward and mistrust of Vietnam pervaded the Cambodian national consciousness and would have no small influence in Cambodia's interactions with both Hanoi and Saigon. In terms of immediate policy concerns, the guerilla war that would soon begin in South Vietnam was simply the latest in a centuries-long history of Vietnamese threats to Cambodia's borders. Sihanouk's objectives during this period were therefore quite straightforward: to keep his country from getting involved in the Vietnam War in the short term and, in the longer view, to defend against the territorial ambitions of a unified Vietnam.³³

Based on the Viet Minh's ties to the Cambodian resistance, Sihanouk was naturally suspicious of the DRV's intentions. He was wise to be. In July of 1954 – despite the ongoing Geneva negotiations – The General Secretary and chief theoretician of the Vietnamese Worker's Party, Truong Chinh, had authored a document advocating a renewed focus on Laos and Cambodia and the formation of a “true revolutionary Party of the working class and of working peoples.” By the end of the conference, however, the situation on the ground had changed. Although the KPRP stayed intact and moved underground, the withdrawal of Vietnamese fighters had slashed its fighting capacity overnight. Meanwhile opposition to the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in South Vietnam had

³³ Joseph R. Pouvaty, “Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations,” *Asian Survey* 26 (April 1986), 442.

become priority number one for the North Vietnamese.³⁴ Even if they had wanted to pick up where they left off in Cambodia, the PRC had applied intense pressure on them to be patient and take advantage of the peace established by the Geneva agreements to benefit the reunification effort.³⁵ Rather than charge back into the fray, they opted to wait and see what kind of neighbor Sihanouk would make.

Although the Cambodia-US military aid deal and Sihanouk's tampering with the 1955 elections caused some consternation in Hanoi, most doubts were soon allayed. At the Bandung conference of Afro-Asian states in April of that year the prince assured Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong that he would not accept SEATO protection or allow his nation to become host to an American military presence. He followed up by exchanging political missions with Hanoi in October and signing a Sino-Cambodian Friendship Declaration in February 1957 that made him the first non-communist beneficiary of Chinese aid. This act resulted in a brief embargo by Thailand, South Vietnam and the United States, but successfully demonstrated to the DRV that he was not a nascent American pawn.³⁶ It soon became clear that the royal government was also willing to turn a blind eye to Vietnamese communist activity in the border regions, which put to rest Hanoi's primary concern about the Sihanouk government and ending the need for active resistance and "liberation governments" to secure use of the countryside.³⁷

The strategic conditions on the ground had also changed dramatically. In compliance with the Geneva agreements the Viet Minh forces in Cambodia – who had been so vital in providing training, military direction, and thousands of experienced

³⁴ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 50.

³⁵ Qiang, "China and the Geneva Conference," 112.

³⁶ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 170. Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 72.

³⁷ Short, *Pol Pot*, 113.

fighters – had departed by ship to North Vietnam.³⁸ Somewhere between one and two thousand Khmer insurgents had chosen to accompany them and continue their communist education in Vietnam rather than risk persecution under Sihanouk.³⁹ This included the most experienced and influential cadres, who would have been most vulnerable to government repression.⁴⁰ Party ranks had further thinned as large groups of Cambodian fighters laid down their arms following both the French transfer of power to Sihanouk in November 1953 and the successful conclusion of the Geneva conference.⁴¹ Between these desertions and the removal of party members to Vietnam, the KPRP was a ghost of its former self – deprived of its best cadres, populated by inexperienced new recruits, and diminished in size to less than 2,000 men.⁴² The prospects for rebuilding the movement were not promising. The vast majority of the Cambodian population consisted of peasant farmers deeply rooted in traditional, quiet lifestyles. They tended to be conservative in the respect that they were loyal to the royal family and uninterested in revolutionary politics.⁴³ The struggle for independence had stirred many to action, but there was little popular interest in replacing Sihanouk with a leftist regime.

³⁸ The custodial role of the Viet Minh is discussed briefly in footnote 12 of this chapter. Becker, *When the War*, 72, writes that at least 3,000 Viet Minh fought in Cambodia. Memorandum by Chester L. Cooper and Joseph A. Yager of the United States Delegation to the Special Adviser (Heath), 1 June 1954, *The Geneva Conference*, 1029, cites US intelligent reports estimating 2,200 Viet Minh regulars and 6,500 (presumably indigenous Khmer, but this is not expanded upon) irregulars.

³⁹ CIA, “Communism and Cambodia,” 20, estimates that as many as 2,000 Cambodians – including dependants – left for Vietnam, based on information obtained from North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong sources. David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 210 ff. 8, cites Nuon Chea’s draft history of the Communist party of Kampuchea as giving a number between 1,500-2,000. Paul Quinn-Judge, “Too Few Communists,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 123 (16 February 1983), 20, puts the number closer to 1,000.

⁴⁰ Kiernan, “Origins of Khmer Communism,” 125.

⁴¹ Becker, *When the War*, 76. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 171 relates that the successful conclusion of Geneva deflated the party line that Sihanouk had “betrayed the country and followed the French,” and hence led to hundreds of further desertions.

⁴² Becker, *When the War*, 79. Kiernan, “Origins of Khmer Communism,” 175.

⁴³ Etcheson, *Rise and Demise*, 40.

Given these realities it would have been difficult for the leadership of the VWP to argue in favor of fomenting a Cambodian insurgency in 1955. Not only was the KPRP utterly incapable of realistically opposing the 30,000-strong Cambodian armed forces, but Sihanouk's accommodating stance was extremely valuable to Hanoi. The centrality of a friendly – or at least cooperative – government in Phnom Penh was axiomatic to Vietnamese strategists, and they were of no mind to spurn Sihanouk's accommodation.⁴⁴ The VWP officially renounced revolutionary tactics in Cambodia and directed the KPRP to fall in behind the prince's neutralist foreign policy while waging a "political struggle" domestically by forming a legal, above-ground political party. To bolster their case, Hanoi plied them with Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Congress which advocated a "peaceful path" to socialism through parliamentary participation.⁴⁵ Those still pushing to renew armed resistance were reassured that as soon as the war in Vietnam had been won, victory would follow throughout Indochina. Until then, Cambodia's only revolutionary function would be as a Vietnamese rearguard. Underground activities for KPRP cadres were limited to providing military and logistical support for Vietnamese operations on Cambodian territory.⁴⁶

After this point, active Vietnamese involvement in the Cambodian party was effectively terminated. Hanoi still claimed a supervisory role in major decisions, but the Cambodians were essentially left to manage their daily affairs on their own and contact was only maintained through the VWP's Southern Bureau.⁴⁷ However, between the

⁴⁴ Chang, *Kampuchea Between*, 13.

⁴⁵ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 49-52. Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 73.

⁴⁶ Engelbert and Goscha partially reproduce VWP Southern Bureau chief Le Duan's 1956 plan of action which called for the construction of bases in Cambodia to support the resumption of armed violence in South Vietnam, but no revolutionary action in Cambodia. Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 52-53. Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 67.

⁴⁷ David P. Chandler, "Revising the Past in Democratic Kampuchea: When Was the Birthday of the

degraded state of the party and Hanoi's directive to cooperate with Sihanouk, there was little they could do with this enhanced independence and they essentially ran on autopilot. Indeed, David Chandler contends that from 1951-1960, "[Cambodians'] own contributions had been ambiguous, subordinate, or non-existent."⁴⁸

It was an indisputably rough period for the Cambodian Party. Electoral politics were at best futile and at times physically dangerous. In keeping with VWP policy the party had formed an above-ground front organization known as Pracheachon to contest the fixed 1955 elections. Sihanouk's continued electoral manipulation kept the party politically marginalized, however, and its members were subject to constant police harassment.⁴⁹ To top it all off Sieu Heng, the Vietnamese-installed leader of the party's rural branch, defected to the government in 1959 devastating the revolutionary apparatus in the countryside.⁵⁰ Pol Pot would later lament that in these years over half of the party membership was arrested or killed by the government, and 90% of their rural bases were lost. Although these figures are certainly exaggerated, the Cambodian party endured real hardships during this period, and Vietnam's unhelpfulness would be remembered.⁵¹

Despite the toll these years took on the KPRP, Hanoi's interest in Sihanouk only grew. In 1964 – as part of a general turn to the left in Cambodia's foreign policy – the prince secretly formalized his de facto accommodation with the use of Cambodia's border regions by the National Liberation Front, South Vietnam's communist "liberation government." In exchange for a promise to honor Cambodia's independence and frontiers after the War, Sihanouk secretly agreed to allow communist troops to use Cambodian

Party?," *Pacific Affairs* 56 (Summer 1983), 292.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 290.

⁴⁹ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 56.

⁵⁰ Kiernan, "Origins of Khmer Communism," 176.

⁵¹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 55.

territory for smuggling war materials and to establish command posts.⁵² His timing was opportune, coinciding as it did with Hanoi's growing reliance on the use of Cambodian territory. Before 1965 the use of Cambodian land by Vietnamese communists had only been sporadic, but increased American pressure on the South had forced a change in tactics. NLF forces had been pushed back from Saigon and found that the open paddy that defined the terrain north and west of the city offered no cover for their military activities. The nearby jungles of Cambodia quickly became highly valuable to Vietnamese forces in need of sanctuary zones and smuggling routes.⁵³ This series of events would continue to replay itself up through 1968's disastrous Tet Offensive – the more difficult conditions on the ground got for the communists, the more dependent they became on the free use of Cambodian land.⁵⁴

While this pragmatic analysis would motivate Hanoi to restrain revolutionary impulses among the Cambodian communists, the prince remained suspicious of the Vietnamese. The continued presence of a Cambodian revolutionary party and the fact that the departing Viet Minh had left caches of arms behind in 1954 convinced him that Hanoi intended to someday return and resume the struggle.⁵⁵ Vietnam's role in founding and directing the KPRP in its early years had indelibly linked the two in the mind of the prince. Although during the 1960's the Cambodian party would begin to distance itself from Hanoi's edicts and pursue an independent political program, Sihanouk had no way of knowing that the radicals in his country were no longer Vietnamese stooges. Even to

⁵² Marie Alexandrine Martin, *Cambodia, a Shattered Society*, Mark W. McLeod trans. (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1989), 93. According to *Short, Pol Pot*, 113, there is some evidence based on French intelligence that indicates a secret agreement between Sihanouk and the VWP may have been in existence as far back as 1954.

⁵³ Etcheson. *Rise and Demise*. 76.

⁵⁴ Michael Leifer, "International Dimensions of the Cambodia Conflict," *International Affairs* 51 (October 1975), 533.

⁵⁵ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 47.

the final hour of his rule, he held the DRV responsible for revolutionary activities in Cambodia.⁵⁶

It was impossible for the prince to fully overcome his mistrust of the Vietnamese. While it was expedient to pursue friendly relations with the DRV, in the Khmer understanding of international affairs Vietnam would always be a threat to hedge against. To this end he sought a relationship with the People's Republic of China.⁵⁷ At the Bandung conference of 1955, Sihanouk met with China's Zhou Enlai to discuss Cambodia's new policy of official neutrality. Zhou took great pains to both publicly and privately reaffirm his nation's respect for Cambodian neutrality and disavow all Chinese desire to interfere in the kingdom's internal affairs.⁵⁸ These exchanges would inaugurate a period of increasingly warm Sino-Cambodian relations as well as a personal friendship between Zhou and Sihanouk, who had apparently been satisfied by the Chinese premier's assurances.

Like their allies in Hanoi, the Chinese appreciated Sihanouk's accommodating stance *viz-a-viz* the struggle in Vietnam, but also had reasons of their own to back the Cambodian prince. As mentioned earlier, the neutralization of most of Indochina had already served the Chinese well by eliminating the presence of French troops in the region. With the war over they found that neutrality had the further benefit of removing Indochina from the arena of Cold War competition and giving China a break from high-stakes international engagement.⁵⁹ Having invested heavily in regional communist movements – sending troops to Korea and providing massive material aid to the Viet

⁵⁶ Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 79.

⁵⁷ Pouvatchy, "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations," 442.

⁵⁸ Leifer, "Cambodia and Seato," 126-127. Kuo-Kang Shao, "Zhou Enlai's Diplomacy and the Neutralization of Indo-China, 1954-55," *The China Quarterly* 107 (September 1986), 500-501.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 499-500.

Minh – the PRC needed desperately to attend to domestic concerns. In 1953 it launched a Five-Year-Plan which called for the long-term project of building up heavy industry. To do so successfully required an environment of relative peace – it did not have the resources to represent its interests by funding another lengthy, expensive war.⁶⁰ To this end, Mao encouraged a regional policy of peaceful coexistence, arguing that “it is good to have no war” and “it is better not to fight,” and publicly pledging to not support communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia.⁶¹ When the United States began providing military aid to Cambodia in 1955 the Chinese expressed reflexive disapproval, but as long as there were no American bases on Cambodian soil they tolerated the arrangement.⁶²

The neutralization of Indochina also afforded the PRC a valuable opportunity to improve its own diplomatic standing. The Chinese were eager to break out of the political isolation brought on by Washington’s containment policy and recast their nation as an important, good-faith participant in global affairs. Before heading to Geneva, Zhou Enlai had been specifically tasked with taking advantage of the international forum the negotiations offered to pursue this kind of a public relations initiative.⁶³ As far as China’s relationship with Cambodia was concerned, his efforts were a resounding success. Early in the conference the head of the royal Cambodian delegation, Tep Phan, had startled the Chinese representatives by accusing them of using the Viet Minh as a proxy to engage in

⁶⁰ Yang, “Changes in Mao’s Attitude,” 11-12. Qiang, “China and the Geneva Conference,” 109.

⁶¹ Yang, “Changes in Mao’s Attitude,” 12.

⁶² Leifer, “Cambodia and Seato,” 128.

⁶³ Qiang, “China and the Geneva Conference,” 108-109. Qiang writes that Zhou’s directives were “first, to exercise active diplomacy at Geneva in order to break the American policy of isolation and embargo towards China and to reduce world tensions; and secondly, to try to conclude agreements so as to set a precedent for solving international problems through big power consultations.”

imperialist aggression against Cambodia.⁶⁴ As negotiations progressed, however, Zhou's efforts to produce a compromise had so impressed Phan that he publically commended Chinese flexibility in dropping support for the Cambodian resistance (on which the DRV had yet to concede) and "expressed satisfaction at [the] spirit of conciliation shown by [the] Chinese."⁶⁵ Of course the Chinese premier's concessions had not been calculated to win the royal government's good graces. The decision to jettison the concerns of the Vietnamese and Cambodian communists had been motivated by a desire to salvage the conference. That it so effectively altered Cambodian opinions, however, demonstrated that the Chinese effort to revamp their image through international diplomacy had been effective – a conclusion borne out by the Sino-Cambodian relationship that would develop in following years.

Outside the limited venue of Geneva, China employed a strategy of engaging nations uninterested in Cold War politics and presenting its friendship as a non-aligned alternative – particularly among neutral Asian nations.⁶⁶ To that end, its cordial relations with Cambodia served as a showpiece of Chinese foreign policy and the viability of the principles of peaceful coexistence. In this respect, a neutral Cambodia that desired China's friendship of its own volition was far more valuable to Beijing than the establishment of a communist puppet state.⁶⁷ Through Zhou's skillful diplomacy at Geneva, China had demonstrated to the world that it was not a dangerous provocateur, but an important power capable of constructive dialogue.⁶⁸ In the years that followed, the

⁶⁴ Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 56.

⁶⁵ Fifteenth Restricted Session on Indochina, Geneva, June 18, 3 p.m.: The United States Delegation to the Department of State, *The Geneva Conference*, 1181.

⁶⁶ Qiang, "China and the Geneva Conference," 110.

⁶⁷ Boucher, "The Relationship Between," 7.

⁶⁸ Kuo-Kang, "Zhou Enlai's Diplomacy," 486.

PRC had ample opportunity to further portray itself as a beneficent regional power with regular proclamations expressing “China’s respect for the independence and integrity of” Cambodia.⁶⁹ That this noble pose could be struck with nice, cheap words fit snugly within the Chinese agenda as well.

Motivated by shared self-interest, Hanoi and Beijing would maintain parallel policies supporting Sihanouk and toning down revolutionary sentiment in Cambodia, but the prince invariably preferred close ties with the Chinese. This had everything to do with geography and shared Khmer-Viet history. China was not engaged in a civil war that threatened Cambodia’s borders more each day, and was not confronted with the historical animus that burdened Vietnam’s relations with Sihanouk’s kingdom. While the prince understood that his foreign policy enjoyed China’s goodwill only because it fit within Chinese national interest, their friendship was the best guarantee of his nation’s security and therefore to be actively courted.⁷⁰ Thus, Phnom Penh dutifully voiced support for the PRC on a number of critical issues such as Chinese admission to the United Nations, their position on Taiwan, and opposition to the Soviet-American nuclear monopoly. At the Colombo conference to resolve the 1962 Sino-Indian border dispute, Sihanouk worked to steer the discussions in directions that would not offend Beijing.⁷¹

The close relationship that developed between China and Cambodia can be considered a clear success of Sihanouk’s neutralist balancing act. Although some in the West felt his neutralism “barely qualified as non-alignment” due its pro-Beijing slant and even chalked his sometimes unpredictable foreign policy up to mental imbalance, in the

⁶⁹ Tillman Durdin, “Chou Conciliatory on Laos, Cambodia,” *NYT*, 15 July 1954, pp. 1, 5. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 83341985. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

⁷⁰ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 45. Sihanouk would at one point observe, “the ‘Reds’ only applaud our neutrality because it serves their interests.”

⁷¹ Michael Leifer, *Cambodia – The Search for Security* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1967), 139-141.

early years of independence he did a remarkable job of using both camps' interest in his nation to Cambodia's advantage.⁷² While American aid monies balanced the budget and paid the salaries of the military, China's friendship was leveraged to counterbalance regional opponents. In the longer term, however, this system would prove to be inherently unsustainable. Sihanouk's strategy relied completely on the most cynical inclinations of other nations' foreign policies and hence produced no strategic partnerships capable of fostering lasting ties or meaningful cultural or economic interaction. Instead he cultivated superficial relationships that encouraged other nations to view Cambodia as simply a factor to tally in their geopolitical calculations.

There would be a steep price to pay for this in the coming years. By the mid-1960s the rift between the communists in Russia and China began to dominate the Sino-Viet relationship and fracture their united front. As their alliance weakened and turned into outright hostility in the 1970s, Cambodia's primary significance would be the role it could play in their rivalry. Rather than a respected ally, Cambodia and its people would become just another venue for the competition of bigger powers unconcerned with the consequences for the tiny kingdom.

⁷² Central Intelligence Agency, "Prince Sihanouk and the New Order in Southeast Asia," ESAU Documents, pp. 144 and 147, available from <http://www.foia.cia.gov/CPE/ESAU/esau-25.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 October, 2008.

Chapter Two: Differences among Allies

During the Vietnam War, propaganda would describe the relationship between the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as being like that of "lips and teeth" or "comrades and brothers." Although this was a gross oversimplification, it is true that the two states shared a very close bond in their early years.¹ The People's Republic was the first nation to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1950 and provided them with political guidance and material support first in fighting the French and later as they struck out as an independent nation. When the communist world began to fracture into Chinese and Soviet camps in the late 1950s, leaders in Hanoi found themselves in an awkward position. While they had deep ties with China, they knew that a unified communist front would offer the most support for the increasingly inevitable war in the South. For as long as possible they conscientiously avoided taking sides, even attempting briefly to act as mediator between the Soviets and Chinese.²

The roots of the Sino-Soviet rift lay in change in party doctrine symbolized by Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of Josef Stalin as a criminal. As the Soviet leadership turned the page on its revolutionary past, the Chinese Communist Party was preparing for the forced collectivization of the Great Leap Forward and launching anti-

¹ Nguyen Vu Tung in Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung and James G. Hershberg, eds., "77 Conversation between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977," Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 22 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 1998), p. 44.

² Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China 1956-1962* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), 234. Examples include Ho Chi Minh's refusal to pick sides when the Soviets aired their grievances at the Bucharest Conference (150) and his successful effort to produce a compromise statement between the Chinese and Soviets at the Moscow Conference (168).

rightist campaigns. To quote one take on the this divergence, “One country shut the doors of the concentration camps and the other opened them.”³ The most divisive aspect of this ideological shift, however, was in foreign policy. The Soviet international outlook stepped away from a stress on continued revolution, and Khrushchev declared that it was possible to achieve global communism through peaceful evolution rather than violent means. This clashed glaringly with Mao’s fervor for revolution (which the Chinese leader saw as his nation’s “unique contribution” to Marxist-Leninist theory) and the two leaders engaged in a number of personal debates over whether to increase international tensions in order to spread revolution or to decrease tensions to avoid conflict.⁴ During these exchanges Khrushchev tried vigorously to persuade Mao that in an age with nuclear weapons the risk of direct confrontation with the United States was simply too great, but the Chinese leader would not be dissuaded. He dismissed American nuclear weapons as a “paper tiger” and insisted that the overwhelming numbers of China and the Soviet Union would lead to military triumph.⁵ These differences in theory finally manifested as an open break in September 1962, when the CCP Central Committee criticized “international revisionism” and declared that “the truth of Marxism-Leninism and the center of world revolution has moved from Moscow to Beijing.”⁶

In 1963 the Vietnamese gave up trying to remain neutral on the Sino-Soviet rift. The Chinese had begun to signal their frustration at Hanoi’s unwillingness to distance itself from Moscow, and the benefits of trying to ride the fence were becoming

³ Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1996), 215.

⁴ Yang, “Changes in Mao’s Attitude,” 16-18.

⁵ In order to handle a military confrontation Mao suggested, “All you have to do is provoke the Americans into military action, and I’ll give you as many divisions as you need to crush them – a hundred, two hundred, one thousand divisions.” Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s*, 219-220.

⁶ These words were spoken by Zhou Enlai at the Tenth Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee. Yang, “Changes in Mao’s Attitude,” 22-23.

increasingly unclear. Any hopes of holding out for increased Soviet military aid had been dashed with Khrushchev's renewed emphasis on "peaceful coexistence" following the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ideologically and strategically, China was the logical ally of Vietnam. In December 1963, the Ninth Plenum of the Vietnamese Worker's Party publically dismissed the Soviet Union's international line while lauding Mao's revolutionary theory as a "model strategy." They were careful not to risk serious damage to their relationship with Moscow and eschewed the sharply anti-Soviet tone Beijing tended to employ in its diatribes, but it was clear whose friendship they preferred.⁷ For a time after this, Hanoi would keep the Soviets at arm's length while steadily increasing cooperation with Beijing. Le Duan, general secretary of the VWP, expressed this sentiment shortly after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, telling Chairman Mao, "The support from China is indispensable," whereas, "the Soviet revisionists want to make us a bargaining chip."⁸

However, the rapidly intensifying military situation soon threw into question the wisdom of hastily writing off friends and potential patrons. Beijing had long provided the DRV with military aid, but the status quo arrangement was no longer sufficient. The Vietnamese simply lacked the ability to challenge the massive American escalation without increased aid from abroad. In this the Soviet Union – now under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev – saw an opportunity and Premier Alexei Kosygin traveled to Hanoi to express his nation's solidarity with North Vietnam. During the trip he offered material

⁷ Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 123 and 125.

⁸ Mao Zedong and Le Duan, 13 August 1964, See footnote 117 to conversation of Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong, Hoang Van Hoan, 5 October 1964, "77 Conversations," 72.

assistance for the Vietnamese struggle, and on February 10, 1965 the two nations concluded formal economic and military agreements.⁹

This new cooperation between Moscow and Hanoi did not sit well with PRC leaders, who saw influence in Vietnam as a zero-sum game. The Soviet aid deal was quite generous – including free provision of tanks, missiles, and artillery pieces – and its weapons were far more sophisticated than the aid Beijing had been providing. If the DRV were to grow reliant on the more advanced Soviet weaponry to wage its struggle, it might abandon China completely and align with Soviet Union.¹⁰ China was horrified by the prospect of a Soviet-Viet alliance drawing Hanoi out from under its sway. Vietnam had come to be the cornerstone of the PRC’s national security strategy for the vital role it played in obstructing American encirclement of China – a concern that had come to preoccupy the Chinese leadership. The hostility that had come to define the Sino-Soviet relationship meant that China now faced a rival power along its northern border to match the presence of American troops in Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan. If the ideological “revisionists” in Moscow were deviously collaborating with the “imperialist” aims of the United States – as China insisted – it was more important than ever to keep Vietnam within the Chinese camp.¹¹

Vietnam’s significance to Beijing was rooted in two thousand years of Chinese imperial history during which the two countries had built extensive cultural and political ties. European colonialism in Asia had disrupted the traditional political arrangement and eliminated the hegemonic status China had once possessed, but the close Sino-Viet

⁹ Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 149.

¹⁰ Yang, “Changes in Mao’s Attitude,” 31.

¹¹ Guan, *Vietnamese Communists’ Relations*, 234. Stein Tonnesson, in “77 Conversations,” 36, also discusses a “reverse version of the domino theory,” in which North Vietnam was China’s last “standing domino” in the region and thus had to be prevented from succumbing to the “revisionist” camp.

cooperation of the First Indochina War heralded a renewal of Chinese involvement in the region. It also revived the age-old concept of a special relationship between China and Vietnam. The Chinese felt they were entitled to a role as Vietnam's patron and closest ally and sought to reassert their sphere of influence in Southeast Asia. Hence by inserting themselves into the management of the Vietnam War, the Soviets were clearly fishing in China's pond.¹² What to them was just another potential client state in a vast socialist bloc was a central element of two millennia of Chinese national security strategy.

The stakes of this dispute were revealed in the way that Zhou Enlai abandoned his traditionally light diplomatic touch in favor of issuing blunt, almost crude, admonitions about Soviet intentions to Vietnam. In May of 1965 he warned Ho Chi Minh that the Soviets wanted Hanoi to "put the NLF aside and sell out its brothers."¹³ Later that year he cautioned DRV Premier Pham Van Dong against receiving assistance from the Soviet Union, warning, "their help is not sincere," and, "It will be better without Soviet aid." He explained, of course, that "we always want to help ... But we are always afraid of the revisionists standing between us."¹⁴ In a conversation with Le Duan, Zhou got into specifics, arguing that the Soviets were maneuvering to divide Vietnam from China, improve bilateral relations with the US and to ultimately obstruct the Vietnamese struggle. He even claimed that if the DRV accepted the help of volunteer Soviet pilots they would sow disagreement in the ranks and likely disclose military secrets to the

¹² Chang, *Kampuchea Between*, 12. Nguyen in "77 Conversations," 60.

¹³ Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Ho Chi Minh, Beijing, 17 May 1965, "77 Conversations," 85.

¹⁴ Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, 9 October 1965. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Record no. 5034C87E-96B6-175C-960FA9D8056B7020. Accessed 4 December, 2008.

Americans. He concluded by starkly declaring that “opposing the US should necessarily go hand in hand with opposing revisionism.”¹⁵

Chinese opposition even took the form of direct confrontation with Vietnamese and Soviet party officials. In April 1965, Le Duan had visited Moscow and Beijing seeking assistance for the war. In Beijing, the Chinese accused him personally of associating himself too closely with the “revisionists.” When Duan raised the prospect of trilateral negotiations to coordinate Soviet and PRC aid to Vietnam, he was rebuffed with the explanation that the ideological differences with the Soviet party were too big for them to even share a table.¹⁶ A Soviet proposal on joint assistance was similarly shot down in an invective-laden telegram that tallied up China’s grievances against the USSR. Among their qualms with the aid proposals was a desire to base Soviet volunteers in China and Vietnam, the request to move supplies through Chinese airspace, and the Soviets’ prior disclosure to the West that military assistance was going to Hanoi. To PRC leaders each of these points masked duplicitous ulterior motives. They revealed that the Soviets did not have Vietnamese or Chinese interests at heart, and betrayed their secret desire to gain control over the two nations.¹⁷ The intensity of China’s opposition to Soviet aid is clear both from this diplomatic campaign and the fact that they would allow the Vietnamese to enter battle with inferior weaponry to prevent it. For a brief time, they even refused to allow the passage of Soviet arms through their territory. It mattered little

¹⁵ Discussion Between Zhou Enlai and Le Duan, 23 March 1966. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Record no. 5034C8BC-96B6-175C-9C840B7B07032AC8. Accessed 4 December, 2008.

¹⁶ Note by the GDR Embassy in Hanoi on a Conversation of Comrade Jarck with the Attache of the CSSR Embassy, Comrade Freybort, on 2 June 1965, from 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., in the Embassy of the GDR, 3 June 1965 [Excerpts], Lorenzi M. Lüthi, “Twenty-Four Soviet Bloc Documents on Vietnam and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1964-1966,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 16 (Spring 2008): 379-380.

¹⁷ Oral Statement by the Head of the Department for the USSR and for the Countries of Eastern Europe of MFA, PRC, Yu Zhan, Transmitted to the Embassy on 8 June 1965, *ibid.* 380-381.

that Hanoi was simply desperate for aid from *any* source and not interested in the political implications – opposing Soviet influence trumped all other concerns.

Unsurprisingly, Chinese obstinacy was wholly counterproductive. Leaders in Moscow and Hanoi agreed that the PRC's obstructionism was responsible for keeping Vietnam enfeebled, and thereby emboldening the US. The risk that a sense of impunity among the Americans could lead them to bomb Hanoi weighed heavily on their minds.¹⁸ That their stubbornness was only pushing Vietnam closer to the Soviet Union was not lost on Beijing, and – seeing as Soviet weapons could always reach Vietnam by sea – they were forced to relent. However, the working relationship was rocky at best and replete with delays, quibbles, and Chinese foot-dragging.¹⁹ Every once in a while some new Chinese objection would surface – such as opposition to the deployment of Soviet specialists and pilots in the DRV – which the Vietnamese would have to accommodate.²⁰ It was far from ideal, but given their awkward position trying to fight the US while staying on good terms with both China and the USSR, they tolerated it.

In the immediate term, this difficultness on the part of the PRC was not a meaningful impediment to good relations. The two parties were still united by their history of close collaboration and the ideological appeal of Chinese doctrine. Even as some elements of the VWP Politburo grew interested in moving closer to Moscow, they were balanced out by a strong pro-Chinese faction including National Assembly Chairman Truong Chinh, Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, and Politburo member Le

¹⁸ Note by the GDR Embassy in Hanoi on a Conversation with Ambassadors of the other Socialist States in the Soviet Embassy on 2 April 1965, 25 April 1965, *ibid.* 377.

¹⁹ Yang, "Changes in Mao's Attitude," 31.

²⁰ Note on a Conversation with an Unnamed Representative of the International Department of the CPSU CC on the Situation in Vietnam, 9 July 1965, "Twenty-Four Documents," 384.

Duc Tho.²¹ It was impossible, however, for the matter to not cause some friction between the parties. While they were pouring out blood and treasure to combat US imperialism it must have been mind-boggling for the Vietnamese to watch China let ideological quibbles interfere with helping their ally wage the very struggle they claimed was paramount. As early as December 1964, the Vietnamese had expressed to Soviet representatives their frustration at China's tendency to push the DRV to fight without compromise, but not provide the extra aid to make that possible. Some cadres had become disenchanted enough to let on to the Soviet Ambassador their suspicions that the Chinese were only using them for their own ends and – as they lacked the support to wage a proper fight – mentioned they were open to negotiations with the US including the possibility of a neutralized South Vietnam.²²

It did not help the Chinese case that (in addition to impeding the flow of foreign aid) their leadership displayed an almost visceral lack of concern for the hardships their allies were facing. Ho Chi Minh experienced this firsthand during a secret meeting with Mao in November of 1965. In the course of discussions over foreign assistance the Chinese leader told him he should not “grumble” about the need for foreign volunteers until his nation had lost at least half its population fighting, and he took it as a foregone conclusion that Vietnam should experience the complete destruction of its industry and

²¹ Stephen J. Morris, “The Soviet-Vietnamese-Chinese Triangle in the 1970s: The View from Moscow,” *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, Priscilla Mary Roberts ed. (Chicago, IL: Wilson Center, 2006): 417. Radio Free Europe Research, “Factionalism in North Vietnam,” available from <http://www.osa.ceu.hu/files/holdings/300/8/3/pdf/38-1-296.pdf>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2008. Politburo members identified as having Pro-Soviet or “Moderate” tendencies include Premier Pham Van Dong, Defense Secretary General Nguyen Vo Giap, and Chairman of the VWP Southern Bureau Pham Hung. VWP General Secretary Le Duan's affiliation is disputed and he may likely have followed Ho Chi Minh's lead by trying to avoid picking sides.

²² Note on Conversations with Comrade Shcherbakov about the Developmental Tendencies in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, on 22 and 28 December 1964, 6 January 1965, “Twenty-Four Documents,” 372-373.

infrastructure in the pursuit of total victory. This dispassionate ends-justify-the-means mindset is hardly surprising from Mao, who had earlier opined that “even if half the population of the world were wiped out” in a final confrontation with capitalism “this would not be a total disaster,” but that did not make the pill any less bitter for the Vietnamese. Given the tone of his conversation with Ho it is almost comical that Mao ended the meeting with what he presumably considered a helpful offer to store foreign-donated industrial equipment in China where it would be safe until the end of the war.²³ A month later, Ho would bemoan Beijing’s lack of support in comparison to Moscow, stating “those who do not always agree with the position of the DRV in all questions rendered more and less self-serving aid.”²⁴

In the coming months and years, the PRC would fail to improve its record both as a genuinely helpful partner in the war effort, and in its regard for Vietnam’s wellbeing. In April 1965, US President Lyndon B. Johnson had begun to push for peace talks with Hanoi. This issue would soon develop into the foremost stumbling block in Sino-Viet relations. Despite Vietnamese interest in using negotiations while fighting to assist their war effort, the Chinese were staunchly opposed to any talks. Their reasoning lay in the logic of the communist rift.

By 1965 Mao had become obsessed with suspected “collusion” between “revisionists” in Moscow and “imperialists” in Washington. American-sponsored peace talks – which the USSR supported – were only the latest evidence of a Soviet-US

²³ Report by the Adviser to the Bulgarian Embassy in Beijing, Ivan Dimitrov, to the Bulgarian Ambassador, Khr. Stoiichev, 14 December 1965, *ibid*, 386. Mao’s “total disaster” comment is found in Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: a World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 530-531.

²⁴ Excerpts from a Note by GDR Ambassador to the DRV Kohrt on the Current Policy of the Chinese Leadership, 11 December 1965, “Twenty-Four Documents,” 385.

conspiracy. In Mao's belief, negotiations were merely a ploy in a broader American scheme to engineer a pincer attack on China from the north and south. To forestall this and disrupt the "conspiracy" the Chinese labored to prevent the peace talks and publicly denounced them as a "hoax" and a "counter-revolutionary" plot.²⁵ The Chinese vigorously lobbied the Vietnamese to spurn negotiations. To encourage Hanoi to stay the course the PRC provided fresh military aid including the deployment of 320,000 Chinese support troops to North Vietnam. Any discussion of negotiations was dismissed out of hand. Even when Ho Chi Minh mentioned his desire to use peace talks to arrest the ongoing American military escalation, Mao coolly replied, "I have not noticed what issues you have negotiated ... I only pay attention to how you fight the Americans."²⁶

The idea of negotiations as a revisionist ruse makes a certain amount of sense if considered through the Chinese perspective. Although Beijing's bitterest vitriol was aimed at the Soviet Union, the primary enemy at this point was still the United States. As mentioned earlier, the central factor of the Sino-Soviet bad blood was Moscow's unwillingness to embrace confrontation with the capitalist world. While Brezhnev had embraced the DRV's struggle, Mao concluded that he would not depart from the essence of Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence.²⁷ To this end Beijing saw a prolonged war in Vietnam as desirable for confounding American power. PRC leaders contended that as

²⁵ Qiang Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-1968: New Evidence from Chinese Sources," Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 18 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, June 1997), 18 discusses Mao's use of any possible forum to denounce peace talks – with visiting diplomats, at international meetings, and in domestic political discourse.

²⁶ PRC troops in Vietnam included "anti-aircraft artillery units, railway units, defense work engineering units, and road building units." Yang, "Changes in Mao's Attitude," 32-33. Mao's Conversation with the Party and Government Delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 20 October 1965, from Qiang Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1965: New Chinese Evidence," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 6/7 (Winter 1995): 245.

²⁷ Qiang Zhai, "China and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-1968," *The Pacific Historical Review* 68 no. 1 (February 1999): 35.

long as its troops were tied down in Vietnam, Washington would be unable to oppose communist movements elsewhere or project influence abroad. In a meeting with Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, Zhou Enlai explained “it is beneficial to the people of the world if America is bogged down in Vietnam. Although the United States is powerful, once its strength is dispersed, it will become powerless.”²⁸

Hence it was immaterial if a peace agreement might be strategically advantageous for the DRV, because PRC leaders saw the war as being as much about frustrating the US as it was about unifying Vietnam. They did not hesitate in expressing this to the Vietnamese. In August of 1966, Zhou explained to Pham Van Dong that “the strategy has been defined: conducting a protracted war in the South. . . . My fundamental idea is that we should be patient. Patience means victory. Patience can cause you more hardship, more sufferings. Yet, the sky will not collapse, the earth will not slide, and the people cannot be totally exterminated.” This Vietnamese suffering, he contended, was well worth it in the name of weakening the US and encouraging national revolutionary movements elsewhere.²⁹

By this point many in the VWP leadership were becoming aggravated at the way that advancing world revolution seemed always to coincide with Chinese national interest. By 1965 moderate and Soviet-leaning Politburo members like Le Duan and Pham Van Dong were reported to be growing “more and more convinced of the view that the Chinese are ready to fight to the last Vietnamese but otherwise are content to be left alone by the Americans.”³⁰ This duality was intrinsic to the proclamations and policies of

²⁸ Zhou Enlai and Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, 4 June 1965, “77 Conversations,” 86.

²⁹ Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, Hoang Tung, Beijing, 23 August 1966, *ibid*, 97.

³⁰ Note by the GDR Envoy to Moscow, Rossmesl, on Talks with Unnamed Soviet Vietnam Specialists, 19 August 1965, “Twenty-Four Documents,” 385.

the Chinese Communist Party. It can be found even in situations in which their ideological consistency seems unadulterated. One case in point is a 1960 conversation in which Mao told Ho Chi Minh that it was a positive good when reactionaries engaged in violence, because deaths among the people created revolutionary resentment and thereby advanced the struggle. When Ho took issue with this on the grounds that it was inhumane, Liu Shaoqui, First Vice Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, rebutted that because humanitarianism was at odds with class warfare, it was of no use for revolutionaries.³¹ Like so many other conversations with Chinese communists it is phrased with all the proper trappings of communist internationalism, however at its core there is revealed an all-too-eager willingness to let others suffer for Beijing's agenda. This logic of self-interest is a common thread in Chinese strategy: If the DRV had to fight with outdated weaponry, that was fine if it meant the Soviets were kept on the sidelines; if Vietnamese blood was being spilled, it was acceptable as long as American blood accompanied it; and if reactionaries massacred radicals, that was an invaluable recruitment tool.

This is not to argue that the leadership of the PRC was being willfully deceitful, per se. It would be a false dichotomy to argue that the Chinese could either be committed to communist internationalism *or* concerned with their self-interest. Indeed considering the Chinese belief that they had become the vanguard of the global revolutionary movement, they saw considerable overlap between the two. The various convictions and motivations of the Chinese leadership are not the point of this discussion – what is relevant is the way they were expressed in PRC foreign policy. Whatever ultimate goals

³¹ Mao's Conversations with Ho Chi Minh, 10 August and 2 November 1965, cited in Kuisong, "Changes in Mao's Attitude," 20.

Mao and his associates may have had it is clear that they pursued their national interests in an extremely cynical, calculating fashion. In each of these matters Chinese efforts to promote the world revolutionary movement coincided with efforts to advance themselves and their global standing. The peace talks issue illustrates this well –attempts to obstruct negotiations were phrased in ideologically orthodox terms, but promised substantial benefits for Beijing. The Chinese had the most to gain from stymieing American influence in Asia. Successful negotiations threatened to expand Soviet prestige by making them a peace-broker in China’s neighborhood. A peace conference orchestrated by its two rivals would leave the PRC sitting on the diplomatic sidelines. It would sink deeper and into political isolation and the stage would be set for future superpower cooperation both in Asia and worldwide. On this last point, China could not compromise.

By 1965, joint Soviet-American world domination had become Mao’s “strategic nightmare.”³² A Chinese party polemic issued that year breathlessly exclaimed that “the new leaders of the [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] are allying themselves and collaborating with [US imperialism] to dominate the world.”³³ As Hanoi moved closer to negotiations in 1968, party publications would denounce the Soviets as “despicable renegades and accomplices of the U.S. imperialists” who promoted peace talks to “serve [their] desperate Washington masters.”³⁴ Whether the Chinese leadership truly believed Moscow and Washington were angling for “world domination” or simply wished to dramatize their propaganda efforts is open to debate. It is certain, however, that Beijing

³² Qiang, “Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-1968,” 17-18.

³³ “Refutation of the new Leaders of the CPSU on ‘United Action’,” quoted in Garver, John, “The Tet Offensive and Sino-Vietnamese Relations,” *The Tet Offensive*, Marc Jason Gilbert and William Head, eds. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 55.

³⁴ “Soviet Revisionists Stop at Nothing to Salvage U.S. Imperialist Aggression against Vietnam,” *Peking Review* 11:12 (22 March 1968): 12-13.

saw the precedent of Soviet-American cooperation as a serious threat to its international agenda. It would make it more difficult to implement Chinese initiatives like attaining United Nations membership and maintaining an effective deterrence regime against Washington. More importantly, if the superpowers were able to successfully resolve the conflict in Vietnam, the PRC had every reason to worry that it would be next on the list of Asian problem states that needed fixing.³⁵

Superpower cooperation also stood in the way of China's grand strategy, which saw a greatly expanded Chinese role in global affairs. Despite its zeal for radical communism, Beijing's worldview had not abandoned its imperial roots and was still permeated by age-old notions of ethnocentric superiority. As the last remnant of China's ancient sphere of influence, Vietnam played a central role not only in the PRC's defense strategy, but also in its desire to create "a modern version of the relationship between the 'Central Kingdom' and its subordinate neighbors."³⁶ This does much to explain the hysteria at Soviet interference in Vietnam, but their aspirations extended beyond Vietnam to Asia in general, as is made clear in a number of conversations with Chinese leaders. In a 1965 discussion about construction efforts in Laos and Vietnam, Mao mused, "Because we will fight large-scale battles in the future, it will be good if we also build roads to Thailand..."³⁷ Zhou encouraged Pham Van Dong in 1967 to be prepared for the war's "continuation and further expansion," beyond Vietnam's borders.³⁸ As late as March 1971, Zhou spoke hopefully about war "expanding all over Southeast Asia."³⁹

³⁵ Garver, "The Tet Offensive," 57.

³⁶ Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969," *The China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995): 386.

³⁷ Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, Changsha (Hunan), 16 May 1965, "77 Conversations," 84.

³⁸ Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 10 April 1967, *ibid*, 101.

³⁹ Zhou Enlai with Le Duan and Pham Van Dong, Hanoi, 7 March 1971, *ibid*, 176.

The project of constantly expanding revolution was part of a long-term Chinese program to court allies from around the world by exploiting their differences with the Soviet Union and the US. China sought to draw unaffiliated nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, into its sway to help it counterbalance both Moscow and Washington.⁴⁰ China's revolutionary zeal was part and parcel to this geopolitical maneuvering. Indeed Beijing's chosen method of building a coalition incorporated ideology by promoting the model of the Chinese Revolution throughout the Third World and representing the China as the new center of global communism.⁴¹ Hence it is not such a contradiction that PRC leaders should have considered themselves the most ideologically pure revolutionaries while still working to revive China's ancient role as the "Middle Kingdom." Their devotion to communism and their national self-interest were, in this regard, complementary rather than competing aspirations.

In light of China's not-too-hidden ambitions the rationale behind Hanoi's gradual shift from the Chinese to Soviet camp is no mystery. As early as December 1965 a Soviet source reported on Vietnamese fears of a Chinese occupation.⁴² Although the vagaries of war and geography would preserve the alliance between the DRV and the PRC until Vietnam was unified, it was clear that the nations were now on divergent trajectories. Early fault lines can be detected in a 1966 document from the East Germany's Hanoi Embassy detailing how Vietnamese were breaking ranks with Beijing on "principled questions": opinions on the Cultural Revolution were generally negative, Chinese depictions of Mao as a second Lenin were not given credence, and the annual

⁴⁰ Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 146-7.

⁴¹ Chen, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War," 363.

⁴² Report by the Adviser to the Bulgarian Embassy in Beijing, Ivan Dimitrov, to the Bulgarian Ambassador, Khr. Stoichev, 14 December 1965, "Twenty-Four Documents," 386.

congratulatory greetings on the anniversary of the PRC's founding had been sent minus the typical exuberant tones and without the personal signatures of party leaders.⁴³

While the alliance would limp its way through to the mid 1970s, it was clear that the end was approaching. In the last half of the 1960s the divide growing beneath the surface would completely reshape the political environment of Southeast Asia in the coming years, and immeasurably complicate Cambodia's already precarious position. The simple formula of balancing the West against the communists no longer functioned in a world where old alliances were falling apart and new loyalties were taking shape. To the detriment of Sihanouk and his countrymen, he would not realize this until it was too late.

⁴³ Note on a Conversation with the First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, Comrade Sverev, on 8 July 1966 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:40 p.m. at the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi, 9 July 1966, *ibid.*, 393.

Chapter Three: Changing Allegiances

As the Chinese and Soviets began to part ways another communist rift was forming between the Vietnamese Worker's Party and their Cambodian counterparts. The roots of this divergence began inauspiciously on the grounds of the Phnom Penh railway station in September 1960. There, twenty-one delegates of the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party met for their first party congress in nine years to choose new leadership and craft a political agenda. At this meeting the party took its first, albeit minor, steps toward political independence by picking the Central Committee membership without Vietnamese oversight and setting an agenda that discussed the possibility of "non-peaceful means of struggle if the imperialists ... insist on forcing us to take that road" – thereby allowing at least hypothetical exceptions to Hanoi's emphasis on parliamentary struggle. The party platform they crafted further deviated from the Vietnamese line by declaring Sihanouk and the "feudal ruling class" to be "the most important enemy of the Kampuchean Revolution."¹ It was at this meeting that the Cambodian party first defined itself as a Marxist/Leninist party and vanguard of the working class.² In this spirit the name of the party was changed to the Worker's Party of Kampuchea (WPK), making them at least nominally equivalent to the Vietnamese.

These developments had little impact on immediate policy and did not change the fundamental nature of the inter-party relationship. They did, however, demonstrate the emergence of a new line of thought within the ranks of the Cambodian party. Although it

¹ Short, *Pol Pot*, 137.

² Kiernan, "Origins of Khmer Communism," 176. This redefinition as vanguard of the working class was in opposition to the party's previous status as a general national resistance movement.

was still dominated by veterans of the independence struggle who wished to tow the Vietnamese line, from this point forth the idea of “self-reliance” – a codeword for freedom from Vietnamese influence – would be a growing theme. Not unrelated to this nascent trend was the appointment at the 1960 congress of a young Phnom Penh teacher named Saloth Sar to the party’s number three position. Though he was at this time just another Paris-educated radical who had joined the resistance in the mid 1950’s, in fifteen years he would gain worldwide notoriety under the *nom de guerre* Pol Pot. As he ascended within the party ranks, Sar would be the leading force for radicalism among the Khmer communists.³

Sar’s radicals were still only an upstart faction within the WPK, however, and disagreement persisted between his branch and the party elements who wished to maintain Hanoi’s policy of accommodation with Sihanouk. The program approved by the party congress had been a compromise between the factions, and although Sar was now a major figure in the party, the delegates picked Tou Samouth, head of the moderate group, as secretary general.⁴ The next two years would see the party essentially deadlocked by internal disagreements between the factions and unable to implement a coherent political strategy.⁵ But when Tou Samouth suddenly disappeared in July 1962 the party’s center of gravity shifted. Saloth Sar was able to pass over the party number two, Nuon Chea, and become acting secretary. When a meeting was convened in February 1963 to elect a new leader, he arranged for it to take place in Phnom Penh to minimize the influence of the

³ Kiernan, “Pol Pot and the,” 228.

⁴ Etcheson, *Rise and Demise*, 58.

⁵ Porter, “Vietnamese Communist Policy,” 75.

rural veteran leaders and ensure that his radical clique of urban intellectuals dominated the proceedings.⁶

It was at this meeting that the radical forces of Cambodia would truly congeal into what the world would later know as the Khmer Rouge.⁷ Although it was not yet to the point of breaking out of its role as the VWP's "younger brother" and certainly bore little resemblance to the genocidal entity it would become, the party moderates were now officially sidelined. Saloth Sar was formally installed as secretary general, thereby initiating a new course of incremental but undeviating steps toward armed revolution. In the following months Sar – along with 90 percent of the party membership – slipped off into the countryside to escape the escalating repression of the capitol and began building a political base for armed struggle among the rural peasantry.⁸ For the next two years the party leadership would be housed in Office 100, a camp in communist-controlled territory in South Vietnam where they could enjoy far greater security than in their own country. This arrangement necessarily meant that the WPK leaders operated under the watchful gaze of their hosts, but the value of Vietnamese assistance and protection was worth any reduced freedom of action it may have entailed.⁹

In truth, the party was still operating on such a small scale that there was little opportunity for it to run into disagreements with the Vietnamese, except perhaps when the rhetoric of the Khmers grew a little too bombastic. Although all-out revolution was the eventual goal, all the WPK could hope to do at this point was continue building its

⁶ Short, *Pol Pot*, 141.

⁷ The term Khmer Rouge was coined by Sihanouk in a denunciation of Cambodian radicals and hence only serves as an informal moniker for Cambodian communists. In modern parlance the term most commonly applies to the Cambodian revolutionary movement under the leadership of Pol Pot. Hence I have elected to use it in that context and any reference to the Khmer Rouge in this work refers specifically to the Cambodian party following the 1963 congress or the leadership of the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

⁸ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 200-203. Vo-nguyen, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 52.

⁹ Short, *Pol Pot*, 146.

political base and drafting party resolutions. While they had been able to overcome their low manpower in the 1950s with the help of Vietnamese weapons and troops, they now had neither. This political obscurity was deepened by having spent the last decade in political isolation, relying on the Vietnamese Central Committee's Southern Bureau for contact with the greater communist world.¹⁰ Desiring to assert itself as a solvent, autonomous organization the new radical leadership was eager to break the status quo. In April 1965 Sar set out on foot to Hanoi with a delegation of Cambodian cadres seeking to establish full party-to-party relations and solicit support for instigating armed struggle.¹¹

The escalation of the Vietnam War had renewed the importance of the Cambodian party and the Vietnamese were eager to get to know its new leader. They greeted Sar with respect and reunited him with the Khmer cadres who had been residing in Vietnam for the last decade. He used the opportunity to conduct several lectures and study sessions with them about the political situation in Cambodia.¹² The delegates also met with VWP officials to discuss the state of the Cambodian resistance and coordinate tactics in the coming years. One product of these meetings was an agreement to provide cross-border refuge to one another's forces in any territory they controlled. This had proven utility for the Cambodians whose leadership was still operating out of the reach of Sihanouk's forces in communist-occupied South Vietnam.¹³

More importantly, at least to Sar, the Cambodians were able to deliver copies of their new political platform to the Vietnamese. In January of that year the Central

¹⁰ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 63.

¹¹ Short, *Pol Pot*, 156-157. There is some disagreement on this date, as Ben Kiernan locates Pol's departure "around late 1964" in *How Pol Pot*, 219. However, David Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 69 corroborates Short, as do Engelbert and Goscha who also mention that Pol brought with him copies of his party's January-February 1965 resolution in *Falling out of Touch*, 67.

¹² Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 69-70.

¹³ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 55. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 210-211. Ben Kiernan refers to an "Office 900," but it is clear that he is referring to the same location.

Committee had finalized a resolution emphasizing self-reliance and endorsing “all forms of struggle” including “armed violence.” Sar was eager to discuss this agenda with his Vietnamese counterparts. To this end he met with VWP Secretary General Le Duan over a dozen times in a five month period.¹⁴ During these meetings, he tried to convince the Vietnamese of the need for an armed line by first playing up the losses his party had suffered pushing a political approach (claiming that 90% of KPRP bases had been lost between 1954 and 1959, and party membership reduced to 250 by 1960), then boasting that they had since managed to restore their ranks to a (certainly exaggerated) size of 3,000.¹⁵

Attempting to play on the personal sympathies of Le Duan – who been head of the VWP Southern Bureau during the initiation of violence in the South a few years prior – may honestly have been Sar’s best bet in hoping to secure Vietnamese support for his agenda. As it were, however, the tactical situation had rendered the Cambodian proposal a complete non-starter. Sihanouk’s cooperation with Hanoi had been steadily increasing since 1963. In the Spring of 1965, he had agreed to let the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front establish permanent sanctuaries on Cambodian territory, and negotiations were underway to allow the shipment of Chinese arms through the port of Sihanoukville (Kompong Som).¹⁶ When Phnom Penh severed diplomatic relations with the United States in May 1965, it marked an end to Sihanouk’s neutralism – he was no officially, if not objectively, an ally of the DRV.

The massive American escalation taking place in the South changed things further. Sihanouk offered stability the Khmer Rouge couldn’t on Vietnam’s vulnerable

¹⁴ Short, *Pol Pot*, 146-147 and 157.

¹⁵ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 70.

¹⁶ Short, *Pol Pot*, 157.

western border. If Cambodia descended into civil war, the sanctity of Viet Cong hospitals, sanctuaries and arms routes on Cambodian territory would be jeopardized. In addition, Vietnamese strategists considered it absolutely critical to maintain Cambodia as a buffer zone. Even more valuable than Sihanouk's accommodation with Hanoi was his rejection of SEATO membership and refusal to allow US military bases on Cambodian soil. The Vietnamese were extremely wary about the possibility of an attack on the South from its western flank, and hence it was all-important to stay in the prince's good graces.¹⁷ While it stood to reason that a communist government run by Saloth Sar could be as useful as the royal government, bringing the Khmer Rouge to power was another manner altogether. Given the enfeebled state of the Cambodian resistance, the Vietnamese (quite presciently) believed that if Sihanouk were pushed out of power, he would not be replaced by a socialist government, but a right-wing regime that would ally itself with Washington and open up a western front.¹⁸

Hence, Saloth Sar's ambitious desires were simply incompatible with Hanoi's strategic reality. Instigating a revolution called for sowing instability that would alienate the people from the monarchy and cultivate revolutionary resentment, but the VWP had put a premium on keeping Cambodia stable.¹⁹ In his meetings with Sar, Le Duan attempted to dissuade his Khmer counterpart from armed resistance, arguing that under Sihanouk the country was already "at the frontline in opposing American imperialism most intensely."²⁰ Duan trotted out the party line that the primary battlefield was South Vietnam and victory there would immediately translate to victory in Cambodia. He

¹⁷ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 68.

¹⁸ *ibid*, 72.

¹⁹ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 221.

²⁰ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 71.

reminded Sar that the Vietnamese themselves had waited on the Chinese Revolution before fighting the French, and argued that political struggle in the meantime was a noble pursuit in itself.²¹ The message to the Cambodian party was clear: Sihanouk was to be left alone until the war in South Vietnam had been won.

It is clear that these meetings cultivated a deep resentment in Saloth Sar. Duan did not mince words in explaining the Vietnamese point of view, and he chastised what he saw as the Cambodian's excessive focus on self-reliance and failure to fall in line with the mindset of international solidarity. While the Vietnamese case was essentially a reiteration of the status quo, Sar was put off by Duan's "almost visceral insensitivity to Cambodian concerns."²² He was further upset when he was given a revised version of the political platform he had delivered to the VWP. The new document, proofread by Le Duan, was written in Vietnamese and had been reworked to exclude all reference to armed struggle. To Sar these incidents were not simply personal slights, but evidence of Vietnamese opposition to Cambodian independence and a wish to control the Cambodian party.²³

As a last ditch effort to carry his point, Duan suggested the Cambodian make use of the Vietnamese archives to research the history of the two parties' relations. He was confident that if Sar were to read the accounts of Vietnam's efforts to build and support an independent Cambodian party, he would remember the parties' close ties and the importance of maintaining a united line. This did not have the desired effect: after spending several days studying party texts, Sar concluded instead that the history of his

²¹ Short, *Pol Pot*, 157.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Engelbert and Gosha, *Falling out of Touch*, 75.

party's relations with the VWP was defined by manipulation, selfishness, and duplicity.

The documents, he explained...

...depicted the Cambodian ... and Lao People's Revolutionary Parties as branches of the Vietnamese Party....Both [Parties] implemented the rules, the political line and the strategy of the Vietnamese Party. Until I read these documents myself, I trusted and believed the Vietnamese. But after reading them I didn't trust them anymore. I realized they had set up Party organizations in our countries solely to achieve their aim of the Indochinese Federation.²⁴

In their review of Vietnamese party documents, Thomas Engelbert and Christopher E. Goscha identify Sar's trip to Hanoi as a turning point in the two parties' relations.²⁵ It is clear that the Cambodian leader thought so. In Sar's account of his meetings, he bitterly recalled that the Cambodian party was directed to "renounce the revolutionary struggle and wait for the Vietnamese to win their victory."²⁶ From this point forth, Sar perceived Vietnam's outlook and behavior toward Cambodia as increasingly in tune with centuries of exploitation and domination. The ancient Khmer suspicion and hostility toward Vietnam, shared by Sar's rivals Sihanouk and Lon Nol, would eventually become a core component of CPK thinking and policy.²⁷ Their alliance was not crumbling by any means, but Sar's experiences in Hanoi convinced him that the two parties were no longer on the same trajectory. The Vietnamese had already seemed overbearing and paternalistic, but now they were revealed to be pursuing goals contradictory to long term Khmer Rouge ambitions.²⁸ While Sar had arrived in Hanoi eager to deepen his party's cooperation with the VWP, he left frustrated and disillusioned.²⁹

²⁴ Short, *Pol Pot*, 158.

²⁵ Engelbert and, Goscha. *Falling out of Touch*. 71.

²⁶ Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 76.

²⁷ Short, *Pol Pot*, 205-206.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 159.

²⁹ Engelbert and Goscha present the example of the stance the Cambodian party took on the communist rift in the political agenda Sar took to Hanoi and Beijing. This document parroted the Vietnamese argument

The next leg of his journey, however, had far more to offer the Cambodian leader. While in Hanoi, Sar had made it known that he wished to continue his travels and visit Beijing. After the bitter pill of his discussions with the Vietnamese, his time in China must have been refreshing. It is certain that the Chinese handled him more courteously than Le Duan and the radicals among them probably admired his candor. The urban bustle and revolutionary spirit of the Chinese capital certainly outshined the primitive isolation of the rural outposts Sar had inhabited since 1963 and the unfinished struggle still roiling Vietnam. Sar beheld the triumphant Chinese revolution and the highly-orchestrated social mobilization going on in China's cities as models ripe for emulation in his own country.³⁰

It also happened that Sar should arrive at a time when radicalism was on the ascendant among the Chinese Communist Party. The months he spent in Beijing saw the rise to prominence of "Mao Zedong thought" and a renewed denunciation of "revisionism".³¹ The "Socialist Education Movement" was one form this took – a vast political initiative and precursor to the Cultural Revolution designed to transform the thinking of millions of Chinese peasants. Another expression of the sea change in China was a seminal article published by PRC Defense Minister Lin Biao entitled "Long Live the Victory of the People's War!" This document was a manifesto of Third World revolution that seemed to validate the position Sar had taken in his disputes with the VWP. The article's championing of autonomous national movements, reliance on the peasantry, and the vanguard role of the Third World in surrounding and defeating the

that while Khrushchev was a revisionist the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was redeemable. This is in opposition to China's wholesale denunciation of the Soviet party. *Falling out of Touch*, 65.

³⁰ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 72.

³¹ David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 149.

world centers of capitalism excited Sar and presented a strong counterpoint to the milquetoast pragmatism of Le Duan.³² That the Cultural Revolution should begin during his stay further influenced his conception of revolutionary politics. Much of what he witnessed of the upheaval would later be mirrored in the policies of the Khmer Rouge government of Democratic Kampuchea. The partial evacuation of cities, addressing economic problems as obstacles to be overcome with brute force, abolition of differential military ranks and purges of “class enemies” were all elements of the Cultural Revolution that would later be adopted by Sar’s government. The Khmer Rouge would even borrow the name of China’s 1950’s nationwide industrialization program for their “Great Leap Forward” economic plan.³³

In addition to the ideological encouragement Saloth Sar derived from his time in Beijing, he was surrounded by sympathetic Chinese party officials. He is known to have befriended K’ang Sheng, a radical senior cadre who had often served as the head of Mao’s secret police. K’ang had earned a reputation for his ruthlessness and his role in organizing a number of political purges, and likely encouraged Sar’s revolutionary zeal.³⁴ Sar also would have met CCP General Secretary Deng Xiaoping and PRC President Liu Shaoqi, the Chinese party officials who would have received the Cambodian delegation. Ben Kiernan points out that all three men would have been alarmed by the news of the abortive coup attempt in Indonesia on 30 September 1965 and the subsequent massacre of hundreds of thousands of communists. The inability of Indonesian President Sukarno to protect his allies in the Indonesian Communist Party from this military-led purge must have changed the terms of the debate over the wisdom of the Cambodian party relying on

³² Short, *Pol Pot*, 159. Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 77.

³³ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 66.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 71-72.

the goodwill of Sihanouk. When it came time for Sar to depart the Chinese staged one last demonstration of good will, hosting a banquet in his honor during which Mao himself delivered a speech heaping praise on the Cambodian leader and his devotion to the revolutionary cause.³⁵

It is likely historians will never know what exactly transpired in Saloth Sar's discussions with the Chinese. Sar publicly denied his 1965 visit to Beijing and all information on the trip comes from Vietnamese sources. It is generally accepted that the Chinese would have echoed Hanoi's call to refrain from armed struggle – albeit with more aplomb – as they shared the Vietnamese interest in keeping Sihanouk in power. Beyond this basic concern, however, it is unlikely Beijing would have passed up the opportunity to court Saloth Sar's favor. It is known that in the long view, the PRC leadership spoke favorably of a Cambodian revolution following success in Vietnam.³⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, China had made support for Third World movements a fundamental part of its national security strategy. Mired in the isolation of the Sino-Soviet rift, the CCP sought allies by sponsoring anti-Soviet breakaway parties throughout the world. This formula had been applied successfully in wooing the communist parties of Burma and Malaya.³⁷ China also had a record of pursuing relations with parties traditionally allied with Hanoi. In 1962, China had built a road to establish links between Pathet Lao controlled zones in Laos with the PRC, thereby cutting out Vietnam as an intermediary in communications and aid flows.³⁸ This behavior even had precedent in Cambodia. During the 1950's, the Chinese had encouraged Hanoi to reduce aid to what

³⁵ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 222-223.

³⁶ Vietnamese and Chinese Delegations, Beijing, 11 a.m., 11 April 1967, "77 Conversations," 111. Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung, Beijing, 19 June 1968, *ibid.*, 134-135.

³⁷ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 220.

³⁸ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 56.

was then still the KPRP while simultaneously courting the group itself.³⁹ Given the ongoing discord over Hanoi's rapprochement with Moscow, the Chinese would have been alert to the opportunity to draw the Cambodian Party into their orbit.

As regards China's international strategy, alliance with the Khmer Rouge offered much the same benefit as close ties with Cambodia's royal government. If Sar could be won over without endangering the assistance Sihanouk provided for the war in Vietnam, he could in the future be a valuable asset in ending Beijing's political isolation and countering the containment policy of the United States. He was also a potential ally in opposing Vietnamese hegemony once the war was over.⁴⁰ Although China and Vietnam shared an interest in winning the Vietnam War, they had divergent strategic interests in postwar arrangements. While the Vietnamese saw a united Indochinese communist front as the best way to resist American power and guarantee Hanoi's regional influence, China's strategic interests were best served by diffusing power among several individual states. Hence, while Hanoi and Beijing maintained parallel Cambodia policies that prioritized success in Vietnam while looking forward to revolution throughout Indochina, this cooperation "masked an emergent rivalry that stemmed from their divergent visions of an acceptable regional postwar pattern of power."⁴¹

In light of this oncoming competition (forecasted by the ongoing dispute over Hanoi's affiliation with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), Beijing was not going to let momentary cooperation deter them from planning ahead. PRC leaders saw promise in Saloth Sar, and were eager to win his preference. With the headaches that had come to

³⁹ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 182.

⁴⁰ Qiang Zhai (published in this instance as Zhai Qiang), "China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970-1975," *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, Priscilla Mary Roberts ed. (Chicago, IL: Wilson Center, 2006), 377.

⁴¹ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 52.

accompany the relationship with Vietnam – and Hanoi’s unwillingness to unquestionably conform with Chinese strategy – Sar would have seemed even more attractive. His eager embrace of Maoist thought and radicalism fit comfortably with China’s international vision. Wilfred Burchett further points out that “whereas Vietnam had stubbornly refused to be placed in China’s pocket, Pol Pot had jumped into it himself.”⁴² For Sar’s part – having no international connections outside of Hanoi, and full of resentment against the Vietnamese – this must have seemed a no-brainer. Engelbert and Goscha suggest that he likely realized if he simply included “anti-revisionism” as a part of his platform, he could at least get the Chinese to not say no to his agenda.⁴³

Hence the Chinese made effective use of their audience with the Cambodian leader, starting with the discussion of Sar’s political agenda. Whereas the Vietnamese had condescendingly edited out the undesirable elements of Sar’s party platform, Chinese leaders gave it praise and encouraged his Maoist focus on the peasantry and opposition to American imperialism.⁴⁴ Ben Kiernan argues that the Chinese likely suggested pursuing a hostile policy (combining armed and political struggle) short of outright rebellion which would have served the dual purpose of ingratiating themselves to the Khmers and alienating them from the Vietnamese.⁴⁵ David Chandler notes “it was possible that the Chinese encouraged him to think about a far-reaching social and economic mobilization in Cambodia, along the lines of the Great Leap Forward ... and gave him some assurances of support. But this is speculation.”⁴⁶ Philip Short cites a Vietnamese document that records Saloth Sar telling the VWP that the Chinese had even offered him

⁴² Wilfred Burchett, *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle* (Chicago, IL: Vanguard, 1981), 149.

⁴³ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 79.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁵ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 223.

⁴⁶ Chandler, “Revising the Past,” 293.

material assistance which he declined on the grounds that it was premature.⁴⁷ If accurate, this is staggering evidence of China's willingness to pursue self-interested policies at the expense of an ally, even at extremely limited gain. However, it is completely possible that Sar's report was nothing more than a ploy to extract greater support from Hanoi, considering its seeming contradiction of extant Chinese policy.⁴⁸ On the other hand, it is documented elsewhere that as Sar returned via Hanoi he boasted to the Vietnamese of the support he found in Beijing.⁴⁹ Whether this is an instance of strategic embellishment or a rare case of him revealing his hand is uncertain. Regardless of its veracity, the incident is illuminating: either the Chinese were interested enough in Sar's party to offer him material aid at this early date, or they had successfully instilled such confidence of their support in Sar that he was willing to exaggerate it without apparent fear of blowback.

Sar's trip abroad was probably the most important development in the history the Cambodian party to that point. He would later write, "Our Chinese friends wholeheartedly supported our political line ... *It was only when we went abroad* that we realized that our movement was quite correct and that our political line was also fundamentally correct."⁵⁰ (Emphasis is mine.) Although this statement, like many of Pol Pot's recollections, is surely embellished, it is beyond doubt that the relationship that emerged between the Cambodian and Chinese parties was a watershed development. As

⁴⁷ Short, *Pol Pot*, 160.

⁴⁸ In conversations with the Vietnamese in 1965 and 1967, Zhou Enlai suggested the VWP discourage the Cambodians from armed struggle and spoke with concern about Chinese weapons going to the Khmer Rouge. He is extremely vague on the question of Vietnam potentially arming the Cambodians and seems to want to leave that decision to Hanoi, but clearly is uninterested in the PRC arming the Khmer Rouge. (Vietnamese and Chinese Delegations, Beijing, 11 a.m., 11 April 1967, "77 Conversations," 111. Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung, Beijing, 19 June 1968, *ibid.*, 133-135). According to Craig Etcheson upon the initiation of armed struggle in late 1967 China still refrained from providing arms to the Cambodian party. (*Rise and Demise*, 82.)

⁴⁹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 78. Kiernan discusses the Vietnamese decision to pay more attention to their interests in the Cambodian party based on Sar's behavior after visiting Beijing. *How Pol Pot*, 224-225.

⁵⁰ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 79.

one scholar puts it, Sar's time in Beijing inaugurated "a *de facto* alliance" between the CCP and the Khmer Rouge. The Cambodians not only had an encouraging new friend, they had also found a way to wriggle out from under Hanoi's thumb. On his return, Sar would identify China as the ticket to independence from Vietnam, and triumphantly told his inner circle, "We need have no more doubts about the correctness of what we are doing."⁵¹

In September 1966, Sar convened a plenum to craft a whole new party program inspired by Maoist thinking and the theory of Third World revolution. Several important developments came from this meeting. First, the party officially changed its name to the Communist Party of Kampuchea, semantically elevating themselves to the level of the Chinese and bypassing the Vietnamese, who had only a worker's party. This was kept secret both from party rank and file and from the VWP. Though it is unlikely to have made any difference to Hanoi, the Cambodians presumably enjoyed it as a symbolic assertion of their independence.⁵²

More significant was the decision to relocate the party leadership from Office 100, which was in Vietnam, to rural Ratanakiri, a province in northeast Cambodia. This gave the Cambodians breathing room and a chance to operate free of Vietnamese supervision. This would be important in pursuing the party's new agenda which called for making preparation for armed struggle in the countryside. Although they were careful to avoid openly defying Hanoi in their latest resolution, they played a "letter of the law" game by approving individually innocuous activities that taken together paved the path

⁵¹ Short, *Pol Pot*, 161. Engelbert and Goscha describe Sar's time in Beijing as "crucial." *Falling out of Touch*, 79. Ben Kiernan also identifies the trip as a major event in Khmer Rouge history. *How Pol Pot*, 220-224.

⁵² Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 75.

for revolution: expanding underground networks, enhancing political struggle, and permitting recourse to violence when conditions called for it.⁵³

Although the still-diminutive strength of the party meant the new agenda caused no real changes in the immediate term, the Cambodians were now undeterably on the road to violent revolution.⁵⁴ Beyond the radical encouragement he had received in Beijing, the fate of the Indonesian Communist Party convinced Sar that the Vietnamese policy of cooperating with Sihanouk was simply untenable.⁵⁵ The *Black Book* – the Khmer Rouge’s historiographically dubious account of their relations with Vietnam – identifies this as the period in which the CPK determined they could no longer operate on a party-to-party level with the Vietnamese. Instead they could have “only State relations and other official relations, for there was a fundamental contradiction,” between the two revolutions.⁵⁶ This shift in attitudes was not lost on the Vietnamese and – though the parties maintained generally fraternal relations – they established a secret military unit under Politburo member Le Duc Tho to train an increased number of Cambodian cadres. Codenamed P-36, its purpose to was to promote adherence to Hanoi’s line and ensure that when revolution finally did break out, Vietnam would have its own force of loyal Khmers to take the helm.⁵⁷

By the time Sihanouk declared in an April 1967 speech that “the masters of the Khmer Viet Minh are the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong” the Cambodian party had taken its first steps down a path that would culminate in the collapse of their alliance with

⁵³ *ibid.* Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 224.

⁵⁴ Etcheson, *Rise and Demise*, 69.

⁵⁵ Short, *Pol Pot*, 164.

⁵⁶ Chandler, “Revising the Past,” 293. Kiernan, “Origins of Khmer Communism,” 178.

⁵⁷ Nguyen-Vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 56. Short, *Pol Pot*, 158-159.

Hanoi.⁵⁸ However, just as the Sino-Vietnamese alliance would hold up until the end of the Vietnam War, cooperation between the VWP and CPK was still mutually beneficial and the two would remain “brother parties” for the time being. Although Sar was enamored with the Chinese and upset by his treatment in Hanoi, he was in no position to cast off a vital ally. The two parties would continue to work together as Sar planned his revolution, but from this point on the days of friendly relations between the two parties were numbered.

⁵⁸ Sihanouk quoted by Roger Smith, “Cambodia: Between Scylla and Charybdis,” *Asian Survey* 8:1, A Survey of Asia in 1967: Part I (Jan 1968): 75.

Chapter Four: Consequences for Cambodia

Even as the Chinese Communist Party was drawing the Khmer Rouge into its orbit, the People's Republic was actively promoting its state-to-state relations with the royal Cambodian government. Beijing's foreign policy at this time was defined by a big-tent mentality – nations of all stripes were accepted as partners in opposing the United States. There was even room for “a segment of the patriotic kings, princes, and aristocrats.”¹ While Saloth Sar's communist party had great potential as a future ally, Sihanouk was every bit as useful in frustrating American containment and countering Hanoi's influence in Cambodia, and had the added benefit of already being securely in power.² Indeed, Sar's visit to Beijing took place when China's relations with the royal government were at their apogee.

Sihanouk's foreign relations entering the 1960s continued to be defined by official neutralism. His government had established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1958 and signed a treaty of friendship and non-aggression two years later, but he took pains to not appear to be aligned with any one camp.³ To this end (and to safeguard against domestic rivals) he consistently rejected communism as a social and economic system in public forums. Among the highly traditional peasantry he emphasized that communists were against religion, and he squelched left-wing representation in politics.⁴ Despite these efforts to keep relations with the West on the level, US-Cambodian

¹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 62.

² Qiang Zhai, “China and the Cambodian Conflict,” 370.

³ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 45.

⁴ Michael Vickery, “Looking Back at Cambodia, 1942-1976,” *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*, David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 104-105.

relations were strained by the American alliance with the Republic of Vietnam. As the guerilla war in South Vietnam intensified the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in Saigon became increasingly hostile toward Sihanouk's neutralism and his accommodation with communist activities. Incursions into Cambodian territory by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in pursuit of fleeing Viet Cong forces became increasingly common. The prince was particularly infuriated by Saigon's decision to play host to clandestine radio broadcasts by the Khmer Serei, a right-wing Cambodian dissident group.⁵ That these provocations were not curtailed by Washington was taken by Sihanouk as evidence of American approval, and relations with the United States soured.

When Diem was assassinated in an American-inspired coup in November 1963, Sihanouk was deeply shaken. While the prince had thoroughly despised Diem, he saw this as a lesson in the unreliability of American friendship. To avoid a similar fate for himself he opted to distance himself from Washington and terminated all foreign aid from the United States. Over the next eighteen months Cambodian-American relations continued their downward spiral until, in May 1965, the Prince officially severed relations. From the final termination date of American aid in January 1964 until the reinstatement of relations with Washington in 1969, Cambodia's entire foreign and security policy would be based on China.⁶

This was a timely event for the Chinese, who had become preoccupied with the need for new allies as the rift with the Soviet Union grew (and as Hanoi increasingly

⁵ Clymer, "Perils of Neutrality," 613.

⁶ It should be noted that – as with any alliance or international partnership – Sihanouk's alignment with China was by no means absolute or unconditional. Kenton Clymer, "A Casualty of War: The Break in American Relations With Cambodia, 1965," *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco eds (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 211, points out that in early 1965, Sihanouk was still engaging in diplomatic interactions with the United States for the purpose of "demonstrating to China and Hanoi that he had options."

slipped into the Soviet camp). The prince had for all intents and purposes aligned himself with the socialist world and China in particular. It was a textbook fulfillment of the PRC's foreign policy strategy of exploiting anti-American tendencies to scoop up allies from the "intermediate zones" that Washington and Moscow ignored.⁷

To that end Beijing moved quickly to reinforce Cambodia's new alignment and fill the void left by the United States. After the rejection of American aid Beijing declared its "resolute support" for Cambodia's "struggle against imperialism" and offered Phnom Penh "full military, political and diplomatic support" in the event of external aggression.⁸ To help make up for the loss of American aid to the armed forces, The PRC instituted a military aid program for Cambodia. China pledged additional aid in October 1964, and the following June agreed to send military technicians to supplement the material assistance already being delivered.⁹ When the PRC celebrated the 16th anniversary of its founding in October 1965, Sihanouk was the guest of honor and only foreign head of state in attendance. His arrival was greeted by throngs of dancers, musicians, and crowds lining the streets.¹⁰ During his stay, the Chinese suggested Sihanouk send a team to Beijing for discussions on continued military aid. This team would be led by General Lon Nol, chief of the armed forces, who reported upon returning home that the Chinese had

⁷ Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 146-147.

⁸ "Red China Pledges to Back Cambodia," *NYT*, 20 November 1963, p. 1. "Pledge from Peking," *NYT*, 22 November 1963, p. 4. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 82155390. Accessed 22 October, 2008. "Cambodian Hails Peking as Friend," *NYT*, 23 November 1963, p. 51. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 89978819. Accessed 22 October, 2008.

⁹ Stephen Heder, "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle: The Origins of an Independent Revolution," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 11 no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1979): 6.

¹⁰ "Peking Welcomes Cambodian Prince," *NYT*, 28 September 1965, p. SU1 2. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 286860772. Accessed 22 October, 2008.

offered him enough weapons to outfit 49,000 men – 19,000 more than the total manpower of the Cambodian army.¹¹

It was understood, of course, that in return for the material and rhetorical aid Cambodia was receiving Sihanouk was expected to provide public support for Beijing's international line. Indeed, while the prince was attending the Chinese celebrations, his hosts made sure to emphasize in discussions how important they found it to form a "broad anti-imperialist united front" on Vietnam that excluded the Soviet Union. Their meaning was not lost on Sihanouk. He quickly adopted China's position on a number of important global issues such as criticism of the Soviet-American nuclear monopoly and opposition to Soviet participation in the upcoming Afro-Asian conference in Algiers. He also fell in with China on Vietnam, supporting National Liberation Front's program for a settlement in South Vietnam and echoing China's uncompromising stance on the war.¹² In public forums the prince demonstrated his affinity for the Chinese with fiery rhetoric, such as calling on the people of Indochina to "exterminate" American forces in Southeast Asia.¹³

It is telling of the importance Sihanouk put in his relationship with China that he was willing to second their opposition to negotiations in Vietnam even as the escalating violence spilled over the border, threatening Cambodia's territorial integrity, killing a number of its people, and undermining his leadership.¹⁴ It is likely he recognized that his

¹¹ Heder, "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle," 6.

¹² *ibid.* Qiang Zhai discusses a conversation between Sihanouk and Zhou Enlai in which the Cambodian mentioned receiving a letter from the leaders of Egypt, India, and Yugoslavia urging him to promote Vietnam-American peace talks, and reported that he rejected their proposal. "Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks," p. 11.

¹³ "Sihanouk asks Indochinese to 'Exterminate' Americans," *NYT*, 7 February 1965, p. 4. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 98451983. Accessed 22 October, 2008.

¹⁴ An extensive discussion of the threat posed to Cambodia's borders by the Vietnam War can be found in Kenton Clymer's two-volume review of American primary source material, *The United States and*

public position on peace talks would have no effect one way or the other on whether they actually took place, but he could ingratiate himself with Beijing by adopting a proper attitude. And it was not without reward – after making it clear where he stood, he received further promises of military and economic aid. It was at this point as well that Chinese leaders invited the visit by Lon Nol that would prove so fruitful.¹⁵

Independent of Sihanouk's eagerness to please Beijing, the Chinese appreciated the image value of their highly visible relationship with Cambodia. Much of their foreign policy was based on perceived appearance – portraying themselves to different audiences as the center of world revolution, an integral part of global diplomacy, or a friendly defender of smaller nations – and in that regard Cambodia had much to offer. With the elimination of countervailing American influence the PRC could double down on the propaganda value it incurred from its genial relations with and foreign aid to the small Khmer kingdom.¹⁶ Chinese leaders routinely played up their enhanced relationship with Phnom Penh, usually in the form of lavish (and wholly ornamental) praise for the prince and his nation. In a 1964 conversation with Sihanouk, Mao Zedong commended him as a more dedicated opponent of the United States than some socialist countries.¹⁷ When Sihanouk later voiced support for the Chinese in their opposition to peace negotiations in Vietnam, Mao praised him saying, "You have not only rejected American aid and separated relations with the United States, but also opposed American imperialism

Cambodia, 1870-1969: From curiosity to confrontation and *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). Sihanouk's accommodation with the Viet Cong was taken as evidence that he was unwilling to or unable to effectively combat growing Khmer Rouge violence in the late 1960s and used to garner support for the Lon Nol coup in March 1970. The effect of the war on the stability of Sihanouk's rule is discussed in Chapter 5 of this paper and covered broadly in existing scholarship.

¹⁵ Heder, "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle," 6.

¹⁶ Alain-Gerard Marsot, "China's Aid to Cambodia," *Pacific Affairs* 42 (Summer 1969), 193. China's international agenda is discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3 of this paper.

¹⁷ Mao Zedong and Cambodian Prince Sihanouk, 28 September 1964, "77 Conversations," 69.

openly, not covertly.”¹⁸ Beijing also issued numerous declarations on its intention to support Cambodia in military altercations. In late 1964, China promised support for Cambodia if its territorial integrity was violated and not long after declared “an attack on Kampuchea is an attack on China.” This sentiment would be repeated in 1967.¹⁹

For all the effusive statements and public declarations of friendship, however, the relationship was clearly a one-sided one. There was no question that Beijing held all the cards and did not intend to allow questions of friendly etiquette to restrain the pursuit of its agenda. Chinese leaders had no misgivings intervening into Cambodia’s foreign policy when they perceived an interest in doing so. This was clearly illustrated by the torpedoing of a proposed conference on Cambodia’s borders in 1965. For several years Sihanouk had been trying to arrange an international conference in the hopes of insulating his country against the war in Vietnam by extracting pledges of respect for Cambodia’s territorial integrity. Washington had long opposed the idea but in April of 1965 consented to participate, in the hopes that in so doing they could also engage in discussions on Vietnam.²⁰ Now that all parties had finally voiced support, however, Sihanouk suddenly backpedaled. He was no longer interested in holding a conference, he declared, because it was “outdated” and unnecessary.²¹

There was, of course, more to the story than a sudden disinterest in diplomacy. PRC Premier Zhou Enlai had personally asked Sihanouk in a meeting in Jakarta to abandon the proposal, on the grounds that it might end up working to the disadvantage of

¹⁸ Qiang Zhai, “Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks,” 11.

¹⁹ Chang, *Kampuchea Between*, 19-20.

²⁰ Michael Leifer, “Cambodia: The Limits of Diplomacy,” *Asian Survey* 7, no. 1 (January 1967): 69.

²¹ Clymer, “Perils of Neutrality,” 626.

the North Vietnamese war effort.²² This explanation, however, was most likely a ploy to gain the prince's acquiescence through a reasonable-sounding appeal. It is more probable that the Chinese were concerned about the conference playing host to discussions that might work to the disadvantage of China's interests. According to an April 1965 CIA report cited by Kenton Clymer, China undertook "intensive efforts ... to sabotage the conference" out of a fear that it would give the Soviet Union an opportunity to increase its influence in Hanoi.²³ Chinese leaders also understood that both the Soviet Union and the United States wanted to explore the possibility of peace talks on Vietnam, which Beijing worried, would improve Moscow's international standing and increase cooperation between the superpowers. Hence the Chinese leaned on Sihanouk to cancel the conference and rewarded him later with words of praise for his "wisdom in seeing through the American plot regarding an international conference on Cambodia."²⁴ That the initiative was of central importance to an ally's national security concerns was secondary to their desire to foil Soviet influence. Given the nature of the Sino-Cambodian relationship there was little concern about potential blowback. As Zhou Enlai would later explain to DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, the prince's support was quite dependable because he "understands that he needs China."²⁵

This cynical outlook was not out of character – regardless of its public face China's relationship with Cambodia was starkly self-interested. Perhaps the most revealing example of this is the state-and-party game the Chinese leadership played in its

²² Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 171.

²³ Clymer, "Perils of Neutrality," 627.

²⁴ Qiang, "China and the Vietnam Peace Talks," 47. Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 159. For a discussion of Beijing's motive in opposing negotiations see Chapter 2 of this paper.

²⁵ Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong. 9 October 1965. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Document ID: 5034C87E-96B6-175C-960FA9D8056B7020. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

approach to Cambodia. At the same time Beijing worked to keep Sihanouk in its pocket it simultaneously courted the goodwill of the Khmer Rouge. This functioned as an insurance policy for Beijing; regardless of whether Sihanouk or the Communist Party of Kampuchea wound up in charge after the Vietnam War, the PRC would have an ally in Phnom Penh.

In particular, Beijing wished to be able to limit Hanoi's postwar influence via proxies in Cambodia. To this end both Sihanouk and the CPK were groomed to align with China over North Vietnam.²⁶ This approach was certainly intuitive, based on Sihanouk's (and Khmers' in general) predisposition against the Vietnamese. Even after his turn left the prince instinctively kept his distance from Hanoi. In 1964 he rejected an offer of aid from Pham Van Dong, telling him, "you can stay and respect us from afar."²⁷ The charm offensive Beijing had directed at Cambodia inherently played on this ingrained distrust of the Vietnamese and served to favorably contrast China against the Khmer perception of Vietnam as scheming and expansionist. American intelligence reported that Chinese leaders played directly to Cambodian tastes, promising "to use their influence" in Hanoi to encourage respect for Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity.²⁸ At times the Chinese seemed even to go beyond taking advantage of preexisting animosity and actively attempted to breed disagreement between Cambodia and Vietnam. This appears to be the case when, during a 1956 state visit to Cambodia, Zhou Enlai took it upon himself to encourage conflict where none previously existed by

²⁶ Michael Haas, *Genocide by Proxy: Cambodian Pawn on a Superpower Chessboard* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1991), 65.

²⁷ Chandler, *Tragedy*, 144.

²⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Cambodia and the Viet Cong*, Memorandum dated 22 December 1965, 6, *Digital National Security Archive* [database on-line], MU; accessed September 16, 2008.

unilaterally encouraging Sihanouk to lay claim to the uncontested Vietnamese island of Phu Cuoc.²⁹

Of course, China's efforts to drive a wedge between Cambodia and Vietnam were not employed with the royal government alone. Following the emergence of the communist rift, the Chinese Communist Party had pushed Hanoi to reduce assistance to the Cambodian party while simultaneously courting the group itself.³⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter the CCP was quick to capitalize on Saloth Sar's frustration with North Vietnam and draw the Cambodian Party into its orbit.

Had Sihanouk been aware of Beijing's burgeoning relationship with the CPK, of course, he would not have been so eager to embrace the Chinese. But the prince remained convinced that the Khmer Rouge were allied primarily with Hanoi. This belief was a core component of his willingness to trust Beijing to safeguard his rule and the Chinese leadership took pains to reinforce this perception. Their deftness in doing so allowed them to effectively have their cake while eating it – even hosting overlapping visits by Sihanouk and (secretly) Saloth Sar in 1965. Both Cambodian factions saw the PRC as their number one ally, while growing ever more hostile toward Hanoi.³¹

The success of this two-track policy was of central importance to Sihanouk's move left in foreign policy. Although the renunciation of American aid was the result of a

²⁹ Burchett, *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle*, 163. There is some evidence that Zhou's egging on of Sihanouk could have had real impacts on Khmer-Viet relations. Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 54 discusses failed efforts by Sihanouk and the National Liberation Front to reach an agreement on Cambodian borders in 1964 and 1966. In both instances, Sihanouk's demands for sovereignty over islands claimed by Saigon were cited as reasons that negotiations foundered. In 1966, his claims to Phu Cuoc were specifically noted. Of course disputes over coastal islands was a longstanding problem in Khmer-Viet relations and there is not nearly enough evidence to conjecture that Sihanouk pushed for Phu Cuoc due to Chinese encouragement, but it is telling that Zhou would willingly decide to exacerbate this debate between two allies.

³⁰ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 182.

³¹ *ibid.*, 222.

long decline in the Cambodian-American relationship, it would not have occurred if the prince did not have faith in unwavering Chinese support. He understood fully that he was abandoning his neutralism and did so in the expectation that China would be there to take Cambodia under its wing.³² That China's very public efforts to court Sihanouk's favor encouraged this is beyond dispute.

The turn left involved more than simply rejected US aid, however. The prince completely reoriented the economy in a left-leaning direction. All banks, insurance companies, and import-export businesses were put under state control. This was partially intended to compensate for the shortfall in government revenues following the loss of American aid money, but it was also a deeply political move. Sihanouk made a point of playing up the socialist nature of his decision, claiming that Chinese, French, and Anglo-Saxon international capitalists constituted a "fifth column" that was undermining Cambodian neutrality.³³ Although this declaration singled out foreign nationals from France and China, David P. Chandler argues that Sihanouk nonetheless hoped to appeal to these countries on an ideological level by appearing anti-American and sympathetic to socialism.³⁴

The impact of these decisions was devastating. The stability of Sihanouk's rule had depended on keeping the support of the urban elite. However, it was the elite who was most in favor of good relations with the United States, and who stood to lose the most from the economic and financial disruption. As leaders in Washington discussed the implications of the prince's actions, US Ambassador Philip Sprouse aptly predicted that members of the "educated class" living in Phnom Penh "individually will feel [the] major

³² CIA, "Prince Sihanouk," p. 121.

³³ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 205.

³⁴ Chandler, *Tragedy*, 131 and 141.

economic impact of [the] cessation [of] US aid programs and Sihanouk's nationalization and other economic measures. They will witness first hand, consequences in armed forces, commerce, schools and development projects, as well as their own urbanized style of life and private fortunes."³⁵

Considering Cambodia's economic realities it could hardly have been otherwise. Cambodia in the early 1960s functioned through a deeply institutionalized system of corruption that relied on ready reservoirs of foreign wealth. Government officials and businessmen helped themselves liberally to foreign financial aid and bribes extracted from foreign firms in exchange for contracts and import-export licenses. With Sihanouk's new policies both these sources of largesse disappeared almost overnight. And while this systemic graft had primarily enriched Phnom Penh's most powerful, a trickle-down effect had developed such that all levels and branches of the administration used what status they had to line their pockets with foreign monies.³⁶ But even those operating within the formal economy took a major hit. The nationalization of the import-export trade and the financial sector seriously degraded economic productivity.³⁷ Cambodia's largest financial institution, the Bank of Phnom Penh, could not even survive until the July 1964 deadline for government takeover and collapsed in mid-December (and its director absconded with over \$4 million in bank assets).³⁸

As much as the loss of US aid affected the Phnom Penh bureaucracy, the Cambodian military was the hardest hit. Aid from Washington had equipped and financed the entire armed forces and constituted 30% of the military budget – including

³⁵ *ibid.*, 136.

³⁶ Osborne, *Sihanouk*, 167.

³⁷ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 57.

³⁸ Chandler, *Tragedy*, 137.

the salaries of the officer corps. Suddenly both recruitment and procurement had to be cut back.³⁹ The US aid regime had also been transforming the military, which was equipped and organized largely in a pre-World War II style, into a more modern force. With the interruption of aid the armed forces found themselves stuck “midway toward modernization.”⁴⁰ And while several communist countries including China, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia began providing military aid to fill the void, it never made up the difference. Weapons broke down and went unreplaced; half of the military vehicles in provincial bases became unusable for lack of spare parts, and those that still functioned often went without the fuel to operate them.⁴¹ To make matters worse, the materiel now being supplied by the communist world was incompatible with the American-made armaments that had filled Cambodian inventories for the last decade. Troops were armed without concern for uniformity and members of a single unit might carry a whole array of mismatched weaponry. This was extremely detrimental in terms of weapons maintenance, logistical support, resupply of units, and standardized training programs. Gen. Sak Sutsakhyan, Commander in Chief of the Cambodian military in the early 1970s, would later lament this fact for preventing the armed forces from “achiev[ing] the standardization of their units in order to become a strong and modern military force.”⁴²

As though the financial, military, and political weakness brought on by the turn left was not enough, it took hold at the same time a vast program of rice smuggling in the countryside was undermining rural economic stability. The 1965 escalation of American forces in South Vietnam had forced the Viet Cong to drastically expand the recruitment

³⁹ Boucher, “The Relationship Between,” 227-228. Osborne, *Sihanouk*, 166. Smith, “Cambodia: Between Scylla and Charybdis,” 72.

⁴⁰ Sutsakhyan, *The Khmer Republic*, 39-40.

⁴¹ Osborne, *Sihanouk*, 168.

⁴² Sutsakhyan, *The Khmer Republic*, 33 and 39-40.

and conscription of new fighters. In order to feed this inflated force Chinese middlemen purchased rice from Cambodian peasants and smuggled it across the border to liberated zones in South Vietnam and Laos. This was a serious blow to the Cambodian government which relied on taxing the export of surplus rice as its primary source of revenue. It could not compete with the prices offered by the Vietnamese communists, however, and by 1966 taxable rice exports had dropped by two-thirds.⁴³ (Ironically this problem was substantially exacerbated by the turn left as well: in an effort to raise revenues after the elimination of aid the government had dropped the price at which it purchased rice from peasants to thereby increase the profit margin. But this, of course, just made the high prices offered by smugglers all the more attractive.⁴⁴)

To address this financial threat Phnom Penh deployed troops to a number of provinces to combat smuggling and ensure peasant compliance with government rice purchasing.⁴⁵ Lon Nol – now prime minister of a newly elected conservative government – spent the opening months of 1967 in Battambang province to personally oversee the effort.⁴⁶ The peasantry grated under the heavy-handed military presence and the paltry prices offered by the government (only one-third what they received from the foreign communists).⁴⁷ February and March saw demonstrations against the government and clashes between peasants and soldiers. In April, tensions exploded when peasants in the village of Samlaut attacked a group of soldiers overseeing rice purchases, killing two of them and seizing several rifles before moving on and attacking army outposts in a

⁴³ Ben Kiernan, “The Impact on Cambodia of the U.S. Intervention in Vietnam,” *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*, Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huyuh eds. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 217. Short, *Pol Pot*, 165.

⁴⁴ Heder, “Kampuchea’s Armed Struggle,” 8.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Short, *Pol Pot*, 165.

⁴⁷ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 251.

number of surrounding villages. The uprising lasted four days before being squelched by a military campaign of – in Sihanouk’s words – “repression and pacification.”⁴⁸ Although the events of the Samlaut rebellion had not been coordinated by the Communist Party of Kampuchea, the party benefited greatly from the instability. The violence died down, but anger among the peasantry remained, compounded by harsh government reprisals. The uprisings showed the party that traditional peasant loyalty to Sihanouk could be surmounted by fomenting discontent, and the CPK made rural land reform a rallying point in its recruitment efforts. Meanwhile the weakened state of the army following the loss of American aid made it easier for the party to conduct its operations in the countryside without being harassed by government forces.⁴⁹

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to assess just how significant these developments were in the eventual rise of the Khmer Rouge, it is clear that they were extremely detrimental to the stability of the royal government. The turn left had obliterated support for Sihanouk among the Cambodian elite. Despite this, Milton Osborne contends that the prince could have banked on continued support among the peasantry and weathered the discontent of the elites were it not for debilitation of the military. The significance of this, he writes, “cannot be overemphasized” because of Washington’s centrality in “making the army a functioning body.” The blow to the armed forces stressed its ability even to provide the public works that had become its predominant mission; it was simply beyond the question for them to effectively restrain the clandestine activities of communists in the remote countryside or build themselves

⁴⁸ Short, *Pol Pot*, 166.

⁴⁹ Chandler, *Tragedy*, 164-167. Heder, “Kampuchea’s Armed Struggle,” 5.

into a force capable of defending against them in coming years.⁵⁰ (Indeed, only the resumption of US military support under the Lon Nol military regime allowed that government to cling to life as long as it did.)⁵¹ Adding to the government's travails was the discontent growing among the peasantry. Ben Kiernan identifies the economic destabilization that resulted from disruptions in Cambodia's rice industry as one of the integral factors leading to the rise of the Khmer Rouge.⁵²

Perhaps the simplest way to contextualize the significance of these events is to consider the opinions of the two leaders most intimately affected. In 1977 Pol Pot himself would reflect in a wide-ranging speech on the rejection of US aid as "a great event in our struggle," going even to so far as to claim it – with typical historical freeness – as "the result of the people's struggle."⁵³ Although he did not share the communist leader's enthusiasm, Sihanouk agreed about the import of his decisions. In the 1980s he would bitterly lament, "There is perhaps one thing I regret. This was to have rejected... the humiliating aid accorded by the United States to my army and my administration."⁵⁴

This soundness of this regret would be further underlined by oncoming developments in the Sino-Cambodian relationship. For most of 1967, in the midst of the social and political upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, China's Foreign Ministry fell under the control of an ultra-left faction of the Chinese Communist Party.⁵⁵ Sihanouk had observed the Cultural Revolution warily, but held his peace as long as his nation and

⁵⁰ Osborne, *Sihanouk*, 168. Sutsakhyan, *The Khmer Republic*, 36.

⁵¹ Arnold R. Isaacs, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1983), 210.

⁵² Kiernan, "The Impact on Cambodia," 217. It should be noted that Kiernan attributes primary responsibility to the United States for its role in escalating the war. However, it cannot be ignored that the NLF chose to adopt a policy of widespread rice smuggling and hence their culpability is relevant to this discussion.

⁵³ Chandler, *Tragedy*, 130.

⁵⁴ Quotation found in *ibid.*, 138-139.

⁵⁵ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 260.

its relationship with the PRC remained unaffected. That March, however, he returned from a trip to France to find that radical Maoism had made it to Cambodia: Maoist demonstrations sprung up around Phnom Penh and the PRC embassy disseminated writings championing the Cultural Revolution; Chinese aid experts distributed Communist Party literature to their Khmer coworkers; Cambodian youth could be seen sporting Mao badges and putting up posters critical of the regime.⁵⁶

The ever-sensitive Khmer prince was aghast, and while he initially dismissed the disturbances as “errors” and “excesses” of a few individual Chinese, he grew concerned about Beijing’s intentions. The French ambassador to Cambodia reported in June that Sihanouk now suspected China was “colluding with the Khmer Rouge and ... trying to capitalize on the movement they have launched.”⁵⁷ According to Michael Leifer, there was evidence that the PRC had been quietly trying to build its influence among the large population of underemployed educated youth as an insurance policy, “in case Sihanouk tumbles from the tightrope of external and internal neutrality and the pieces are to be picked up by the rightist Army leadership.”⁵⁸ This would certainly be consistent with the trends in China’s Cambodia policy discussed above, and the Chinese seemed to be in no hurry to restrain the radical outbursts. When Sihanouk sent his foreign minister, Prince Norodom Phurissara, to Beijing to discuss the turmoil, Zhou Enlai tried to placate the Cambodian, but added that the Chinese population in Cambodia should “be permitted to display their pride of the cultural revolution and their love of Chairman Mao.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Boucher, “The Relationship Between,” 103. Short, *Pol Pot*, 179.

⁵⁷ Short, *Pol Pot*, 180.

⁵⁸ Michael Leifer, “Rebellion or Subversion in Cambodia?” *Current History* 56 (February 1969): 113.

⁵⁹ Chandler, *Tragedy*, 169.

Tensions grew even deeper in September, when Sihanouk shut down the Khmer-Chinese Friendship Association. Three days later, radical officials in Beijing thumbed their nose at this decision by sending the defunct organization a telegram expressing “militant greetings” on its anniversary and calling on its members to unite with the masses and continue sowing discord to further the struggle against reactionary forces.⁶⁰ The prince did not take this jab lightly and was particularly infuriated by the implicit accusation that he was a reactionary. He stridently denounced China’s “extraordinary interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state” and announced his intent to withdraw his ambassador to Beijing.⁶¹

This got the Chinese leadership’s attention. Within days Zhou took action to soothe Sihanouk’s concerns. He spoke with the Cambodian ambassador of his esteem for the prince and reassured him that “Cambodia occupies an important position in Indo-China and in South-East Asia.” This was less comforting than it was intended to be. To Sihanouk this only meant that it would be impossible for his nation to fade back into obscurity – they were now inexorably caught up in the power politics of the region. Zhou’s statement, he explained, “hardly reassures us – we would prefer to remain the Cambodia of no importance.”⁶²

The relationship between the two nations soon stabilized itself, but the damage had been done. The ‘cornerstone’ on which Sihanouk had built his foreign policy had proven it was every bit as fickle and subject to change with the geopolitical winds as any other country. It was around this time that the prince decided to attempt to resurrect his neutralism, and began pursuing a rapprochement with the United States. In October 1967

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 170. Smith, “Cambodia: Between Scylla and Charybdis,” 75.

⁶¹ Boucher, “The Relationship Between,” 107-108.

⁶² Both quotations from Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 263.

he hosted an unofficial, but symbolically meaningful, visit by Jackie Kennedy. The following January Chester Bowles, US Ambassador to India, traveled to Cambodia and met with Sihanouk. He was the highest-ranking American official to meet with the prince in several years, and his visit laid the groundwork for renewing relations.⁶³ In addition to arguably agreeing to turn a blind eye to American bombing of communist sanctuaries, the prince also reportedly “made it clear that while he felt the US policies in Southeast Asia were inept, he primarily feared the Chinese” – although given Sihanouk’s continued collaboration with Beijing over the coming years it seems clear that this statement was meant more to appeal to the United States than to express his actual political outlook.⁶⁴ For Bowles’ part, the ambassador promised to help Sihanouk’s efforts to crack down on communist infiltration by sharing US intelligence with Phnom Penh – though considering the longstanding accommodation between Sihanouk’s government and the Vietnamese communists this offer was unlikely to be put to use and had more value as a good faith gesture than anything else. For the prince’s purpose it was primarily valuable as a signal to his communist allies. By hosting Bowles – and discussing efforts to curb communist activities – Sihanouk was letting Hanoi and Beijing know that he was not beyond moving back to the right if they failed to restrain the Cambodian communists or encouraged efforts to undermine his rule.⁶⁵

Though it was clear that Sino-Cambodian relations would not return to the high they had once seen, the relationship remained intact. Sihanouk revived his neutralist balancing act, but avoided going so far as to alienate himself from the PRC, which

⁶³ Chandler, *Tragedy*, 171-172.

⁶⁴ C. L. Sulzberger, “The Cambodian Dilemma,” *NYT*, 17 January 1971, E15. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 91297700. Accessed 22 October, 2008.

⁶⁵ Boucher, “The Relationship Between,” 115.

remained Cambodia's best option for balancing against Vietnam. Meanwhile Beijing was happy to continue enjoying the prince's accommodation with the Vietnamese communists. The late 1960s had seen major blows to Sihanouk's foreign policy, but it had not fallen apart, and he would manage to keep a lid on the foreign threats that confronted him. Domestically, however, events in the coming years would spiral out of his control, finally dragging his country into the war he had tried so hard to stay out of.

Chapter Five: The Forces Coalesce

Between the 1966 Party Congress that saw the Khmer Rouge declare its intention to prepare for armed struggle and the spring of 1967 little progress had been made toward building an actual rebellion. However, following the Samlaut Uprising, the Communist Party of Kampuchea made the decision to fully abandon all political participation and begin building a revolutionary army. The party knew that it had to take advantage of the peasant disaffection that had led to the uprisings while it had the opportunity, and the brutal reprisals of Lon Nol's army proved that it was time to start thinking in terms of a real military organization that could defend revolutionary interests.¹

While the domestic situation may have seemed ripe, the timing could not have been worse if the CPK hoped for the support of its allies in Hanoi and Beijing. By this time eighty percent of war material moving from the People's Republic of China to Vietnam was going through the port of Sihanoukville (Kompong Chom) and the Vietnamese – gearing up for the upcoming Tet offensive – were going out of their way to stay on Prince Sihanouk's good side.² Based on the “concurrence of overwhelming interests of the two countries in the matter of opposing U.S. imperialism,” the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam had formally proclaimed its respect for Cambodia's territorial integrity in May 1967.³ In the Eastern Zone of Cambodia's revolutionary apparatus, where Hanoi's influence was strongest, the Vietnamese successfully lobbied

¹ Heder, “Kampuchea's Armed Struggle,” 9.

² Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 59.

³ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 82.

the zone leader So Phim to hold off joining the military effort.⁴ This moderation was seconded by the Chinese. PRC Prime Minister Zhou Enlai advised the Vietnamese to continue directing the CPK to cooperate with Sihanouk's government and explain that, "struggle can be intensified, but it is not necessary to conduct armed struggle in Cambodia. At this moment, Vietnam's victory is the first priority."⁵

The Cambodians, however, were set on their revolutionary agenda. On January 17, 1968 the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea (RAK) launched the first attack of the Cambodian civil war. It was a minor operation, consisting only of a raid to capture rifles from an army post, but it put the last nail in the coffin of Vietnam's theory of a unified Indochinese battlefield.⁶ The next two years would be crucial in developing the strength of the CPK and its armed wing, the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea. Although the Cambodian communists were still few and relied on capturing weapons to arm themselves, "the seriousness of their strategies and their tight organization together with peasant discontentment amounted to a potentially potent prescription."⁷

The uptick in revolutionary activity was extremely worrisome to Sihanouk who still believed that the communists in Vietnam were "the masters of the Khmer Rouge."⁸ He publically denounced the Democratic Republic of Vietnam for supporting the Khmer insurgency and threatened to cut off the movement of supplies through the Sihanoukville port if Hanoi did not restrain its Khmer protégés.⁹ The prince sought further leverage by reviving his policy of neutralism and pursuing a rapprochement with the United States. In

⁴ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 64.

⁵ Discussion between Chinese and Vietnamese delegations, 11 April 1967. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Record no. 5034C9D6-96B6-175C-9AB775DA5583281D. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

⁶ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 59. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 268.

⁷ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 62.

⁸ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 281.

⁹ Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 79.

January 1968, he hosted a visit by US ambassador to India, Chester Bowles which paved the way for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations in April 1969. The prince even went so far as to declare in May 1969 that a “state of war” existed with the Vietnamese in Svay Rieng province.¹⁰

Hanoi witnessed these developments with some trepidation. The Bowles trip was seen as an indication that Sihanouk may have been considering allowing “hot pursuit” of Viet Cong forces across the border into Cambodia. To make matters worse, the United States began secretly bombing sanctuaries in Cambodia one month before the restoration of relations. These events put Sihanouk’s utility as a buffer for their western flank into question. He had been invaluable for consistently rejecting an American military presence in his country, but if he was going to allow hot pursuit or American bombing, Vietnam’s now-vital Cambodian operations would be jeopardized.¹¹

This wavering may have prompted some degree of support for the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea. A captured Vietnamese document details Khmer-Viet cooperation in northeast Cambodia in 1969 and suggests that in areas where the government attempted to crack down on Vietnamese activities Hanoi was more willing to support guerilla activity – hence suggesting that support for Sihanouk extended only so far as his utility.¹² Especially after the reestablishment of US-Cambodian relations, Vietnam’s leaders were deeply concerned by the prospect of American forces moving into Cambodia and flanking South Vietnam.¹³ In this regard the Vietnamese had an interest in

¹⁰ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 61.

¹¹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 84-86.

¹² Chandler, *Tragedy*, 176.

¹³ This worry was discussed in April 1969 at a Politburo meeting, three months later in a resolution passed by the VWP Southern Bureau, and again in a January 1970 plenary session of Central Committee. Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 87.

ensuring that the Cambodian party remained functional. If US troops did end up in Cambodia, Vietnam would be well served to have allies already on the ground. Even before Sar's trip the Vietnamese seem to have been providing limited quantities of arms to their Khmer allies.¹⁴ However, these considerations were not sufficient to impel the DRV leaders to change their fundamental strategy in Cambodia. In September 1969 Sihanouk traveled to Hanoi for Ho Chi Minh's funeral and met with Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong to discuss the continuation of the existing agreements between Cambodia and the DRV. From these meetings the Vietnamese determined that the prince did not have the means or the inclination to abandon their arrangement and opted not to alter their policy.¹⁵

This lack of support resulted in a perceptible increase in tensions between the CPK and the Vietnamese. By the end of 1969 the rebellion in Cambodia was essentially at a standstill – the rebels had met with success in building support in the countryside, but neither side had the resources to inflict a decisive degree of damage on the other. Around that time Saloth Sar traveled to Hanoi to solicit Vietnam's support. He challenged the strategy of accommodating Sihanouk by arguing that the prince would soon be toppled by a military coup and forced to ally with the resistance anyway. Although impressively accurate in hindsight, this prediction did not sway the DRV leadership. Once again Sar was rebuffed by VWP Secretary General Le Duan, who urged him to call the rebellion off altogether and revert to political struggle – an unthinkable option for the Khmer radical.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Short, Pol Pot*, 185. See also footnote 27 of this chapter.

¹⁵ Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 81.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 82. *Short, Pol Pot*, 188.

This was effectively a replay of Sar's 1965 visit, which had put its own share of strain on the relationship between the Vietnamese and Cambodian communists. Now, however, the stakes were even higher. With the instigation of armed struggle the CPK had made Hanoi's ally their sworn enemy. That the Vietnamese were unwilling to back their fellow communists, "led to increasing problems in [VWP-CPK] relations," according to Pham Van Ba, a Vietnamese cadre who had been extensively involved with the Cambodian party in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁷ It could hardly have been otherwise. Although Sihanouk was a vital element of Vietnamese military strategy, to the Cambodian party he was a "feudalist" and their existential enemy. These mutually exclusive outlooks ensured that in the early years of the rebellion, "most of the remaining elements of the CPK's and VWP's international proletarian feelings for one another were crushed between Sihanouk's anti-communism and his anti-Americanism."¹⁸

As in 1965, the Vietnamese followed Sar's visit by trying to shore up their waning influence in the Cambodian party. While Sar traveled on to Beijing, the VWP took advantage of his absence to try and build ties with other CPK leaders including CPK Deputy Secretary Nuon Chea.¹⁹ This was in keeping with earlier efforts to counter the radical elements of the CPK and restrain the impulse to violent revolution. In the hopes of increasing pro-Vietnamese sentiment among the party, in January 1968 Hanoi began returning the Cambodian cadres who had been training in Vietnam at a rate of around 11 or 12 daily.²⁰ In the Eastern Zone – the only part of Cambodia where Hanoi still had much weight – they refused to supply weapons following the outbreak of armed struggle,

¹⁷ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 88.

¹⁸ Heder, "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle," 19-20.

¹⁹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 88-89.

²⁰ Ben Kiernan, "The Samlaut Rebellion, 1967-68," *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*, Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua eds. (Armonk, NY: Zed, 1982), 194.

and successfully diverted the cadres in the zone into political work instead of armed activities. Even when the Eastern Zone finally joined the fight in late 1968, Hanoi provided aid only in the form of allowing retreating fighters to seek protection at NLF bases.²¹

The amount of clandestine support China provided to the Cambodian resistance during these years is uncertain, due to the extreme secrecy of the Khmer Rouge and the dearth of evidence from Chinese sources.²² Sihanouk was still Beijing's most valuable asset in the country, and the Chinese were uninterested in seeing him meaningfully undermined. Indeed, two weeks before Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea's first operation in January 1968, the Chinese transferred a consignment of military aid to Lon Nol's forces, including amongst other things jet fighter-bombers, transport aircraft, artillery pieces, and machine guns.²³

Nevertheless the CPK were valuable as a potential ally and, as we have seen, the Chinese leadership wanted to keep that option open. Conversations between Zhou Enlai and Vietnamese leaders during these years demonstrate what appears to be a legitimate sympathy for the Cambodian revolutionaries and an interest in their wellbeing. In June 1968, the Chinese premier relayed to Pham Hung, head of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), some complaints of the Khmer communists, telling him, "Comrade Pham Van Dong said that we should not interfere in the internal affairs of the Khmer Communist Party. However, I hear them complain that Vietnamese comrades have a chauvinist attitude, do not want to help, to discuss with them, or give them weapons."

²¹ Nguyen-Vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 60-61.

²² Ben Kiernan mentions the fact that Chinese and Cambodian communist leaders went to great lengths to keep the details of their relationship under wraps to prevent any backlash from the royal government. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 222.

²³ Etcheson, *Rise and Demise*, 82. Heder, "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle," 12.

Zhou went on to advise Hung to “educate Vietnamese troops passing through Cambodia to be more attentive to the question of relations with the Khmer Communist Party.” He also suggested that the PRC’s support for the royal Cambodian government was not unconditional, declaring that “if Sihanouk oppresses the Cambodian Communists, China can no longer provide Cambodia with weapons.”²⁴ These comments – particularly the last – display a degree of uncertainty with the established policy of relying completely upon Sihanouk, while more or less neglecting the communist rebels. Read in this light, one can further detect growing discomfort with the status quo in a conversation Zhou had with the COSVN in 1969, in which he told the Vietnamese, “As far as the situation in Cambodia is concerned, we are not as optimistic as you are. Even though [Sihanouk] carries out a policy of double-dealing, he is tilting to the right.”²⁵

There is evidence that Beijing’s support to the Khmer Rouge in the early stages of the rebellion went beyond rhetorical solidarity, however. Information from the Soviet Union’s embassy in Hanoi indicates that China may have been providing important advisory and military support to the RAK by early 1968. A Soviet document entitled “Subversive activities of Chinese in Cambodia” and dated February 19, 1968 reports that “using the critical economic situation of the peasants in the number of provinces, Chinese, based on pro-Maoist and pro-Vietnamese elements of the left-wing forces, rouse actions of the so-called Khmer Rouge in the Northern and Northwest provinces, smuggle weapons, and create small armed groups of rebels.” The document further

²⁴ Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung, 19 June 1968. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Record no. 5034CD02-96B6-175C-9F3D20B75A8C3115. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

²⁵ Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng, Pham Van Dong, Hoang Van Thai and Pham Hung address the COSVN delegation, 20 April 1969. Database on-line. Available from Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Record no. 5034CD50-96B6-175C-92A481244D47BD78. Accessed 14 October, 2008.

detailed a conversation with Ung Khon San, Cambodia's Deputy Chairman of Internal Affairs, who told Soviet representatives that, "rebels are armed with modern Chinese-made weapons (automatic rifles, grenade launchers, and 81 mm. mortars)...these weapons were found in boxes addressed to the textile factory in Battambang where Chinese experts were working."²⁶

In light of the aforementioned lack of evidence on the relationship between the Khmer Rouge and the PRC at this time it is difficult to assess the accuracy of these claims or the extensiveness of any material Chinese support. These examples are certainly in line with Michael Leifer's suggestion, mentioned in the last chapter, that the Chinese may have discretely been cultivating radical sentiment among Cambodian youth to ensure they would have friends in Cambodia should Sihanouk fall.²⁷ However if they are representative of an established policy of material support for the Cambodian rivals this constitutes a significant departure from the established historical opinion that China was unwilling to support the insurgency at this point.²⁸ It is not unreasonable to conjecture that Beijing might agree to provide a limited amount of arms to the RAK, sufficient enough to secure the good will of the Khmer Rouge, but not to enable them to seriously challenge the stability of Sihanouk's government. This would be entirely consistent with the record of allying openly with the prince, but hedging their bets by quietly courting the CPK.

²⁶ Dmitry Mosyakov, "The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A history of their relations as told in the Soviet archives," Genocide Studies Program Working Paper No. 15 (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2000), p. 13-14.

²⁷ Leifer, "Rebellion or Subversion," 113.

²⁸ At a 1969 meeting of Cambodia's provincial governors with the cabinet of the national government, the governor of Kompong Cham reported the presence of "Viet-Cong supplied Chinese weapons" among CPK forces. Whether this is an example of the Vietnamese diverting Chinese aid to the Khmer Rouge or Beijing funneling aid via the Viet Cong is impossible to surmise, however, it is worthy of notice in light of these more recent reports. CIA, "Communism and Cambodia," p. 59.

For their part, the Khmer Rouge leadership was clearly interested in good relations with the Chinese. In an October 1967 letter to the Chinese Communist Party, Saloth Sar had written, “although there are obstacles ahead, we will still continue to put into effect the revolutionary work according to the line of the people’s war which Chairman Mao Zedong has pointed out.”²⁹ As discussed in previous chapters the Khmer Rouge saw the Chinese as an important counterweight to the Vietnamese. This interest was even detected through the dense veil of secrecy surrounding the CPK by American intelligence. A 1972 CIA report observed that “there are already clear indications that [CPK] leaders have flirted with China to offset Hanoi” - a tactic that, the writer observed, “curiously resembles the Cambodian state policy during Sihanouk’s reign.”³⁰ Thus as Sar’s party became more active, he kept it on a steadily pro-Chinese track. While in Hanoi in 1969 he rebuffed Vietnamese suggestions that he establish relations with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and refused to meet with the Soviet ambassador – a clear indication of where he stood concerning the Sino-Soviet dispute.³¹ And while the Cambodian armed forces were using Chinese-provided military aid to hunt down and fight the CPK, its leadership did not hold Beijing accountable for this, instead resenting the Vietnamese for not helping them to fight back.³²

As the CPK drew ever closer to the Chinese, relations with Hanoi hit a new low.³³ Ieng Sary, Saloth Sar’s closest companion in the CPK, would even report that the first two years of the rebellion had seen armed clashes in the North-Eastern administrative zone between the Khmer Rouge and Viet Cong who “came in and out without

²⁹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 81.

³⁰ CIA, “Communism and Cambodia,” 90.

³¹ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 298.

³² *ibid.*, 281.

³³ Heder, “Kampuchea’s Armed Struggle,” 20.

permission.”³⁴ By all rights the relationship was doomed to collapse. But on March 18, while Sihanouk was out of the country, a group of army officers led in association with General Lon Nol – at this time Prime Minister – staged a bloodless coup removing the prince from power. In October the general would declare the foundation of the Khmer Republic, ending two thousand years of monarchical rule.³⁵

This event would redefine the terms of the inter-party communist relationships and drag Cambodia irrevocably into the Vietnam War. On March 23, Sihanouk announced the formation of the National United Front of Kampuchea (NFUK) and called on his countrymen to resist the perpetrators of the coup. The purpose of the NFUK was to unite the revolutionaries in the CPK with Sihanouk loyalists against Lon Nol; in practice it functioned largely as a Khmer Rouge front group.³⁶ Overnight, Saloth Sar’s sworn enemy became a vital ally – for united with the prince the Khmer Rouge could finally receive the full backing of their fellow communists. The Vietnamese acted quickly in this respect – by March 27, Hanoi had denounced the coup, announced full support for the NUFK, and severed relations with Phnom Penh.³⁷ The Chinese, however, moved more slowly and made a considerable effort to reach an accommodation with Lon Nol. According to Khmer Republic General Sak Sutsakhyan, Beijing offered to regard the change of government in Phnom Penh as “nothing more than an internal problem” if Lon Nol would maintain Sihanouk’s permissive stance *viz-a-viz* Vietnam.³⁸ Only when these

³⁴ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 275.

³⁵ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 90.

³⁶ Qiang Zhai, “China and the Cambodian Conflict,” 383.

³⁷ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 299-300.

³⁸ Sutsakhyan notes that the Vietnamese also met with the Lon Nol government, but this produced no results, likely due to the fact that Phnom Penh’s negotiators had the goal of “securing Communist agreement to evacuate their forces from Cambodia.” Sutsakhyan, *The Khmer Republic*, 14-15.

efforts proved fruitless did the Chinese extend total support to the resistance, finally breaking relations with the Khmer Republic six weeks after the coup.³⁹

The differences in the Vietnamese and Chinese responses to the coup sprung from the different role that Cambodia played in each nation's national security strategy. For Beijing, Cambodia's most important function was – as we have seen – keeping Western military power out of Southeast Asia. If Lon Nol did not intend to allow US bases in his country, his regime was no threat to China. In fact, much like Sihanouk's neutralism, it had the secondary benefit of standing in the way of Vietnamese communist domination of Indochina. Thus Beijing committed to completely severing its ties to Lon Nol's government only when it became clear that the countries could not work together. In the Vietnamese view, however, the Khmer Republic was an intrinsic threat to its domestic war effort. Even if Lon Nol's forces did not attack the Vietnamese communists, cooperation with American and South Vietnamese forces would threaten the survival of the NLF, which relied on access to Cambodian territory.⁴⁰

Thus despite the increasing drift of the Cambodian revolutionaries toward Beijing, the Vietnamese now found themselves in close cooperation with the Khmer Rouge. The VWP Politburo instructed its cadres to unite with the Cambodian Communists to fight the United States/South Vietnam forces and “strengthen the Cambodian revolution,” branding it a “strategic matter of the utmost importance.” The ascendancy of a pro-American right-wing government in Phnom Penh acutely threatened Hanoi's strategic rearguard, and reawakened fears that Vietnam would be threatened on

³⁹ Eugene K. Lawson, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1984), 196. Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 189-190.

⁴⁰ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 299. Qiang Zhai seconds the interpretation that China's reaction to the coup was primarily focused on countering Hanoi, as well as Moscow. Qiang, “China and the Cambodian Conflict,” 384.

its vulnerable western flank. This risk was too great to be ignored and the Vietnamese quickly set out to consolidate their sanctuaries and take control of as much of the countryside as they could.⁴¹

VC/NVA cadres rapidly took the fore in combat operations, recruiting and training Cambodian personnel, and putting together local administrative organs that could function on their own. The Vietnamese embraced much of the agenda Saloth Sar had argued for in 1969, justifying their change of heart by explaining that with Sihanouk on board they finally had the basis for a revolutionary government in Cambodia. Their strategy differed significantly from the CPK's vision, however, by including a significant role for Sihanouk's supporters in the NFUK and, importantly, greatly expanding Vietnamese involvement.⁴² It was understood that Vietnam's participation in the Cambodian struggle would strengthen Saloth Sar's in-party opposition and the *Livre Noir*, the CPK's official party history, makes much of his refusal to accept Vietnam's domineering terms, such as acceding to mixed Khmer-Viet military commands. In all reality, however, the puny Cambodian party was in no position to look a gift horse in the mouth, and David Chandler contends that – while some compromises were made – Hanoi essentially ran the show.⁴³ This arrangement provided the Cambodians with the military might of the Vietnamese forces and a shield behind which to build up their own strength, but did not go so far as to topple Lon Nol for the Khmer Rouge. A Politburo directive instructed South Vietnam's Southern Bureau to unite with the Cambodian resistance and

⁴¹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 91-92.

⁴² Porter, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," 83.

⁴³ Chandler backs his claim up by arguing that between the feeble state of the party and the evidence of continued close cooperation of Khmer and Vietnamese communists, there is more than enough reason to suspect that the *Livre Noir* was embellishing, to say the least. Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 89.

take control of all Cambodia east of the Mekong river, but not move any further west.⁴⁴ Vietnam needed to lock down its strategic areas in Cambodia and contain Lon Nol's military, but was not particularly interested in a quick revolutionary victory in light of the antipathy some of its leaders felt toward Hanoi.⁴⁵

The Vietnamese were aware of the growing anti-Vietnamese sentiment in the ranks of the CPK and used the upheaval in Cambodia to try and reorient the party away from a radical line. Large numbers of peasants were recruited by VWP cadres to fight for Sihanouk. These recruits were assembled into a separate Sihanoukist force within the NUFK under the name Khmer Rumdo (Liberators). As the Vietnamese built local political and military organizations, they made a point of placing cadres recruited under the prince's banner in positions of local authority where they could hopefully counter Khmer Rouge influence.⁴⁶ Hanoi hoped to reap a dual benefit from these efforts. On the one hand they were building the resistance into a self-sufficient force that could independently support the Vietnamese war effort while on the other, they were filling its ranks with moderates who could draw the resistance out of Saloth Sar's sway.⁴⁷

In terms of Vietnam's main concern – securing their strategic interests in Cambodia – they met with little difficulty. At the time of the coup the Cambodian military “numbered only a few more than 30,000 men with a mismatched arsenal of obsolete weapons.”⁴⁸ Although this had kept the Khmer Rouge contained to the countryside it was no match for the VC/NVA. Following Sihanouk's deposition, over

⁴⁴ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 93.

⁴⁵ Anne Gilks, *Breakdown*, 53.

⁴⁶ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 68.

⁴⁷ Timothy Carney, “The Unexpected Victory,” *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*, Karl D. Jackson, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1989), 22-23.

⁴⁸ Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 197.

40,000 Viet Cong fighters surged through Cambodia. They made it within fifteen miles of Phnom Penh before being repulsed, and by the end of April they controlled most of the country east of the Mekong River.⁴⁹ Wherever the Vietnamese encountered Khmer Republic forces, the Cambodians were decimated. Were it not for their own unwillingness to incur the political costs of toppling a neighboring government the Vietnamese could certainly have conquered the entire country.⁵⁰ By any fair assessment there was no one to challenge Vietnam's supremacy in Cambodia.

No one, that is, except their Chinese allies. The Sino-Vietnamese relationship had encountered a renewed period of tension in 1968 when Hanoi agreed to peace talks with the United States without first consulting China. The PRC had been deeply critical of this diplomatic engagement – which involved both the US and the Soviet Union – and at least one Chinese official threatened to terminate aid to Vietnam if it continued negotiations.⁵¹ As the situation in Cambodia rapidly transformed, China became seriously concerned about Hanoi's growing role in Cambodia and worked actively to curtail its influence. This was not out of any altruistic impulse, but rather the understanding that Vietnamese predominance in Cambodia ran contrary to Beijing's geopolitical imperatives.⁵² To that end the Chinese found themselves – despite finally having the freedom to openly support the Khmer Rouge – once again pinning their hopes on Prince Sihanouk.

⁴⁹ Short, *Pol Pot*, 204.

⁵⁰ Analysts in the US government estimated, “Within four months the Communists had overrun half of Cambodia, taken or threatened sixteen of its nineteen provincial capitals and interdicted – for varying periods – all roads and rail links to the capital. VC/NVA forces in the countryside appeared able to move at will.” They concluded, however, that Hanoi was waging “a sort of war-on-the-cheap” and was not interested in taking over the whole country. Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 205-206.

⁵¹ Gareth Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis,” *The Third Indochina Conflict*, David W. P. Elliot ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981), 74.

⁵² Chang, *Kampuchea Between*, 30.

Although Saloth Sar's Maoist clique seemed like natural allies, the Chinese could not realistically challenge Hanoi's sway within the CPK, which was still divided regionally and politically. By Beijing's reasoning the Vietnamese were in a position to dominate the Cambodian communists through their geographical proximity and their strong influence among the remaining friendly elements of the party.⁵³ Therefore Sihanouk – who had taken refuge in Beijing – was China's best option for exercising influence within the resistance. His natural inclination against Vietnam and his deep commitment to Cambodian independence ensured that Sihanouk would keep the resistance government from becoming a Vietnamese puppet. Meanwhile his close relationship with Zhou Enlai and history of good relations with the Chinese promised to give Beijing plenty of influence with the prince. Furthermore by hosting Cambodia's government-in-exile China had an excuse to open their own supply route to the resistance, whereby they could insert themselves further into its affairs by providing aid directly to the NUFK rather than going through the Vietnamese.⁵⁴

To further expand their role in Cambodian affairs, China arranged and hosted a summit conference in April 1970 to proclaim the solidarity of the three Indochinese peoples. Although China was not a participant this was an effective means of extending their reach by securing Sihanouk's role within the three-way alliance. The summit was held at the prince's request and he served as the chairmen of the proceedings. Although by any measure Cambodia was the most junior partner in the alliance, these diplomatic moves greatly enhanced the prince's diplomatic status. By inducing Hanoi to participate in a conference conducted by Sihanouk and even sign onto the joint communiqué the

⁵³ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 51-52. Qiang, "China and the Cambodian Conflict," 388.

⁵⁴ Lawson, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, 197.

summit produced, Beijing succeeded in elevating the prince to the status of an equal, at least diplomatically. Thus Vietnam was compelled to provide support without becoming overbearing towards Cambodia.⁵⁵ Meanwhile Sihanouk played his role as “China’s man” at the conference to a tee. He lavished praise on China for supporting the Cambodian struggle and pointedly snubbed DRV premier Pham Van Dong in toasts and speeches. In discussions he loudly condemned a Soviet proposal for a new Geneva conference, and the joint declaration of the conference was an overall loss for Hanoi, wrought with language praising noninterference and stopping short of establishing a joint military command.⁵⁶

The Vietnamese were well aware of these machinations, but had little recourse. Chinese friendship was still a vital element of the ongoing war effort in Vietnam and Hanoi’s China policy called for maintaining its independence from the PRC while extracting as much aid as possible. Aid had increased following Lon Nol’s seizure of power due to Chinese fears of resurgent American influence in Indochina, however, tensions were increasing within the alliance.⁵⁷ Even before the coup, Hanoi cast a wary eye on the similarity of the Chinese and Cambodian views of Soviet-Vietnamese “revisionism,” and suspected that Mao Zedong had encouraged the CPK to initiate its armed struggle against Vietnam’s wishes.⁵⁸ And despite its status as the DRV’s number one ally, the PRC at times seemed ambivalent about the struggle to reunify Vietnam. The Chinese maintained separate relations with the DRV and South Vietnam’s National Liberation Front, and often gave the NLF special attention indicative of a desire to build

⁵⁵ Chang, *Kampuchea Between*, 30-31.

⁵⁶ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 57. Lawson, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, 198.

⁵⁷ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 63.

⁵⁸ Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and,” 91.

direct influence in the South.⁵⁹ During Sino-American negotiations in 1971, Hanoi became acutely concerned that Beijing was going to sell out its interests in exchange for American concessions in Taiwan. When the US State Department let slip that China had interest in a “Balkanized” Indochina in which Vietnam would remain divided, Hanoi’s conviction that Beijing wanted to obstruct reunification became complete.⁶⁰

It therefore makes sense that Vietnam would be hesitant to allow Beijing or Sar’s “pro-Chinese” radicals to take the lead in Cambodia and opt to take the helm itself. In doing so, however, the Vietnamese took pains to avoid seeming like foreign invaders to the Cambodian populace. VC/NVA forces took the forefront in organizing occupied populations into revolutionary and administrative bodies from the level of hamlet up, but under explicit instructions to not give the impression that the Vietnamese army was in charge.⁶¹ A VWP document dated April 17, 1970 declares, “We must avoid the impression that such organizations are initiated by the South Vietnam Liberation Army or the ‘Viet Cong’. We must make them realize that they are masters.” Central Committee resolutions explicitly instructed cadres deployed to Cambodia to “treat the Kampuchean as our equals” and “consider the Kampuchean population as our main objective.”⁶² In this pursuit, the role of Sihanouk in the resistance was again valuable. According to the account of one Cambodian who fled from a Vietnamese-controlled village, Viet Cong cadres moved into town wearing civilian clothes and Sihanouk badges and telling

⁵⁹ Lawson, *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*, 193.

⁶⁰ Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and,” 74-75. United States Senate, “Problems of War Victims in Indochina, Part IV: North Vietnam,” Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees, of the Committee on the Judiciary, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session, September 28, 1972, available from <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/star/images/239/2390916005B.pdf>; internet; accessed 11 November 2008.

⁶¹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 95.

⁶² Kiernan, “Pol Pot and the,” 258-259. Several other primary source materials regarding the conduct and behavior of VC/NVA forces are reviewed and quoted at length on pages 257-264.

villagers that they were fighting in the name of the prince. They held propaganda lectures that invoked the name of Sihanouk and distributed leaflets calling for the liberation of Cambodia from the Americans.⁶³

Although these reports indicate some harsh behavior (intermittent forced taxation and execution of accused government agents, for example), the Vietnamese communists were downright chivalrous compared to the Republic of Vietnam forces that had remained in the country at the end of the American incursion in June 1970. The South Vietnamese troops behaved more like hostile occupiers than government allies, stealing cattle, taxing the population, raping Khmer women, and pillaging homes. These excesses drove tens of thousands of villagers to flee to communist controlled areas.⁶⁴ By contrast, the VWP leadership exhorted its troops to display a “correct attitude” toward Khmer villagers in order to develop a good relationship. Unit commanders were even provided a “10 Point Code of Conduct” with which to instruct their men. Guidelines ranged from “Respect the elders” to “In combat or in case of danger, sacrifice yourselves to save the people’s lives and property.”⁶⁵

Among its allies in the NUFK the Vietnamese also went on a charm offensive of sorts. In October 1970 Vietnamese emissaries met with leaders of the CPK’s Eastern Zone. There they gave clear instructions to their troops about proper behavior toward the Cambodians. Documents emanating from this meeting also assured Cambodians serving in VC/NVA ranks that they would have a role in a postwar unity government.⁶⁶ Hanoi

⁶³ Ralph Blumenthal, “Cambodian Describes Life Under Red Rule,” *NYT*, 20 July 1970, pp. 1, 4. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Document ID 78789568. Accessed 11 November, 2008.

⁶⁴ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 151 and 223.

⁶⁵ Kiernan, “Pol Pot and the,” 260-261.

⁶⁶ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 312.

also repeatedly guaranteed the Cambodian resistance that their intentions were honorable. At least four separate declarations were issued to this effect throughout the war, promising that Vietnam, “Strictly respects the independence, peace, neutrality, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kampuchea.”⁶⁷

Were the Vietnamese simply concealing a desire to control their Khmer neighbors? It seems doubtful based both on their willingness to relinquish oversight in “liberated” areas as soon as feasible, and the ease with which Vietnam eventually did seize control of the Cambodian government when they decided to in 1978-1979. More likely Hanoi wished to maintain a degree of hegemony within an autonomous Khmer resistance in order to ensure first that the NUFK could competently support them in their “rear base” and second that the extremists led by Saloth Sar would not rise to unchallenged prominence.⁶⁸

Irrespective of Hanoi’s long term intentions, Sar saw the creeping hand of Vietnamese expansionism in the attempts to marginalize him. In spite of the military cooperation that was so effectively expanding the reach of the resistance and giving the Khmer Rouge a shield behind which to build itself up, it was at this time that the idea of Vietnam as a “hereditary enemy” came to trump all other thinking. In September 1971 a CPK congress secretly resolved that Vietnam was the long-term “acute enemy” and decided to begin working to expel all Vietnamese communist troops and cadres. This is

⁶⁷ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 69.

⁶⁸ This is not to suggest that Hanoi’s relations with the Cambodians were beyond reproach. Ivan Shcherbakov, the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi and a personality friendly to the Vietnamese, reported that DRV leaders at this time still spoke of “a socialist Indochinese Federation,” and warned about Hanoi’s “narrowly nationalistic approach” and attempts “to subordinate the problems of Cambodia and Laos to the interests of Vietnam.” It seems characteristic of Vietnamese diplomacy to simply state one’s mind – at least among allies – regardless of how overbearing it may seem. It is little wonder then that Cambodians of all stripes preferred Zhou Enlai’s measured subtlety even when his policies were the same as Vietnam’s. Short *Pol Pot*, 238 and Mosyakov, “Khmer Rouge,” 17. For an interpretation of the DRV’s policies at this time differing from my own see Chang, *Kampuchea Between*, 32-33.

noteworthy in light of the fact that Khmer Republic forces still outnumbered the combined communist forces in Cambodia – which were three quarters VC/NVA.⁶⁹ It is also significant because, while the CPK had harbored resentment toward Hanoi for years, they had up to this point continued to count the Vietnamese as allies in the all-important struggle against “imperialism” and “feudalism”. Now, however, Khmer Rouge cadres could be found organizing anti-Vietnamese demonstrations such as one in the summer of 1972, which rallied villagers around the cry, “We all agree to die together in order to get the VC/NVA out of Kampuchea.”⁷⁰ As the war progressed Cambodian refugees in South Vietnam would report an ever-increasing Khmer Rouge focus on “self-reliance” and “Cambodia for the Cambodians.”⁷¹

It did not take long for this antipathy to boil over into violent confrontations. These were often the result of Cambodian efforts to demonstrate the supremacy of their own administrative and military organizations in areas of Vietnamese military presence or political influence. One form this took was strict enforcement of the requirement that Vietnamese cadres secure the permission of local revolutionary authorities before transiting or encamping on Cambodian territory.⁷² There were also numerous cases of outright armed hostility from a surprisingly early date. During a September 1970 assault on the town of Kompong Thom, Khmer Rouge troops fired on Vietnamese forces from behind. In 1971 reports of “actual fighting” between Vietnamese and Cambodian communist units reached Washington.⁷³ As the year progressed Khmer Rouge units

⁶⁹ Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1999), 56.

⁷⁰ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 250.

⁷¹ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, 91.

⁷² Stephen P. Heder, “The Kampuchean-Vietnamese Conflict,” *The Third Indochina Conflict*, David W. P. Elliot ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981), 27.

⁷³ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 250.

began conducting kidnappings and assassinations of Viet Cong cadres in Cambodian territory.⁷⁴ During 1972, Khmer Rouge confiscation of food and arms moving through Cambodian-based Viet Cong supply lines became such an issue for Vietnam's Southern Bureau that its units were advised to travel in large groups as a protective measure.⁷⁵ According to Hanoi's military statistics there were at least 174 armed incidents between Vietnamese and Cambodian communist forces between the fall of Sihanouk and the final victory of the Cambodian resistance in April 1975, during which 600 Vietnamese were killed.⁷⁶

So concerned was the Khmer Rouge leadership with stamping out Vietnamese influence, that violence spread even to Cambodians thought to be sympathetic to Vietnam. The Hanoi-trained returnees who had been traveling down the Ho Chi Minh trail since 1968 were targeted for elimination both through outright purges and intentionally placing them in the most dangerous combat roles. This system was so effective that by the end of 1971 over half of them had been killed.⁷⁷ Even civilians who associated with the Vietnamese were occasionally subjected to mass violence. A Khmer interpreter working with Vietnamese troops reported that during the government's 1971 offensive, Chenla II, citizens in the township of Baray inadvertently marked themselves as traitors by providing housing for Viet Cong forces involved in the engagement. When the Vietnamese left the town, "Khmer communists came and threw grenades into the houses of those who had sheltered the Vietnamese... in some cases they killed entire

⁷⁴ Morris, *Why Vietnam*, 57.

⁷⁵ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 100. Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 251.

⁷⁶ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 121.

⁷⁷ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 80.

families, in some cases the head of the family. The others all ran off far into the countryside.”⁷⁸

The Vietnamese at this time either did not suspect that these incidents had the blessings of the CPK leadership or else they determined that preserving the alliance with the NUFK was worth the provocations of the Khmer Rouge. According to Vietnamese general Tran Van Tra, Hanoi was aware of the inter-party violence, but “wanted to reconcile differences ... in order to concentrate all our resources in the liberation of the South.”⁷⁹ In discussions the VWP approached the matter with an impressively cool demeanor, suggesting “we must be calm and objective to carefully determine whether the friction is caused by our personnel, the Khmers, or by the enemy. We must realize that the responsibility of our party is to promote the solidarity among the Khmer and Vietnamese parties to defeat the common enemy.”⁸⁰ Vietnamese troops were cautioned to avoid frictions with their Khmer counterparts, but continue normal military cooperation with the NUFK. Hanoi’s forbearance also seems to have been encouraged by the belief that between pro-Vietnam elements in the Eastern Zone and the influence of Khmer cadres who had trained in the DRV, Saloth Sar’s clique would never actually take control of the resistance. Even in late 1974, the Vietnamese were telling the Soviet Union they had confidence that the pro-Vietnam elements of the Cambodian party would win out over what they termed the “pro-China” faction.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 330.

⁷⁹ Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War After the War* (New York, NY: Collier, 1986), 73. Quotation from Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 99-100.

⁸⁰ Morris, *Why Vietnam*, 56.

⁸¹ Gareth Porter suggests that this optimism likely convinced Hanoi not to simply remove Saloth Sar’s clique from power by force, despite their overwhelming preponderance of power and the fact that Hanoi had considered just such an option. Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and,” 92.

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see the folly of this optimism. In mid-1972 the peace negotiations that had been taking place in Paris for four years suddenly picked up speed. As an agreement drew closer the United States made it clear that future Khmer Rouge hostilities would be seen as a ceasefire violation on the part of Hanoi.⁸² The DRV took these threats seriously, and top-level Politburo members worked hard to persuade Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge liaison with Hanoi and Beijing, to concede to ceasefire negotiations with the Khmer Republic.⁸³ The Cambodians, however, absolutely refused to take part in negotiations, and with good reason. By 1973 the VC/NVA had “broken the back” of Lon Nol’s forces and all that remained for the Khmer Rouge was essentially a cleanup job.⁸⁴ The Vietnamese had, it seems, been hoisted by their own petard. By building up a Cambodian resistance capable of supporting them on the battlefield they had eliminated any remaining leverage they once had with the CPK and inadvertently made Saloth Sar the most powerful man in Cambodia.⁸⁵ In April 1973 Le Duan openly admitted to the Soviet Ambassador that the VWP no longer had any real control over the Cambodian situation.⁸⁶

⁸² Kissinger warned Le Duc Tho, the chief DRV negotiator, that “if the Khmer Rouge responded with a new offensive, this would be “contrary ... to the assumptions on which this agreement is based.” Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1979), 1383.

⁸³ VWP Secretary General Le Duan told Sary, “We think that you comrades should consolidate the victories which you have already won in order to advance even more later. Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 103. Le Duc Tho cajoled the Khmer in terms that must have brought to mind the party’s dealings with Hanoi between 1954 and 1965, talking up the “extremely good forms of struggle available in the realm of foreign affairs.” *ibid.*, 108. Pham Van Dong also joined in, the latter encouraging Sary to, “take the initiative. Maybe they will meet your demands, maybe not... Why does your country still hesitate?” Short, *Pol Pot*, 243.

⁸⁴ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 70.

⁸⁵ Ben Kiernan estimates that by the end of 1972 NUFK forces had skyrocketed to 200,000 (counting both guerrillas and regulars) – only a little smaller than the government armed forces. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 345. Interestingly the Sihanoukists at this point were still numerically strong, but CPK cadres had managed to completely dominate the political and military leadership positions of the resistance. Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 70.

⁸⁶ Mosyakov, “Khmer Rouge,” 21.

With the conclusion of the Paris peace agreements on 27 January 1973, Vietnam began the process of withdrawing its troops from Cambodian soil, leaving the struggle in the hands of the NUFK. Although the CPK was happy to see the Vietnamese leave Cambodia, this parting was clearly defined by mutual frustration. After 1970's inconclusive incursion of American troops the United States had begun conducting secret B-52 bombing raids of communist targets in Cambodia.⁸⁷ Now the Khmer Rouge leaders saw themselves as being abandoned to face the American bombs alone – “Hanoi has dropped us” was the outlook.⁸⁸ Indeed, with the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam the United States would escalate its Cambodian bombing, dropping 275,00 tons of high explosives – an amount equal to nearly half the total that had already been dropped in the previous years of war – in six months before the US Congress forced the Pentagon to ground the bombers.⁸⁹ Meanwhile the Vietnamese were exasperated that the CPK would unilaterally jeopardize the fragile peace by continuing to fight. Nonetheless Vietnam's removal from Cambodia appears to have been conducted with the same disingenuous smiles so prevalent in Khmer-Viet relations.⁹⁰ The Khmer Rouge politely thanked Hanoi for its support and suggested that, as a continued Vietnamese presence was unnecessary, remaining VC/NVA combat forces should be withdrawn (the unspoken message being, of course, “if you aren't going to help us fight, we don't need you here undermining us”). The DRV for its part complied and, as a sop to the CPK turned over all Vietnamese-trained cadres to Cambodian control, without attempting to maintain oversight of them

⁸⁷ Short, *Pol Pot*, 215.

⁸⁸ This was the way that Khieu Samphan, the Khmer Rouge commander in chief, described the situation to Sihanouk during a visit by the prince to Cambodia's liberated zones in February-March 1973. Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 218.

⁸⁹ Short, *Pol Pot*, 245.

⁹⁰ Mosyakov, “Khmer Rouge,” 20.

from afar or even bring them back to Vietnam.⁹¹ In one exchange from this period Le Duc Tho, a member of the VWP Politburo who interacted extensively with the Cambodian party, became almost absurdly gracious in discussing the Vietnamese withdrawal with Ieng Sary, telling him “we know that we must help you ... in order that you, comrades, can have strong forces. Yet no matter how difficult it may be we will find a way to do it. Our victory is in large part due to you, comrades.”⁹²

In spite of this elaborate fraternal courtesy, relations between the CPK and VWP were locked in a downward trajectory. During 1972 reports of “fairly constant” fighting between Khmer Rouge and Viet Cong forces emanated from the countryside.⁹³ Wary both of Saloth Sar’s extremism and the explicit desire of the CPK to continue fighting (and hence invite renewed American military involvement), the DRV began restricting military aid following the Paris ceasefire. When Ieng Sary visited Hanoi in November 1973 to solicit arms for a new offensive he left empty-handed.⁹⁴ Meanwhile the Khmer Rouge stepped up ethnic nationalist propaganda branding Vietnam the nation’s “hereditary enemy” and reviving irredentist claims to Kampuchea Krom – territory that had historically belonged to Cambodia before being lost to Vietnamese expansion in the 18th Century. In one example of this reanimated racial animosity, one CPK district chief told his subordinates, “if we do not fight the Vietnamese, we will lose the rest of our country.”⁹⁵ These hostile words were matched in deed. A Khmer student who had been working with the Vietnamese reported that they were being attacked along the roads

⁹¹ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 358-359.

⁹² Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 106.

⁹³ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 261.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 281. Gilks, *Breakdown*, 110.

⁹⁵ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 361-362.

“every day.”⁹⁶ Vietnamese arms depots, hospitals and base camps remaining on Cambodian territory after the withdrawal of combat troops were regularly attacked by the CPK. In spite of all this the parties maintained genial public relations. Khmer Rouge raids were explained away as misunderstandings or individual excesses. As late as 1974, Saloth Sar told Le Duc Tho his party would “remain faithful to the line of great solidarity and of fraternal and revolutionary friendship between Kampuchea and Vietnam.”⁹⁷

While the conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords was the latest in a series of intensifying blows to the Khmer-Viet relationship, for Beijing it was a golden opportunity. As the war progressed the Chinese had become overwhelmingly concerned with minimizing Vietnam’s influence in Cambodia. Beijing greatly wished to bring an end to the close Khmer-Viet military cooperation, but due to the strident Khmer Rouge opposition to negotiations China could not openly advocate a ceasefire, their preferred solution. Instead it tacked in the complete other direction – two weeks before the Paris Accords were signed the PRC signified its revolutionary support for the Cambodian resistance by producing two military and economic aid deals.⁹⁸ Meanwhile Beijing allowed the Vietnamese to incur the resentment of the Khmer Rouge by pushing its leaders to negotiate with the Khmer Republic. In an October 1973 conversation Zhou told Le Thanh Nghi, a member of the VWP Central Committee, that the Chinese were not in a position to promote negotiation with the Khmer Rouge, “because we have talked with them a lot about fighting and encouraged them to fight. We suggest that the Vietnamese Worker’s Party find a suitable moment to tell them.”⁹⁹ Once again the

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 372.

⁹⁷ Nguyen-vo, *Khmer-Viet Relations*, 73.

⁹⁸ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 107.

⁹⁹ Zhou Enlai and Le Thanh Nghi, Beijing, 8-10 October 1973, “77 Conversations,” 190.

Chinese were relying on their old tactic of tailoring policy in order to exploit Cambodian frustrations with Hanoi.

Outward respect for the Cambodian party's independence and fraternal support for its continued struggle constituted the new wedge that China drove between the Khmer Rouge and the VWP. After the conclusion of the Paris agreements Zhou criticized the fact that the accord made reference to Laos and Cambodia, remarking that this "was not good because we cannot impose the Vietnamese settlement on these two countries."¹⁰⁰ At the end of February 1973 Ieng Sary reported to Le Duc Tho that Zhou Enlai had assured him that on the subject of negotiations a "concurrence" of views existed among their parties. Zhou went on to advise the Cambodians to "go ahead with the fighting for a further period of time before entering a period of simultaneous fighting and negotiating." That November Sary reported that again Zhou had spoken in favor of continued fighting and assured the Cambodian of China's unflinching support.¹⁰¹ It goes without saying that this pandering was cynical to the core. The success of the Khmer Rouge surely had appeal on an ideological level, but the only consistent thread in Chinese policy at this time was the overriding prerogative of minimizing Vietnamese influence. In spite of the sympathetic rhetoric the evidence indicates that Beijing saw a Cambodian ceasefire as the best way to achieve this end.

Even as Zhou tirelessly reassured the Khmer Rouge of China's support, he was bargaining hard with American National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in an attempt to follow up on the January ceasefire with a political settlement in Indochina favorable to Chinese interests. As early as June 1972 Zhou promised the American that if a national

¹⁰⁰ Qiang, "China and the Cambodian Conflict," 388.

¹⁰¹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 110 and 113.

settlement could be worked out, “we can say for certain that elements of the national bourgeoisie will take part in such a government; and we can be sure in Cambodia Prince Sihanouk will be head of state.”¹⁰² Now the Chinese Premier worked with Kissinger to strike some kind of compromise working against Soviet-Vietnamese influence in which the Khmer Rouge were just another bargaining chip. He warned the American that the Soviet Union was attempting to form its own “Red Khmer” organization and, significantly, made it clear that China was not interested in a communist Cambodia. It seems that at this point Beijing still saw Sihanouk as their most reliable proxy in Cambodia and continued to believe that, in spite of the clashes between Cambodian and Vietnamese communists, a Khmer Rouge victory would allow Hanoi to prevail over Cambodian affairs.¹⁰³

This conclusion is not so unreasonable in light of the fact that the Vietnamese still maintained extensive base areas on Cambodian territory. Even if this would not have provided a gateway for Vietnam to dominate the country, a continued Vietnamese military presence would have made it far easier for Hanoi to exert pressure on its neighbor and expand its activities when conflict resumed.¹⁰⁴ Thus even if Beijing was confident in its own warm relations with the Khmer Rouge, the goal of removing Vietnamese troops from Cambodia was valuable enough for them to sell out their allies. Hence, Zhou continued to seek a political agreement for Indochina with Henry Kissinger. In May 1973, he encouraged Kissinger to invoke Article 20 of the Paris Peace Accords,

¹⁰² Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, MS: Little, Brown, and Company, 1982), 341.

¹⁰³ Zhou specifically told Kissinger, “it is impossible for Cambodia to become completely red now. If that were attempted, it would result in even greater problems.” Conversation between Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, 18 February 1973, *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*, William Burr, ed (New York, NY: The New Press, 1999), 109-111. Qiang, “China and the Cambodian Conflict,” 389-390.

¹⁰⁴ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 108.

which called for all foreign military forces to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia, and intimated that all Vietnamese base areas in Cambodia would have to be eliminated. He once again promoted a compromise settlement which would return Sihanouk to power and even “preserved key elements of the Lon Nol structure.” Kissinger maintains that the Chinese Premier was so committed to this stratagem that he even tacitly approved of the American bombing campaign in Cambodia, because it could help convince the Khmer Rouge to strike a deal.¹⁰⁵

Something along the lines of unqualified Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge came only as an NUFK victory proved itself inevitable. Beijing had always been more comfortable with Sihanouk and had conscientiously kept a foot in each camp, but as it became clear that the Khmer Rouge would be the new masters of Cambodia, the Chinese deemed it prudent to put themselves squarely behind the CPK. On April 2, 1974 Khieu Samphan, the future Khmer Rouge head of state, became the first Cambodian communist granted an audience with Mao Zedong, thereby shattering the prominence Sihanouk had always occupied in Chinese diplomacy. China sealed its new affinity for the Khmer Rouge with the commitment of a new free military aid agreement the following month.¹⁰⁶ The French ambassador in Beijing wrote that Samphan was honored with a formal banquet and treated almost as lavishly as a head of state – a fact that greatly distressed Sihanouk. Both symbolically and materially the Chinese had shifted in their Cambodia

¹⁰⁵ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 350-351 and 353.

¹⁰⁶ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 125-126. Qiang, “China and the Cambodian Conflict,” 392. According to Ben Kiernan, Vietnamese in Beijing believed that Saloth Sar had met with Mao in 1965, but Samphan was at least the first CPK member to do so openly. Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 223.

policy, from one of cautious moderation, to a full embrace of a military solution spearheaded by the Khmer Rouge.¹⁰⁷

Beijing, it seems had finally clued into Saloth Sar's now-total independence from Hanoi. No longer fearing that a communist victory would be a gateway to Vietnamese domination of Indochina, the PRC moved swiftly to support the NUFK. The new Chinese aid enabled the Cambodians to continue fighting through the 1974 wet season at a higher intensity than ever before. During the final siege of Phnom Penh, Beijing provided major support by mining the Mekong River, thereby cutting off the government's one remaining supply route and forcing the Khmer Republic to rely on American airlifts to survive.¹⁰⁸ When Henry Kissinger beseeched the Chinese in November 1974 to intervene with the NUFK and stop the fighting, he was rebuffed. Beijing no longer needed to make a deal.¹⁰⁹

As the Khmer Rouge geared up for the final stages of its war there was also a brief return to friendly relations and close cooperation between the Cambodians and Vietnamese. On both sides, however, this was merely an aberration prompted by short-term goals and not indicative of any significant shifts in attitude. According to Soviet archival material the CPK, realizing they required serious military aid to recoup casualties suffered in its 1973 offensive, engaged in an intense charm offensive with Hanoi. Forgotten was rhetoric about Vietnamese betrayals, replaced instead by effusive expressions of gratitude and solidarity to their fraternal allies. This was an extremely cynical ploy, and its success seems to have hinged largely on the participation of Nuon

¹⁰⁷ Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 336.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* Qiang, "China and the Cambodian Conflict," 392.

¹⁰⁹ Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: The American debacle in Vietnam and the fall of Saigon* (London: Penguin, 1977), 100.

Chea, whom Hanoi had identified as “our man” in Cambodia, but it was effective. The Vietnamese agreed to provide another package of free military aid.¹¹⁰ This arrangement was not one-sided, however. In renewing the military partnership, the Vietnamese were acting in concert with their now decades-old view of Cambodia as a strategic rearguard as they prepared for their final assault on the South. General Tran Van Tra put it aptly: “We helped them in order that they could help us. We helped them so that we could have our back free from a sudden attack from the west as we were heading for Saigon.”¹¹¹

The reunion was short lived. CIA analyst Frank Snepp wrote that two days after the Khmer Republic surrendered on April 17, “For the first time Communist artillery men shelled Phu Cuoc.”¹¹² This was the island that Zhou Enlai had once encouraged Sihanouk to lay claim to and which later plagued Cambodian negotiations with the NLF. By May 4 CPK troops had landed on the island. Six days later they moved even deeper into Vietnamese waters to attack the island of Tho Chu, and took over 500 prisoners.¹¹³ These clashes at sea were accompanied by altercations along the land border. A member of the CPK’s 120th regiment reported that he had been dispatched to the Vietnamese border “immediately after” capturing the city of Takeo on April 18th. Commanders of the units assembled there spoke excitedly about reclaiming Kampuchea Krom from Vietnam, some going so far as to include Saigon among the provinces to be recovered. This all took place under the auspices of an eight-point agenda Saloth Sar had laid out the day his

¹¹⁰ It appears that Saloth Sar first solicited aid from Beijing, but the Chinese were uninterested in providing aid in the first months of 1974, presumably still more interested in a political settlement. The supplicating tone of Sar’s appeal to Hanoi is stunning in comparison to his more familiar excoriations of Vietnam. In a letter to Le Duc Tho he wrote, “Sincerely and from the bottom of my heart I assure you that under any circumstances I shall remain loyal to the policy of great friendship and great fraternal revolutionary solidarity between Kampuchea and Vietnam, in spite of any difficulties and obstacles.” Mosyakov, “Khmer Rouge,” 27-29; quotation from Le Duan found on page 15.

¹¹¹ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 115-116.

¹¹² Snepp, *Decent Interval*, 299. See also Chapter 4, page 71 including footnote 29.

¹¹³ Kiernan, *How Pol Pot*, 414.

forces captured Phnom Penh. In addition to evacuating towns, doing away with markets and currency, and moving forward with collectivization programs, two of the points on the agenda were, “7. Expel the entire Vietnamese minority population. 8. Dispatch troops to the borders, particularly the Vietnamese border.” The Vietnamese reported that cross border attacks began as early as May 1, 1975.¹¹⁴

With the fall of Saigon and the victory of the DRV on April 30, the fragile wartime solidarity that had held the communists in China, Vietnam, and Cambodia together vanished. The fissures that had grown quietly for years assumed a new prominence. By the end of the war Vietnam’s affiliation with the Soviet Union was undeniable. Although Hanoi had tiptoed around the most sensitive areas of the Sino-Soviet dispute, and consistently tried to maintain fraternal relations with both nations, the Vietnamese had openly aligned themselves with Moscow’s policies in several issues in Western Europe and the Third World. The leadership in Beijing would soon conclude that Vietnam had completed the transformation into Moscow’s puppet and now served as a bridgehead for Soviet influence in Asia.¹¹⁵ The Vietnamese were likewise more wary than ever of Chinese intentions. Beijing’s maneuvers in Indochina had not been particularly subtle, but Hanoi had always grudgingly tolerated them to keep their alliance afloat. By the end of the war, however, Vietnamese opinion on China had shifted dramatically. Party theoreticians now branded China’s Maoism a deviation from Marxism-Leninism and narrowly nationalist in character. The PRC’s foreign policy was identified as a revival of traditional Han Chinese chauvinism. Beijing’s willingness to accept a divided Vietnam at Geneva in 1954 and Chinese encouragement to prolong the

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, 415-416.

¹¹⁵ Morris, *Why Vietnam*, 167. Short, *Pol Pot*, 300.

anti-American struggle by waging a protracted war and refusing negotiations backed up the Vietnamese contention that China was not concerned with communist internationalism, but only its own national standing.¹¹⁶

These contradictions would lead to the final crumbling of the Sino-Vietnamese partnership. In September Le Duan, in his first postwar visit, traveled to Beijing to meet with Chinese leaders and attempt to patch up the inter-party differences that had become so cumbersome.¹¹⁷ Meeting with China's Deng Xiaoping, Mao's soon-to-be successor, Duan and his delegation were lectured on Mao's "Three Worlds" theory, which saw the world as divided into three groups: the two superpowers, the weak capitalist states in Europe and Japan, and the developing world, including China. The theory called for the second and third worlds to ally against the two superpowers. Deng's message was clear: Vietnam should renounce its ties to the Soviet Union and unite with Chinese opposition to "superpower hegemony."¹¹⁸

The Vietnamese were nonplussed. To them the "Three Worlds" theory was a confirmation that China had jumped the socialist ship, and was now pursuing narrow goals of power politics. Duan rejected the substance of Deng's presentation and glibly remarked that "since it had taken Mao so long to perfect his theory ... the Vietnamese leaders would need many years to study and understand it."¹¹⁹ In light of Vietnam's clear disinterest in embracing "anti-Hegemonism," Beijing made it clear to the Vietnamese that they should no longer look to China as a source of assistance with the war over. Mao told Le Duan, "Today, you are not the poorest under Heaven. We are the poorest. We have a

¹¹⁶ Porter, "Vietnamese Policy and," 75-76.

¹¹⁷ Morris, *Why Vietnam*, 173.

¹¹⁸ Porter, "Vietnamese Policy and," 77.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

population of 800 million.”¹²⁰ The Vietnamese delegation returned home without producing the customary joint communiqué that marked such events or even having discussed any important policy issues. This had been a watershed event in Sino-Vietnamese relations. Even as the two nations had pursued divergent tactical goals, their alliance had persevered. Now Vietnam had effectively been cut loose. In the following months relations steadily declined, and the worries over the Sino-Vietnamese relationship increasingly became a subject of discussion in the highest levels of the VWP Central Committee and with Soviet representatives.¹²¹

As this thesis has consistently argued, containing Vietnam had been a factor in Chinese foreign policy for years. It now became a primary objective, and the centerpiece of the strategy was once again Cambodia. The June following the battlefield victory of the Khmer Rouge Saloth Sar traveled to Beijing where he received a “hero’s welcome” from Mao Zedong.¹²² This was followed in August with a visit by Cambodia’s new Deputy Prime Minister Khieu Samphan, who signed a joint communiqué completely parroting China’s international line opposing “hegemonism” and “imperialism.”¹²³ Even as Beijing began withdrawing aid from Vietnam they established themselves as the primary international backer of Democratic Kampuchea, pledging a \$1 billion interest free economic and military aid package with a \$20 million gift – the largest one-time aid package China had given to any nation.¹²⁴ The relationship that emerged between Democratic Kampuchea and the People’s Republic of China was based on the same

¹²⁰ Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 213. Mao Zedong and Le Duan, Beijing 24 September 1975, “77 Conversations,” 192.

¹²¹ Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and,” 77-78. Morris, *Why Vietnam*, 174-175.

¹²² Qiang, “China and the Cambodian Conflict,” 392-393.

¹²³ Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and,” 78.

¹²⁴ “Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation,” *China Quarterly* 64 (December 1975): 797.

precepts that had forged strong Sino-Cambodian ties two decades earlier – shared interest in limiting Vietnamese power.¹²⁵

The Cambodian communists were only too willing to oblige. The years following the Cambodian civil war were marked by extreme turbulence in Khmer-Viet relations. Saloth Sar – having now adopted the infamous moniker Pol Pot – set about consolidating his rule in radically anti-Vietnamese terms. These years would be defined by racial paranoia, chauvinistic irredentist rhetoric, and increasingly frequent military altercations. This misguided and confrontational policy would eventually put his nation on a collision course with its neighbor by challenging Hanoi’s foremost security imperative and threatening Vietnam’s vulnerable western underbelly.¹²⁶ The communists in Indochina had won their wars, but they had not yet won peace.

¹²⁵ Gilks, *Breakdown*, 141-142.

¹²⁶ Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 118. The anti-Vietnamese racial hysteria that defined Khmer Rouge policy following 1975 is well documented elsewhere. For further reading on the subject see Morris, *Why Vietnam*, Chapter 4, particularly pages 97-107 and Kiernan, “Pol Pot and the,” 230-239.

Conclusion: “Not the End of the War, But the Beginning”

In September 1977, Pol Pot met with Hua Goufeng, Mao’s handpicked successor and consulted him regarding the “Vietnamese threat.” According to Pol, Vietnam was maneuvering to dominate the entirety of Southeast Asia, and in order to do so had assembled a rather diverse alliance including the Soviet Union, Cuba, Thailand and the United States. Hanoi, he reported, was preparing to attack Phnom Penh and had for some time been attempting to assassinate the Khmer Rouge leadership by various means. On this matter Pol even claimed to possess “documents to show that the US and Vietnam cooperate on this issue.”¹ As idiosyncratic and detached from reality as much of this was, a little over a year later Democratic Kampuchea would find itself facing a full-scale Vietnamese invasion. This would not be the result of an imperialist bent in Vietnam’s foreign policy, however, but the culmination of three years of escalating Khmer-Viet confrontation.

By the time of Pol’s meeting with Hua, the last remnants of the three-way alliance between Cambodia, Vietnam and China had crumbled. Although both Hanoi and Beijing wished to stabilize relations and avoid conflict, they were locked into trajectories that guaranteed each nation’s fears became reality. China did not wish to antagonize Vietnam, but – obsessed as it was with the premise of Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation – felt compelled to support the Khmer Rouge to check Vietnamese influence. In doing so, however, the Chinese bound themselves to an unruly and antagonistic ally whom they

¹ Hua Guofeng and Pol Pot, 19 September 1977, “77 Conversations,” 193-194.

were unable to control.² The aggressive and chauvinistic behavior of Pol Pot's regime convinced the Vietnamese that they could not coexist with the government in Phnom Penh, and plans were made to replace the Khmer Rouge either by force or by sponsoring a domestic uprising. Beijing's military support for Democratic Kampuchea was seen as part of a strategy to use Cambodia as a proxy to harass Hanoi. This conviction overshadowed any desire Beijing may have had to prevent open military conflict and the Vietnamese lumped the PRC together with the Khmer Rouge as a hostile power.³

Throughout 1977 and 1978, armed conflicts took place back and forth across the Cambodia-Vietnam border in a cycle of retributive violence. It was clear to all parties involved that open military confrontation was increasingly unavoidable. In late 1978, the Soviet Union began providing Hanoi with arms and military advisors in order to shore up Vietnamese defenses along its border with China. This was followed in turn by a massive shipment of Chinese military aid to the Cambodian port of Kompong Som (Sihanoukville).⁴ Although the PRC had not been involved with Khmer-Viet military altercations thus far, the importance they placed on countering Hanoi and the strategic significance of Indochina prompted Beijing to similarly prepare for the oncoming war. At least as early as August 1978 Beijing began secretly massing tanks, artillery, and jet fighters near the border in preparation for a strike against northern Vietnam.⁵

When the war finally came on December 25, 1978, Vietnamese forces swept through Cambodia, devastating the Khmer Rouge military. By January 7 they had taken Phnom Penh, forcing the communist leadership to flee to the Thai border and once again

² Gilks, *Breakdown*, 169-170.

³ Short, *Pol Pot*, 378.

⁴ *ibid.*, 380.

⁵ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 73. Quotation from Engelbert and Goscha, *Falling out of Touch*, 322-324.

go into hiding in the countryside. This intervention, however, could not go unanswered by the Chinese. The prior November, Deng Xiaoping, who had become the de facto head of the PRC, had explained to the prime minister of Singapore that China's interests in Indochina were too great to abandon the Pol Pot regime, even if the leaders in Beijing did not support the Khmer Rouge policies. The Chinese leader had promised that, while Phnom Penh might fall, "This would not be the end of the war, but the beginning."⁶

For the second time in under a decade, China became the sponsor of a Khmer Rouge-led Cambodian resistance. As the Vietnamese installed a puppet government in the form of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, Beijing took the lead in building (and arming) a resistance government-in-exile of Khmer Rouge remnants and various noncommunist forces – again including Prince Sihanouk. The Chinese even launched a massive military incursion into northern Vietnam to "teach it a lesson" for invading Cambodia, as well as attempt to divide Hanoi's attention and reduce pressure on the scattered Khmer Rouge forces. China would withdraw within a month, but a proxy war between Pol Pot's guerrillas and the Phnom Penh government (and its Vietnamese allies) would drag on until the end of the Cold War.⁷

These events were, in all reality, simply a final reification of the forces that this thesis has been discussing. For over two decades the modern Cambodian state had played host to a Sino-Viet power struggle in which national self-interest was the guiding light. Even as China and Vietnam had banded together to defeat the French and the Americans, they had actively maneuvered to secure a postwar arrangement favorable to their respective interests. To this end Cambodia's wellbeing could be laid aside for the sake of

⁶ *ibid.*, 325.

⁷ Short, *Pol Pot*, 406-407 and 415.

a tactical advantage. The story of Cambodia as a pawn in the agenda of others is a long one, and neither ideological fellowship nor simple respect for the country's welfare or the lives of its people were strong enough forces to counter the entire balance of Southeast Asian political history.

As Deng Xiaoping moved to assist the Khmer Rouge by sending Chinese troops and tanks against Vietnam, he was likely buoyed by the spirit of revolutionary solidarity. More prevalent in his mind, however, would have been the challenge Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia presented to China's regional preeminence and the loss of face that accompanied the swift defeat of Beijing's Khmer clients. The great military and political success Vietnam had enjoyed in recent years had not gone unnoticed by the Chinese. With this latest development Beijing, was impelled to assert itself and remind the world who was really the regional leader. As Deng would explain, it was time for China to "explode the myth of Vietnamese invincibility."⁸

⁸ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 329.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Published Government Papers

- Burr, William, ed. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. New York, NY: The New Press, 1999.
- Lüthi, Lorenzi M. "Twenty-Four Soviet Bloc Documents on Vietnam and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1964-1966." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 16 (Spring 2008): 367-398.
- Peking Review. "Soviet Revisionists Stop at Nothing to Salvage U.S. Imperialist Aggression against Vietnam." *Peking Review* 11:12 (22 March 1968): 11-13.
- Qiang Zhai_. "Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-1968: New Evidence From Chinese Sources." Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 22. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, June 1997.
- U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. *Cambodia and the Viet Cong*, 22 December 1965.
- _____. *Communism and Cambodia*. ESAU Documents. February 1972. Available from <http://www.foia.cia.gov/CPE/ESAU/esau-53.pdf>. Internet; accessed 18 October, 2008.
- _____. *Prince Sihanouk and the New Order in Southeast Asia*. ESAU Documents. Available from <http://www.foia.cia.gov/CPE/ESAU/esau-25.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 October, 2008.
- U.S. Department of State. Glennon, John P., editor. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The Geneva Conference: Volume XVI (1951-1954)*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981.
- _____. "Security in the Pacific: Address by Secretary Dulles." *Department of State Bulletin* 30 (27 April 1953): 971-973.
- _____. "Text of Final Declaration." *Department of State Bulletin* 31 (2 August 1954): 164.
- U.S. Senate. "Problems of War Victims in Indochina, Part IV: North Vietnam," Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees, of the Committee on the Judiciary, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session, September 28, 1972. Available from <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/star/images/239/2390916005B.pdf>. Internet; accessed 11 November 2008.

Westad, Odd Arne, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung and James G. Hershberg, eds. "77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977." Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 22. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 1998.

Yang Kuisong. "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973." Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 22. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Feb 2002.

Zhou Enlai. "Foreign Minister Chou En-Lai's Statements at the Geneva Conference." *People's China* 10 (16 May 1954) Supplement: 9-12

Diaries and Memoirs

Kissinger, Henry. *The White House Years*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1979.

_____. *Years of Upheaval*. Boston, MS: Little, Brown, and Company, 1982.

Newspapers and Periodicals

New York Times

Wall Street Journal

Secondary Sources

Ang Cheng Guan. *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China and the Second Indochina Conflict, 1956-1962*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997.

Becker, Elizabeth. *When the War was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 1998.

Boucher, Jean-Marie. "The Relationship Between Cambodia and China, 1954-1970." Ph.D. diss., University of London [SOAS] 1978.

Burchett, Wilfred. "The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle." Chicago, IL: Vanguard, 1981.

Cable, James. *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina*. New York, NY: St Martin's, 1986.

Carney, Timothy. "The Unexpected Victory." *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*. Karl D. Jackson, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1989. 13-36.

- Chanda, Nayan. *Brother Enemy: The War After the War*. New York, NY: Collier, 1986.
- Chandler, David P. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.
- _____. "Revising the Past in Democratic Kampuchea: When Was the Birthday of the Party?" *Pacific Affairs* 56 (Summer 1983): 288-300.
- _____. *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Chang Pao-Min. *Kampuchea Between China and Vietnam*. Kent Ridge, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985.
- Chen Jian. "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969." *The China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995): 356-387.
- China Quarterly. "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* 64 (December 1975): 784-819.
- Chomsky, Noam and Herman, Edward S. "Distortions at Fourth Hand." *The Nation*. 6 June 1977. Available from <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/19770625.htm>. Internet; accessed 1 December 2008.
- Clymer, Kenton. "A Casualty of War: The Break in American Relations with Cambodia, 1965." *A Companion to the Vietnam War*. Edited by Marilyn B Young and Robert Buzzanco. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. 198-228.
- _____. "The Perils of Neutrality: The Break in US-Cambodian Relations, 1965." *Diplomatic History* 23 (Fall 1999): 609-631.
- Edwards, Matthew. "The Rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia: Internal or External Origins?" *Asian Affairs* 35:1 (March 2004): 56-67.
- Engelbert, Thomas and Goscha, Christopher E. *Falling out of Touch: A Study on Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards and Emerging Cambodia Communist Movement, 1930-1975*. Warrnambool, Victoria: Amazon, 1995.
- Etcheson, Craig. *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984.
- Garver, John. "The Tet Offensive and Sino-Vietnamese Relations." *The Tet Offensive*. Marc Jason Gilbert and William Head, eds. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996. 45-61.

- Gilks, Anne. *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance, 1970-1979*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992.
- Haas, Michael. *Genocide by Proxy: Cambodian Pawn on a Superpower Chessboard*. New York, NY: Praeger, 1991.
- Heder, Stephen. "Kampuchea's Armed Struggle: The Origins of an Independent Revolution." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 11 no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1979): 2-23.
- _____. "The Kampuchean-Vietnamese Conflict." *The Third Indochina Conflict*. David W. P. Elliot ed. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981. 21-67.
- Isaacs, Arnold R. *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1984.
- Kiernan, Ben. *Blood and Soil: a World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.
- _____. *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.
- _____. "Introduction: Conflict in Cambodia, 1945-2002." *Critical Asian Studies* 34: 4 (2002): 483-495.
- _____. "Origins of Khmer Communism." *Southeast Asian Affairs 1981*. Singapore: Heinemann, 1982. 161-180.
- _____. "Pol Pot and the Kampuchean Communist Movement." *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*. Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1982. 227-317.
- _____. "The Impact on Cambodia of the U.S. Intervention in Vietnam." *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*. Edited by Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huyuh. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993. 216-229.
- _____. "The Samlaut Rebellion, 1967-68." *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*. Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1982. 166-205.
- Kuo-Kang Shao. "Zhou Enlai's Diplomacy and the Neutralization of Indo-China, 1954-55." *The China Quarterly* 107 (September 1986): 483-504.
- Lawson, Eugene K. *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*. New York, NY: Praeger, 1984.

- Leifer, Michael. "Cambodia and Seato." *International Journal* 17:1 (Winter 1961-1962): 122-132
- _____. "Cambodia: The Limits of Diplomacy," *Asian Survey* 7, no. 1 (January 1967): 69-73.
- _____. *Cambodia – The Search for Security*. New York, NY: Praeger, 1967.
- _____. "International Dimensions of the Cambodia Conflict." *International Affairs* 51 (October 1975): 531-543.
- _____. "Rebellion or Subversion in Cambodia." *Current History* 56 (February 1969): 88-93, 112-113.
- Leighton, Marian Kirsch. "Perspectives on the Vietnam-Cambodia Border Conflict." *Asian Survey* 18 (May 1978): 448-457.
- Mak, Kanika. "Genocide and Irredentism under Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)." Genocide Studies Program Working Paper No. 23. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2004.
- Marsot, Alain-Gerard. "China's Aid to Cambodia." *Pacific Affairs* 42 (Summer 1969): 189-198
- Martin, Marie Alexandrine. *Cambodia, a Shattered Society*. Mark W. McLeod trans. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1989.
- McGregor, Charles. "China, Vietnam, and the Cambodian Conflict: Beijing's End Game Strategy." *Asian Survey* 30(March 1990): 266-283
- Morris, Stephen J. "The Soviet-Vietnamese-Chinese Triangle in the 1970s: The View from Moscow." *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, Priscilla Mary Roberts ed. Chicago, IL: Wilson Center, 2006: 405-432.
- _____. *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1999.
- Mosyakov, Dmitry. "The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A history of their relations as told in the Soviet archives." Genocide Studies Program Working Paper No. 15. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2000.
- Osborne, Milton. *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.
- Peou, Sorpong. *Intervention & Change in Cambodia: Towards Democracy?* New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

- Porter, Gareth. "Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards Kampuchea 1930-1970." *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays*. David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983. 57-98.
- _____. "Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis," *The Third Indochina Conflict*, David W. P. Elliot ed. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981. 69-137.
- Pouvatchy, Joseph R. "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations." *Asian Survey* 26 (April 1986): 440-451.
- Qiang Zhai. "Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1965: New Chinese Evidence." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6/7 (Winter 1995): 232-249.
- _____. "China and the Cambodian Conflict, 1970-1975." *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, Priscilla Mary Roberts ed. Chicago, IL: Wilson Center, 2006: 369-403.
- _____. "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954." *The China Quarterly* 129 (March 1992): 103-122
- _____. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Quinn-Judge, Paul. "Too Few Communists." *Far Eastern Economic Review* 123 (16 February 1983): 20-21.
- Radio Free Europe Research. "Factionalism in North Vietnam." Available from <http://www.osa.ceu.hu/files/holdings/300/8/3/pdf/38-1-296.pdf>. Internet; accessed 24 September 2008.
- Shawcross, William. *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979.
- Short, Philip. *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co, 2004.
- Smith, Roger M. "Cambodia: Between Scylla and Charybdis." *Asian Survey* 8:1, A Survey of Asia in 1967: Part I (Jan 1968): 72-79.
- Snepp, Frank. *Decent Interval: The American Debacle in Vietnam and the fall of Saigon*. London: Penguin, 1977.
- Statler, Kathryn C. *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007

Sutsakhyan, Sak. *The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse*. Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980.

Thayer, Carlyle A. "Sino-Vietnamese Relations: The Interplay of Ideology and National Interest." *Asian Survey* 34, no. 6 (Jun. 1994): 513-528.

Thu-huong Nguyen-vo. *Khmer-Viet Relations and the Third Indochina Conflict*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1992.

Vickery, Michael. "Looking Back at Cambodia, 1942-1976." *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*. Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1982. 89-113.

Zubok, Vladislav and Pleshakov, Constantine. *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1996.

All documents from CWIHP are cited or quoted from the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), www.CWIHP.org, by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.