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Soviet Third World Policy Dilemmas and Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict

by
Deven Ogden

The recent resolution of the Cambodian problems that have lingered since after World War II are generally looked on as the product of American and Chinese action. However, Soviet policy also had a significant impact on recent developments. By encouraging Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia and by dramatically reducing foreign aid to Cambodia, the Soviet Union was able to exert influence on Cambodia to settle the deeply rooted problems of the country.

For decades Cambodia has been the cold war battleground of the Soviet Union, China, and the United States who have been the advocates of the various Cambodian contingents. Vietnam, one of the Soviet’s most dependent clients, invaded Cambodia in the last weeks of 1978, ousting the genocidal Khmer Rouge from power. Yet, supported by the Chinese, the Khmer Rouge were able to maintain a significant resistance force to fight a civil war that has only recently come to a cease-fire. To complicate matters, the US revived two non-communist Cambodian resistance factions in protest to the Vietnamese invasion. In 1982, these two factions—led by Prince Sihanouk, former head of state of Cambodia during the 1950s and 60s, and Son Sann, Sihanouk’s former prime minister—joined with the Khmer Rouge in the resistance effort against the Vietnamese-installed Heng Samrin regime.

The Cambodian civil war raged on for years until finally, in 1989, Vietnam surprised the world by announcing that it would withdraw all its troops from Cambodia by 1990. In fact, it was in September of 1989 that Hanoi claimed that all its troops had indeed withdrawn. What Vietnam had been to the US in 1973 when the US withdrew its troops, Cambodia was to Vietnam in 1989—Cambodia was Vietnam’s "Vietnam." Since the withdrawal, the parties have made significant progress toward a comprehensive peace settlement in the region. All four factions have agreed to an enhanced UN involvement in the settlement. The United Nations will play an unprecedented role as it will dismantle the Phnom Penh government and replace the bureaucracy with its own personnel and peacekeeping troops until UN-supervised elections democratically empower a new neutral government.

When the UN first proposed its comprehensive settlement, the Hun Sen government in Phnom Penh strongly opposed it as it highly disadvantaged his government. As late as December 1990, Hun Sen expressed his contempt for such an imbalanced plan:

The Prime Minister said that his government will never consent to the presence in Cambodia of a large UN peacekeeping force and will not agree to replacing the present administration with a "UN transitional authority," much less to dissolving the legitimately functioning current government before elections are held, which is essentially what the opposition is seeking (Vinogradov 1990).

Hun Sen continued to make such protests throughout the various negotiations in 1991.
Yet on October 23, Hun Sen signed the peace treaty that set into action the very operations he vowed he would never consent to.

Several explanations have been given why Vietnam decided to unilaterally withdraw its troops and why Phnom Penh conceded to the UN operation. Most of the analyses focus on the US and Chinese involvement in the crisis and the effects of their foreign policy. US and Chinese policies focused on isolating Vietnam and Cambodia politically and economically and supporting the resistance forces in an attempt to compel Vietnamese withdrawal and compromise in peace negotiations. However, most of these studies pay little attention to the significant role played by the Soviets in influencing Vietnam to undertake an Afghanistan-like withdrawal. While the resistance movement and the isolation and pressure imposed by the US and China have certainly been major factors bringing about the Vietnamese withdrawal and the resulting peace process, they are not the only factors. The Soviet's role in influencing the Vietnamese withdrawal and Phnom Penh’s cooperation in the peace process will be the focus of this study as a contributing explanation.

Many find it unthinkable to believe that the Soviet Union would undermine its own client state by encouraging it to cooperate in a peace settlement that would almost certainly eliminate it from power or at least diminish its power profoundly. However, considering the political, economic, and social changes that have had such a profound impact on the Soviet Union since 1985, a dramatic change in its foreign policy can also be expected. In fact, the Soviet Union had been experiencing severe dilemmas in the Third World for some time. Gorbachev is responsible for many policy reforms which were undertaken to deal with these dilemmas which fall into two categories: economic and political.

The chronic economic decline in the Soviet Union has affected its foreign policy in that the Soviets can no longer afford to sustain the massive foreign aid programs it had once implemented in the Third World:

The Soviets had learned that counterinsurgency problems in Angola, Ethiopia, Cambodia, and Nicaragua exacerbated risks of getting involved in a client state, meant sinking excessive investments into unsteady political systems, and—consequently—worsened economic problems within the world socialist system (Goodman 1991, 52).

Gorbachev formally recognized the problem with his government's foreign aid program by issuing a decree on July 24, 1990 mandating major foreign aid reforms. Though the Vietnamese withdrawal had already taken place by the time Soviet aid was cut, it had been foreseen for some time and had been a considerable threat for Vietnam and Cambodia to depend solely on the Soviet Union. It became clear that they would have to bring about political and economic changes that would allow them to integrate with the free market economies of the world. Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia and the continuing factional stalemate was, of course, a major obstacle to this objective. Politically, the Soviet Union had suffered greatly in Asia and elsewhere for Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia. The conflict threatened to increase a US presence in the region, strengthened Sino-US ties, and eliminated any chances for improved relations with ASEAN, the US, and China. The entire political environment was very dismal for the USSR’s broader strategic objectives:

The Soviets found themselves at a disadvantage in Asia as China normalized relations with the United States and Japan...The USSR, for the most part, was excluded from the diplomatic activity and burgeoning economic development of the region, perceived by Asian states as a
European power with threatening military assets in the Pacific (Goodman 1991, 107-8)

It is the economic and political disadvantages that provided the incentives for the Soviet Union to take such a provocative policy stance in pressuring Vietnam to withdraw and allow a political settlement to take place in Cambodia. The focus of this study will be on these incentives and the impact they had on Soviet policy, how that policy was implemented toward Vietnam and Cambodia, and how it contributed to the eventual Vietnamese withdrawal and the progress toward a comprehensive settlement between the warring Cambodian factions.

The Cambodian Conflict

The Cambodian conflict has dragged on for decades and therefore has a large number of significant events that have shaped it over the years. It is a very complex conflict with diverse actors, as can be attested to by the fact that at the 1991 Paris Conference where the peace treaty was finally signed, the four Cambodian factions were accompanied by 18 other countries who were integral participants to the negotiations. To be able to understand and analyze the conflict and the Soviet Union’s role in that conflict, a review of the events and actors that shaped it will be necessary.

During France’s occupation of Indochina, students from all three colonies were able to study in France. In the early 1900s, communism was the ideological fashion in France, and the Indochinese students were automatically attracted to this anti-imperialist ideology. The most prominent of these communist students was Nguyen Ai Quoc, a Vietnamese activist who later became known as Ho Chi Minh. During the 1920s, Ho "worked as a Communist bureaucrat in Moscow and elsewhere. Then, on February 3, 1930, he met with other Vietnamese students and intellectuals in Hong Kong to organize the Indochina Communist Party (ICP)" (Isaacs et al 1987, 18). The Soviet supported ICP was active in Cambodia as well, but was mostly supported by Vietnamese Cambodians. This was the beginning of Soviet involvement in Cambodia.

1941 was a significant year in Cambodia for two important events that took place. First, the French picked the next king of Cambodia, and the 18-year-old Norodom Sihanouk (the great-grandson of King Norodom) ascended the throne. Later that same year, France was invaded by Hitler’s army. With the French administration of Cambodia in disarray, Japan invaded and occupied the colony, but allowed the French administration to continue operating. When the Japanese surrendered in 1945, King Sihanouk declared independence. However, when the Allied occupation forces left Cambodia, they restored control of the country back to the French. The Cambodian people, and especially Sihanouk, felt betrayed by the West.

In Vietnam, after Ho Chi Minh had already declared independence, the country was restored to French rule. When Ho had declared independence, he made very strong solicitations toward the US, but was disappointed when the US allowed France to resume control of the country. The result was the French-Indochina War which the French lost to Ho’s Vietminh forces in a humiliating defeat in 1953 at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. Both China and the Soviet Union had supported the Vietnamese in the war against the French. The USSR provided some $365 million in aid while Chinese aid totalled nearly $460 million. However, it was probably because of China’s extensive aid that Vietnam began seeking additional dependence on the Soviets:
can be weapons of exploitation in the hands of the Chinese which made it necessary for them to seek compensating support from the Soviet Union" (Buszynski 1986, 151).

At the same time, King Sihanouk was leading his "Royal Crusade for Independence" in Cambodia. Through some shrewd political manipulation, Sihanouk was able to eliminate his opponents to become the prominent nationalist leader and obtain the country's independence from France.

**Sihanouk and Communist Insurgency**

Sihanouk set up a neutral government so as not to alienate either communist or Western powers. The prime minister, Penh Nouth stated in 1953: "Although we are not communists, we do not oppose communism as long as the latter is not to be imposed on our people by force from outside" (Basu 1987, 15). In fact, Cambodia tried to maintain good relations with both China and the Soviet Union at the beginning of their disputes. However, it was clear that China played a much more significant role in Cambodia. It is during this period, however, that communist insurgencies began taking place in Cambodia--the Khmer Rouge started their guerrilla activities against the Sihanouk government.

At the time Cambodia gained its independence, the Khmer Rouge made up only a small rag-tag organization. They had been supported by the Soviets and trained by the Vietnamese. However, at the Geneva Conference on Indochina of 1954, the Soviets provided for a withdrawal of Vietminh troops from Cambodia. The Soviets generally considered the Cambodian communists too insignificant among the Indochinese communists (Basu, 1987, p. 15).

As the Vietminh withdrew back into North Vietnam, most of the old-guard of the Cambodian communist party went with them. But the younger and more reactionary remained to continue the insurgency. This younger group, headed by Saloth Sar (later known as Pol Pot), Ieng Sary, and Khieu Samphan who had been fellow students in France, formed a new party in 1960. As a result of their disillusionment of Vietnam and the Soviets, this reorganized Khmer Rouge sought China's support, and when Sino-Soviet relations disintegrated, the Khmer Rouge sided with the Chinese. On the other hand, the Soviets had always strongly supported Ho Chi Minh, and so when the split occurred, Vietnam naturally went to the Soviet side.

The Geneva Accords of 1954 divided Vietnam into North and South, but required elections the next year to reunite the country under a democratically elected government. However, the Diem regime in the South refused to comply, and the US expressed its support by funneling aid to the government. As a result, the Vietminh set out on a crusade to unite the country under communism by force, and thus the Vietnam War began.

Before long, the Vietnam War spilled over into Cambodia. As Vietminh transported supplies to the Vietcong along the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Cambodia, South Vietnamese troops (often accompanied by US troops) began several incursions into Cambodian territory. US bombing campaigns in Cambodia were soon to follow. These bombings were not confined to the jungles, but were carried out in central population centers as well. Moreover, US bombing campaigns in Cambodia exceeded the magnitude of the US bombings in Iraq.

The Cambodian people blamed Sihanouk for not being able to stop the bombings. Subsequently, civilians in the country side became more sympathetic to the Khmer Rouge, and the communists were able to make some very strategic advances. Sihanouk's cabinet began to doubt his ability to resolve the crisis, so on March 18, 1970, while Sihanouk was on a diplomatic visit abroad, the defense
minister, Lon Nol, staged a coup and deposed the prince.

Sihanouk’s main enemies during his years in power were the communist insurgents. Yet only a few days after the coup, Sihanouk announced the formation of the United Front with the Khmer Rouge to oppose the Lon Nol regime. Considering Sihanouk’s anti-communist past, it is difficult to understand why he allied himself with the Khmer Rouge, his former enemies. Betrayed by his own cabinet and by the West, Sihanouk really had no one else to turn to. All of these events forced him closer to the Khmer Rouge who had immediately begun wooing the prince upon his being ousted. Sihanouk later would join with the Khmer Rouge again in 1982 in a coalition government that would represent the resistance to the Soviet-backed Heng Samrin regime.

For several more years, Soviet involvement in Cambodia would be limited until the Vietnamese invasion in 1978. However, several important events led up to the invasion, but which exceed the scope of this study. Following Sihanouk’s ouster, the Lon Nol regime controlled Cambodia from 1970 to 1975. That corrupt regime, however, was displaced by the brutal Khmer Rouge which controlled Cambodia up until the Vietnamese invasion. Details of these two governments will not be discussed in detail here because the Soviet Union had little influence with either regime.

The pro-US Lon Nol government—the Republic of Cambodia (RC)—was quickly recognized by the US, and a river of US aid gushed into the country. The Khmer Rouge immediately began a major offensive against the Lon Nol government, starting a bloody, five-year civil war that left millions of Cambodians homeless. US bombings in Cambodia continued until 1973 when the US began to pull out of Indochina.

Khmer Rouge troops managed to capture the countryside and besiege Phnom Penh by early 1975. On April 17, the Lon Nol government surrendered to the Khmer Rouge. Once in power, the Khmer Rouge established the government of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). The Khmer Rouge instituted brutal Marxist agrarian reforms, and only a few days after they captured Phnom Penh, they emptied the city and forced its residents into the countryside to work on state forced-labor farms. The Party set out to purify society from "corruption," especially religion and Western institutions. Schools, libraries, and ancient Buddhist temples were destroyed. All forms of Western technology were despised and forbidden including televisions, radios, trucks, and even farm tractors. All were destroyed or abandoned. Power sources and even water and sewage systems were destroyed. Currency, markets, and financial institutions were abolished and industries were abandoned.

A program of autogencide was implemented aimed at the intellectual, merchant, and elite classes who were considered unformably corrupt. Even people who simply wore glasses were murdered. Children were stripped from their parents and sent to work on youth farms where they were indoctrinated and forced to hard labor. Over one million people were killed by starvation, disease, and mass execution. Large interrogation and torture centers were set up where hundreds of thousands were systematically murdered. During the Khmer Rouge days, some 400,000 Cambodians fled to Vietnam and Thailand. The magnitude of the slaughter and devastation caused by the Khmer Rouge is hard to comprehend.

Part of Pol Pot’s plan to restore the ancient Khmer glory was to reclaim its ancient territory of the Mekhong delta in southern Vietnam. Pol Pot called for the "liberation" of southern Vietnam and heavy fighting on the Vietnamese border began as Khmer Rouge troops launched numerous cross-border raids.
Over 500,000 Vietnamese were forced to leave their homes because of the fighting (Myliewiec 1988, xxi). In response to these continued attacks over three years, and with Soviet approval, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and ousted the Democratic Kampuchea government on December 25, 1978. The fact that these border attacks took place, and therefore, that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia was provoked, is not well known. Throughout the following years, the Soviet Union would continue to profess the legitimacy of the Phnom Penh regime and would engross itself in massive aid to Vietnam and Cambodia.

The PRK and the CGDK

In January 1979, the Vietnamese, with Soviet backing, established the communist People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) with Heng Samrin as president and Hun Sen as foreign minister (who in 1987 became prime minister). Heng Samrin and Hun Sen were, as were many officials of the PRK, former Khmer Rouge officials, but part of a faction that remained loyal to Vietnam after the split. Both had been regional officials in the DK, but took part in an unsuccessful uprising against the Pol Pot regime in 1978, before defecting to Vietnam.

Later in 1979, a new guerrilla force opposing the PRK was formed: the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF), headed by Son Sann, one of Sihanouk’s former ministers. Thailand supported the non-communist force and armed its troops. In another two years, in 1981, Prince Sihanouk returned from China and unified several small pro-Sihanouk resistance factions into the Sihanoukist National Army (ANS) and founded a political organization that would control the army—the United National Front for an Independent, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC).

In 1982, with pressure from the US and China, the two non-communist factions joined with the Khmer Rouge in an uneasy coalition in opposition to the PRK and Vietnamese occupation forces. The coalition was named the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) reflecting the dominance of the Khmer Rouge which has consistently had more than twice the number of troops as the two non-communist factions combined. Sihanouk became the president, Khieu Samphan (Khmer Rouge) became the vice-president, and Son Sann (KPNLF) became the prime minister. Though all three factions were under the presidency of Sihanouk, they each retained their autonomous nature. The coalition was given the DK’s seat in the UN.

In 1985, a full-force Vietnamese offensive overran all of the resistance bases within Cambodia, and the CGDK forces along with 250,000 civilians were forced across the border into Thailand. Eight enclosed camps were set up near the border with shelling range of the Vietnamese army, each under control of one of the CGDK factions. In September, the Khmer Rouge announced the retirement of Pol Pot in order to bolster waning international support. Though it was clear that Pol Pot still controlled the faction, to their satisfaction they were able to get what they wanted. Following the 1985 Vietnamese offensive which nearly disabled the resistance, the US Congress debated the issue, then approved a substantial non-lethal aid package to the CGDK.

The Beginnings of Reform

For the Soviets, 1985 was a landmark year with the arrival of Gorbachev to power and the commencement of perestroika and glasnost. Gorbachev began to reevaluate Soviet policy in the Third World, especially Afghanistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Angola. The costs of maintaining sponsorship of these
movements had severely drained Soviet coffers and limited its political objectives in other areas. Gorbachev set out to resolve these long term conflicts with the anticipation that the "withdrawal from Afghanistan in addition to the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia and Cuban withdrawal from Angola will pay dividends throughout Southwest and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa" (Goodman 1991, 116). Gorbachev had a specific plan for Cambodia which he felt would end the conflict once and for all:

The type of settlement Moscow envisioned in 1985, however, was a non-aggression pact between Indochina and ASEAN. The war in Kampuchea [Cambodia] would then end because ASEAN and other outside parties would cease aiding the Cambodian opposition groups. Vietnamese forces would withdraw from Cambodia, but the Heng Samrin government would remain in power. Moscow would not even consider the possibility of its sharing power (Katz 1989, 51).

In 1986, Nguyen Van Linh became the head of Vietnam’s Communist Party and in the spirit of Gorbachev’s reforms began trying to end Hanoi’s international isolation, mainly caused by the Cambodian conflict. In 1987, Hun Sen, the PRK foreign minister, was appointed to the post of prime minister. He undertook some dramatic reforms of the country, and before he had been in office a year he had led the country in an abandonment of Marxism and in a new pursuit of a market economy. However, he maintained the single party rule and close ties with Vietnam. In April 1989, the PRK changed its name to the State of Cambodia (SOC) reflecting its abandonment of socialism. Hun Sen’s reforms have improved the country’s conditions immensely and have resulted in the SOC gaining considerable legitimacy in the eyes of the Cambodian people. Many nations such as Australia began expressing to Hun Sen that their governments would like to recognize the SOC as soon as it complied with UN resolutions, namely, withdrawal of all foreign troops and permitting UN-supervised elections.

Soviet efforts to persuade Hanoi and Phnom Penh to undertake a withdrawal just as the Soviets had done in Afghanistan did not have much success until 1987 when Hun Sen agreed to participate in talks with the resistance. This move was highly praised by Moscow as an adoption of a reconciliation policy which Moscow approved heartily (Duncan and Ekedahl 1990, 155). By this time, Soviet policy had made a major compromise. In May 1987, at a dinner for Linh, Gorbachev stated that the Cambodian problem:

For the first time, the Soviets conceded to allow power sharing among the four Cambodian factions as part of the settlement. This is evidence that the Gorbachev leadership had reduced its commitment in defending the pro-Soviet regime in Phnom Penh. "As in Afghanistan, the cost to the Soviets of propping up the regime no longer appear[ed] worth the effort" (Katz 1989, 52).

Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze visited China in February 1989 and came to a momentous decision. The Soviets agreed that Vietnam would unilaterally withdraw its troops from Cambodia with no conditions. In April, Vietnam and Cambodia announced that Vietnam would start immediately to withdraw its troops and called for an end of foreign military aid to all sides and for an international control mechanism to supervise withdrawal and the end to foreign aid (Duncan and Ekedahl 1990, 156). This meeting came as a precursor to the Paris Conference on Cambodia which took place in July 1989.
The objective of the Paris Conference was to negotiate the formation of a coalition government and to create an international control mechanism that would verify troop withdrawal and the end of weapon supplies from outside sources and to monitor democratic elections. The Conference failed on several issues, but mostly because China, the US, and ASEAN demanded a comprehensive settlement while Phnom Penh refused to include the Khmer Rouge in an interim government. In addition, Vietnam was nearly finished with its withdrawal from Cambodia, and the resistance was anxious to see if it could attain a military victory. One member of the Sihanouk delegation summed up the conferences' failure by stating:

We are deadlocked here because the military situation is not decisive. If there is no result on the battlefield, there is no result at the negotiating table...Hun Sen thinks he can still win the war. That is why he has made no concessions. When he is weak, he will negotiate (United Nations Association 1991, 52).

In September 1989, Vietnam finished withdrawing all of its troops from Cambodia, leaving the 45,000 troop SOC army and a poorly equipped militia behind to fend for itself against the 70,000 resistance guerrillas. This withdrawal was conducted unilaterally, without UN-supervision as a UN resolution passed in 1988 required. The resolution required that the withdrawal be done under UN supervision and within the framework of a comprehensive settlement. Once Vietnam completed its withdrawal it requested a UN team to come to Cambodia and verify that a complete withdrawal had taken place. The UN refused to do so unless it was within the framework of a comprehensive settlement. The withdrawal of Vietnamese troops has not been verified to this day.

After the withdrawal, CGDK forces experienced moderate success in a military offensive against the SOC. Large chunks of northwestern Cambodia came under resistance control. However, most of the success was achieved by the Khmer Rouge who began forced repatriation of refugees into the newly controlled areas:

From the murky claims and counterclaims, it was difficult to pinpoint precisely what appreciable gains had been made by any of the four factions by the end of the dry season in May 1990. Three conclusions seem valid: The Khmer Rouge had given added proof of their superiority on the battlefield, when they cared to demonstrate it, and were building up their political and administrative infrastructure inside Cambodia; the noncommunist groups seemed somewhat better organized and more effective militarily than in previous years but were tainted by their association with the Khmer Rouge and had limited capability to affect events on the ground; and although the SOC armed forces had not collapsed under the CGDK's military pressure, they were nonetheless hard pressed to fend off attacks from a variety of quarters. These were some of the realities that had implications at the negotiating table. (United Nations Association 1991, 54)

Development of a Comprehensive Political Settlement

One of the first peace proposals for the Cambodian conflict was presented in 1981 after the International Conference on Kampuchea. ASEAN proposed a comprehensive settlement--ironically--very similar to the one that was finally adopted ten years later. The proposal involved UN-supervised disarmament of all Khmer factions, Vietnamese withdrawal, and free elections involving all four factions. However, at that time, both China and the US opposed any proposal that would include the PRK in any power-sharing agreement or that would in any way allow the Vietnamese-installed government any legitimacy. The Soviet Union, Vietnam, and the PRK also rejected the plan because they opposed any role for the Khmer Rouge. Since then, several
proposals have been offered, but all have been rejected mainly over this issue of power-sharing. China and the US would not accept a power-sharing role for the PRK; Vietnam and the PRK would not accept a power-sharing role for the Khmer Rouge; and Sihanouk, China, and the US would not accept a settlement without a role for the Khmer Rouge. The result has been a stalemate in which no peace plan could succeed until there was a substantial compromise.

The Australians drew up a detailed draft proposal offering several configurations for an enhanced UN role in a comprehensive settlement. The Australian proposal recognized that the central challenge to a peace settlement was the issue of power-sharing between the factions until a new government could be elected. Therefore, the Australian proposal provided for the UN to create an international control mechanism that would involve a peacekeeping force and UN administration of the country until a newly elected government could replace it. In the meantime, no single Cambodian party would be able to determine the country's destiny. It provided for important issues such as how to implement a cease-fire, how to run free elections, and how to ensure a politically neutral administration in the transition period. Shortly after Evans announced the Australian proposals, the five permanent members of the Security Council adopted the issue onto their agenda.

On January 15-16, 1990, the five permanent members of the Security Council, including the Soviets, met in Paris to examine the Australian proposals and write up a plan based on its suggestions. The permanent five draft included the formation of a Supreme National Council (SNC), a quadripartite body made up of representatives from each of the four factions. The SNC would be the repository of Cambodian sovereignty, hold the seat at the UN, and function in a delegative capacity to the transitional authority. However, this draft plan did not specify the scope of UN involvement in the administration of the government.

In a communique issued by the permanent five at their January 1990 meeting, they stated that "all Cambodians should enjoy the same rights, freedoms, and opportunities to participate in the election process" (United Nations Association 1991, 56). This statement and the exclusion of the usual pledge regarding a "non-return to the universally condemned policies and practices of the recent past" indicate that the Khmer Rouge were given full license to participate in the proposed elections. This may have been a "realistic acceptance that the Khmer Rouge must be allowed to compete in elections so that their (presumed) defeat would allow China a graceful exit" (United Nations Association 1991, 56).

At first, Vietnam and the Hun Sen regime strongly opposed any such UN intervention that would violate its sovereignty and disregard its claimed legitimacy. However, the Soviet Union was their main source of subsistence, and the Soviets had fully participated in drawing up the UN plan. The Soviets obviously became concerned that the Hun Sen government would not agree to a settlement that the Soviets had a hand in writing (Vinogradov 1990). With continued pressure from the Soviets, the Hun Sen government yielded and agreed in principle to the UN plan.

The five permanent members of the Security Council met again in March 1990 and outlined the scope of involvement which the UN was willing to take. This proposed international control mechanism was to be called the UN Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC). It proposed that the SNC would delegate to UNTAC all necessary powers to administer the government, but would be consulted by and give advice to UNTAC. UNTAC would be headed by a
special representative of the Secretary-General who would be given considerable powers over Cambodian territory in order to protect the Cambodian people from economic and social discrimination and protect their fundamental rights.

Japan invited the Cambodian factions to Tokyo on June 5, 1990 in order to decide on important issues of the settlement, particularly the makeup of the SNC. Despite a Khmer Rouge boycott in protest over a diplomatic formality it did not approve of, the remaining parties were able to come to a decision on the SNC. It was agreed that the council would be made up of 12 representatives, six from the SOC and six from the three resistance forces (two each).

In July 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker announced a major policy reversal. Due to increased pressure at home, a realization that the Khmer Rouge could possibly return to power, and the increased legitimacy of the Hun Sen government, the US retracted its recognition of the resistance coalition and opened talks with the SOC and Vietnam. Though this surprising reversal of US policy was popular in the US and other Western countries, it outraged the ASEAN nations who accused the US of trying to pull the rug out from under its friends. On August 6, the US held its first talks with Vietnam on Cambodia, and then in September 6 with the SOC.

Through continued and difficult negotiations, the Cambodian factions finally came to an agreement on the UN plan. Then on September 20, 1991, the Security Council adopted resolution 668 showing unanimity and support for the proposed expanded role of the UN in Cambodia. General Assembly resolution 45/3, adopted on October 15, 1990, showed the full support of the Assembly for Security Council resolution 668.

During 1991, several events took place making significant progress towards the signing of the peace agreement. A cease-fire finally was implemented between the factions in May, but both sides accused each other of violations. In a meeting in June, all members of the SNC agreed to an indefinite cease-fire and to stop accepting foreign arms. In July, Sihanouk resigned from his post as head of FUNCINPEC to become the neutral leader of the SNC. A significant decision was reached by the SNC in August in which it was decided to disband only 70% of current military forces and put the remainder under UN control. In September, the SNC resumed meetings in New York where its members agreed to a compromise system of elections providing for proportional representation that would allow each faction places in the Parliament based on its share of the popular vote. Finally, on October 23, 1991, the Paris Conference on Cambodia was reconvened and the UN peace plan was signed by all four Cambodian parties and 18 other involved nations ending more than 20 years of civil war.

**Soviet Incentives for Concession**

Examining the events and the involvement of the Soviets in the Cambodian crisis, a major shift of policy has been identified where the Soviets began exerting pressure on Vietnam and Phnom Penh to settle the dispute. Most significant has been the Soviet’s position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a co-writer of the UN peace plan. Though Phnom Penh fervently resisted at first, it has conceded to Soviet pressures and has accepted the settlement. A closer look at why the Soviets have made this policy change is warranted.

According to Kolodziej and Kanet there are five main constraints to Soviet expansion in the Third World:

1. Developing countries have an increasing ability to resist subordination and
to manipulate the Soviets for their own advantage.

2. The Soviets have been checked by the economic and military power of the US and its Western allies.

3. Divisions within the socialist camp—notably the Sino-Soviet split.

4. Receding relevance of the Soviet model to many Third World countries.

5. Scarce economic and technological resources commanded by Moscow to project its power and purposes abroad (1989, xiii-xiv).

Developing countries have increased their ability to resist subordination, not only to the Soviets, but any country that might pose a threat. Small Third World countries have taken a very aggressive posture in international organizations, particularly the UN. Through bloc voting, the Third World has been able to bring about several programs such as the UNDP that directly favor their particular needs and often conflict with the interests of the Big Powers. Not only have they been able to protect themselves from subordination, but they have been able to attain many objectives at the expense of the industrialized countries (Bennett 1991, 291). In the case of Southeast Asia, Vietnam has been able to take considerable advantage of the Soviet Union. Vietnam's isolation from the rest of the world made it so that it could only trade with the CMEA countries. Its trade with the Soviets was highly imbalanced and the Soviets gained little more than an ideological victory in the aftermath of the US-Vietnam War.

Though the Soviets have been able to move into Vietnam after the US pulled out, the US military presence in nearby Philippines and elsewhere remained a continual threat to Soviet expansion in Southeast Asia. The economic power of the US and its allies has been a considerable constraint on Soviet expansion in the region. The isolation of Cambodia and Vietnam by Western and ASEAN countries has impoverished Indochinese economies which have stagnated and lacked significant development.

As was discussed above, the division between Soviet and Chinese communists caused a multitude of problems for the Soviets in Indochina. Its current dilemma in Cambodia is a product of that conflict with the Khmer Rouge in the Chinese camp, and the PRK in the Soviet camp. However, since 1989, relations between the Soviets and China have warmed considerably. Their joint agreement in Beijing that Vietnam would withdraw from Cambodia and that all foreign military support to the Cambodian factions should end was a landmark decision. The fact that the Soviet's made most of the concessions is an indication that the Gorbachev government is anxious to wrap up this drawn out conflict and move on to more productive pursuits.

The Third World perceives the Soviet Union as ideologically bankrupt. Marxism-Leninism is not widely perceived to apply to the conditions of developing countries today. In addition, the economic problems that the Soviet Union is facing at home has made it a non-model of economic development that is encouraging Third World countries to look for other models, mostly that of the US and the NICs. The rapid economic development that occurred in the Soviet Union in its happier days has all but ceased. Its inability to adjust to the needs and impulses of the day has plowed its economic system into the ground. This, obviously, is what the developing nations are trying to avoid, not replicate.

Probably most significant of all these issues is that scarce economic and technological resources have become more scarce than ever in recent years and have eventually concluded in the breakup of the Soviet Union. Faced with this economic turmoil which has impacted even Moscow, the Soviets can no longer afford the expansive aid commitments to developing countries. In fact, this has been a rising concern of the Soviets for some time
and a major reevaluation of Soviet aid commitments and practices have been undertaken. On June 13, 1990, the Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution instructing the Council of Ministers "to work on cutting back the amount of aid we give" (Arefyeva 1990). Arefyeva, a columnist for Izvestia, summarized the debate concerning the Supreme Soviet’s resolution by stating:

I’d like to congratulate the Deputies on an important step toward glasnost...At the same time, however, one can only regret the fact that the question had been posed so narrowly and deals only with the volume of aid. For the problem is not one of volume...The essence of the problem lies elsewhere—namely, in the thrust and objectives of our aid...We should be talking about a full review of our aid policy, which would in turn lead to a reduction. At any rate, provided we base our reasoning not on ideology, as in the past, but on humanitarian considerations and sober economic calculation (Arefyeva 1990).

This was followed by a decree from Gorbachev on July 24, 1990:

In implementing measures to further expand economic cooperation with developing countries, it is to base this cooperation on the principles of mutual benefit and mutual interest, guided by international norms and practice. It is to proceed from the premise that economic aid must be provided with due regard for our country’s real capabilities (Gorbachev 1990).

When the head of the socialist countries department of the USSR Council of Ministers’ State Foreign Economic Council, V. Demchuk, was asked about Gorbachev’s decree, he responded by saying that the main countries in concern were Cuba, Mongolia, and Vietnam. "Take Vietnam, for example," he said. "One can cite a good many costly projects that were taken on without proper consideration, resulting in the squandering of a lot of money" (Romanyuk 1990). Vietnam possibly represents the largest aid package the Soviets offer. It is estimated that Vietnam receives over $1.2 billion per year, a large portion of which goes to their military (Duncan and Ekedahl 1990, 154).

With the recent breakup of the Soviet Union, continued aid to Vietnam and Cambodia is clearly at risk. However, in the years leading up to the union’s collapse, it would not have seemed likely for the Soviets to consider abandoning Indochina. Even so, it was obvious that the Soviets were anxious to reduce Indochina’s dependency upon Soviet resources, and tried to do so by three methods. First, the Soviets tried to encourage more efficient use of its aid and prompted Vietnam and Cambodia to pursue market economies. Second, in order to reduce Vietnam and Cambodia’s dependency, the Soviets have tried to facilitate the integration of Indochina into the booming economic structure of the ASEAN nations and make them eligible for international loans. And third, in an attempt to improve their image in the region, the Soviets have reduced their military presence in Southeast Asia with a huge reduction of troops and navy at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam.

Previous to Gorbachev, the Soviets underwrote the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Soviet-bloc aid provided the Phnom Penh regime with more than three-fourths of its budget. Recently, the Soviets began cutting aid to Cambodia: "The USSR and Eastern European states are cutting economic aid to Cambodia and introducing 'pay-as-you-go' exchanges and loans payable in hard currency" (Goodman 1991, 180). This changing-the-rules-of-the-game will make a serious impact on Cambodia. Though Hun Sen had originally rejected the UN peace settlement, the plan provided for a commitment of some 22 nations to aid Cambodia in its reconstruction efforts—a very attractive offer considering the fact that the Soviets could no longer be counted on. With the breakup of the Soviet Union after the attempted coup in August 1991, the SOC realized that a perma-
lement cessation of Soviet aid was imminent and it would have to make major concessions and accept the UN plan which offered its only hope of survival.

Other factors responsible for the Soviet’s eagerness for Vietnam and Phnom Penh to resolve the conflict through the UN plan are: 1) the Soviets could not foresee any military solution to the problem, 2) US-Sino relations were strengthened against the Soviet Union largely because of the Cambodian conflict, and 3) the conflict prohibited rapprochement with ASEAN which Moscow saw as crucial for both the Soviet Union and for Indochina’s integration into the regional and global economy.

Considering the Soviet Union’s wider international objectives and its current economic vulnerability, Moscow knew it would have to depend on international support. This put military intervention of any sort out of the question. The hope of SOC troops obtaining a military victory on their own was not realistic after the fighting in 1990 ended in stalemate that slightly favored the resistance. The only alternative was a peaceful settlement.

Poor Sino-Soviet relations had for years hindered Soviet objectives in Asia, especially when the US joined with China on the Cambodian issue. For the last two decades, no Asian country would want to increase Soviet presence for fear of antagonizing the Chinese. In 1989, Gorbachev made some strong overtures to China by unilaterally meeting three of Beijing’s conditions for reconciliation: withdrawal from Afghanistan, Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, and unilateral Soviet troop reductions on the Sino-Soviet border (Goodman 1991, 110).

In 1987, Gorbachev sent a strong message to ASEAN nations that it was committed to rapprochement. For the first time ever, a Soviet Foreign Minister (Shevardnadze) visited Thailand and Indonesia. The visits were for the purpose of finding a solution to the Cambodian crisis, which was used as the campaign for rapprochement. Soviet objectives with the ASEAN states has been to:

- enhance its political image, increase its economic participation in the region’s rapid growth,
- facilitate the political and economic integration of the communist countries of the region into regional affairs (in order to reduce their reliance on Moscow’s largesse), and improve the environment for its own strategic objectives (Duncan and Ekedahl 1990, 157).

With a resolution to the Cambodian conflict, the Soviets would be able to pursue these objectives. Especially now with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis they are facing, the Soviets more than ever will need the support of ASEAN, the US, China, as well as the rest of the international community. Thus, the Soviets have continued to encourage and provide incentives for Hanoi and Phnom Penh to submit to the provisions of the UN peace plan.

Conclusion

For years, the Cambodian conflict has been a complex skein of contradicting interests and violent confrontation. The Soviet Union stood opposed by the US and China who each supported different Cambodian contingents in this very "international" civil war. But since 1985, significant moves were made by Hanoi and Phnom Penh which allowed for a comprehensive settlement to take place. First, Vietnam withdrew all its troops in 1989. Then in 1991, Phnom Penh agreed to sign an unprecedented peace treaty ending the two decades of violence.

Most of the analyses focusing on the recent developments of the Cambodian settlement have centered attention on the policy implemented by the US and China and its impact on the decisions of Vietnam and
Cambodia. However, they have neglected the fact that the Soviet Union, since 1985, has played a major role in influencing those decisions. The Soviets encouraged a Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, reduced their aid to both countries, and undertook a campaign to integrate them into the region politically and economically.

The central incentive for the Soviets to encourage a speedy settlement was its economic concerns. The devastating economic decline in the Soviet Union made it incapable of attending to its former Third World commitments. The Soviets closely reexamined their development aid programs and instituted some sweeping reforms. Vietnam and Cambodia, who depended mostly on the Soviet Union for their survival, realized that their economic aid was in jeopardy and that they must end their international isolation in order to avoid disaster. When the attempted coup in the Soviet Union resulted in its breakup, Phnom Penh realized its aid would be ceased and it would have to depend on the wider world for its survival. Thus, it would have to come to terms with the UN comprehensive settlement.

On October 23, 1991, Phnom Penh and the Cambodian resistance factions signed the peace treaty and initiated the huge UN operation that will dismantle the Hun Sen government and operate the country's key ministries until a new coalition government is elected through UN-supervised elections. Several challenges to the UN operation still lie ahead, but with unanimity in the UN Security Council, chances are greatly improved that the operation will be successful and that peace will finally be restored to the war-torn country.
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