CHAPTER TWO

THE ENSUING BATTLES

To the hundreds of thousands of Kampuchean, the arrival of the Vietnamese soldiers was a salvation. It signalled the end of the brutal repression that they have been living under since the Khmer Rouge assumed power. There were widespread joy and relief with this new found freedom but there was also anxiety that the liberators might turn out to be new masters. This anxiety was hardly lessened when the hundreds and thousands upon returning to Phnom Penh found the city plundered almost clean by the Vietnamese troops. If anything it reinforced the traditional hostility against the Vietnamese "yuon".

The Vietnamese began hastily bringing back a modicum of normalcy into the country. The economy was revived through international aid and widespread smuggling across the Thai-Kampuchea border. Administrative machinery was put into gear with the help of seconded Vietnamese personnel and a new political apparatus was established on the basis of the new constitution passed in early 1981. A general election was organised to select 117 members of the National Assembly, following which a new party - the Kampuchean Peoples' Revolutionary Party was introduced. The
cementing of the PRK into the Indochina Federation is
effected by placing the country military under Vietnam’s
Fourth Army Corps. This was further enhanced by the
presence of three shadowy Vietnamese organisation which
advised the PRK on all aspects of administering the
country.¹

Immediate Response to Vietnamese Invasion

Asean

The Vietnamese invasion coming as it did close
upon the heels of Premier Pham Van Dong’s visit to the
Asean capitals brought about a deep sense of betrayal
within the latter. Pham Van Dong had earlier on assured
Asean that Vietnam had no plans of invading Kampuchea.²
In a hastily called meeting on 13 Jan. 1979 Asean
Foreign Ministers issued a statement which among others:

- called for the immediate and total withdrawal of
  Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea,
- deplored the armed intervention against the
  independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity
  of Kampuchea,
- expressed concern over the escalation of the
  Vietnamese/Kampuchean war,
- appealed to Vietnam to demonstrate its credibility,

¹ Nayan Chanda, "Brother enemy". p. 373.
² New Straits Times, 9 and 10 Jan. 1979.
- affirmed right of Kampuchean people to determine their own future.³

Thailand, more than any other Asean member country was most apprehensive on the latest security development. Thailand had traditionally relied upon the existence of buffer states to provide it security. With the loss of Kampuchea and the presence of more than 60,000 Vietnamese troops close to its border, Thailand felt a deep sense of insecurity. This was enhanced in no small measure by the knowledge that its armed forces were no match - both in qualitative and quantitative terms, against Vietnam. Under the circumstances, Thailand could no longer afford the luxury of maintaining a neutralist stance. In mid-January 1979 Premier Kriangsak Chomanan signed a secret pact with China providing a basis for Sino-Thai co-operation whence Chinese supplies of arms and ammunition could be transported through Thai conduit for Khmer Rouge forces.⁴ Thai territory would also provide transit for Khmer Rouge materials and personnel.⁵ Kriangsak next made a hasty visit to the United States to secure United States guarantee for Thai security against the increasing conflict in Kampuchea. More economic and military aid were also sought.

⁴ Op Cit Nayan Chanda. p. 348 - 349.
China

China's reaction was more dramatic, and took the form of a limited if intense military assault across the Sino-Vietnam border. The attack on the northern Vietnam provinces represented an outburst of intense Chinese frustrations if indeed hostility which has been steadily building up ever since Vietnam began warming up to China's most bitter enemy, the Soviet Union. The Chinese had been planning to "teach Vietnam a lesson" well before Vietnamese troops swarmed over into Kampuchea. As early as August 1978, the Chinese were known to have secretly moved large numbers of troops, air force planes, artillery and tanks closer to the Vietnamese border. While secret military preparations were under way, China's strongman Deng Xiaoping went on a diplomatic offensive to rally support for China's policy. In a nine-day swing through Asean capitals in early November Deng attempted to persuade Asean that China intended to play a positive role in regional security and to this end had to restrain the Vietnamese from being a pawn of the Soviets. Deng's argument was initially coolly received by Asean in cognizant of the latters deep rooted suspicious of China's intentions. But the announcement of the signing of Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty during Deng's tour provided an element of credibility to Deng's argument. Normalisation of Sino-United States relations in January 1979 followed by Deng's official visit to Washington allowed Deng to inform President Carter of China's intended military
action against Vietnam and to indirectly obtain discreet American support. This was necessary to pre-empt any possible Soviet military action against China. Elated by his administration's success in normalising Sino-United States ties, Carter refrained from publicly opposing China's intended punitive action against Vietnam. Thus when Deng stopped over in Tokyo on his return from the United States, the Japanese were persuaded that there was covert Sino-United States collusion against Vietnam and hence did not vigorously oppose Deng's plans.

China chose February 17 as the day for teaching Vietnam the necessary lesson. On that day Beijing was playing host to a visit by the Indian Foreign Minister - the first such visit since the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. The day before, Premier Pham Van Dong and his chief of staff had left for Phnom Penh for a four-day visit.

As dawn was breaking on 17 February 1979 some 85,000 troops of the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army poured across the Sino-Vietnam border which had earlier been softened by thousand of artillery and rocket barrage. Supported by tanks and artillery, Chinese troops, after 16 days of intense fighting with high casualties on both sides, penetrated some 45 km into Vietnamese territory and captured the provincial towns of Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, and Lang San. On 15 March, the troops withdrew back to Chinese
territory but not after systematically destroying every single piece of building.

China's lesson was equally heavy for both sides in so far as casualties were concerned. Some 30,000 soldiers and civilians were estimatedly killed.\footnote{Figures given by Chinese officials during author's discussion with them in Beijing.} If the Chinese lesson was meant to force Vietnam to withdrew its troop from Kampuchea, it was an abject failure. Except for the United States which implicitly supported China's military action most other countries condemned China. Asean was no exception. Desirous to demonstrate its evenhandedness in handling the Kampuchea crisis, Asean criticised China's violation of Vietnamese territory and called for the withdrawal of all troops from Indochina. Asean had also became apprehensive on the burgeoning number of refugees. Close to 200,000 refugees had crossed over into Thailand by mid-1979 bringing in its wake profound political and security problems to the front-line state.

Different Strategies

Asean had also abandoned all pretensions of neutrality in the face of Vietnamese intransigence. As a matter of principle Asean cannot accept Vietnamese invasion and subsequent occupation of Kampuchea, notwithstanding the installation by Vietnam of a regime headed by a former Khmer Rouge commanders, Meng Samrin.
Asean had no choice but to continue to recognition of Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea, as the legitimate government, however repugnant that regime may be. On this score there would appear to be a parallel interest between Asean and China. But the similarity ends there, for both entertained different if not contradictory objectives. China desires to undermine Vietnamese influence and dominant position in Indochina and by the same token to reduce the threat of Soviet encirclement through its Vietnamese proxy. China is convinced that its strategy of "bleeding Vietnam white" would achieve these objectives. That continued application of military, political, economic and diplomatic pressure upon Vietnam would detract the latter from ever consolidating its position within Indochina. Asean's objectives on the other hand are to ensure the security of Thailand against the threat of Vietnamese military presence in Kampuchea, to seek a reduction in Soviet and Chinese influence in Southeast Asia and to draw Vietnam into a more constructive relationship with its corporate members. The strategy employed by Asean is aimed at a political settlement of the Kampuchean problem which is "seen as a sine qua non of the achievement of these overarching objectives." This strategy would require that Asean continue to isolate Vietnam and apply military pressure upon its occupation of Kampuchea

7 Sukumbhand Paribatra "Between Watana Nakorn and the UNGA: The Growing Delusion in Asean"s Diplomacy towards the Cambodian Conflict". p. 6.
without precluding the option for a negotiated settlement.

Internationalism and the Kampuchean Conflict

United Nations General Assembly

The non-aligned conference provided the stage for Asean’s first two major attempts to draw world attention to the conflict in Kampuchea. On both occasions - at Colombo in August 1976 and subsequently at Havana three years later, Asean had failed, due to the manipulations by Vietnam with the collusion of its allies, mainly the Soviet Union and Cuba. Asean’s third attempt at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in November 1979, however produced a far satisfactory result. Asean presented a draft resolution calling for the seating of DK in the United Nations and the non-recognition of the PRK on the following arguments:

- that the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Kampuchea were violated by Vietnamese invasion and subsequent occupation,
- that the Vietnamese occupation was in pursuit of its cherished dream of dominating an Indochina federation and the rejection by DK of such an arrangement had led to the invasion,
- that despite condemnation by a large segment of the world community and after repeated calls for withdrawal, Vietnam refused to do so,
- that the Heng Samrin government was installed by
Vietnam and not by popular elections, and its continued existence was possible only through the presence of more than 200,000 Vietnamese soldiers, that a recognition of the PRK would set a dangerous precedent which gives legitimacy to the use of force by the mighty to subjugate the small.  

It is to Asean’s credit that it was able to argue the distinction between Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge and the DK government. While Asean and the world community abhorred the barbaric policies associated with the Khmer Rogue regime, nevertheless the DK was the legitimate government and not the Vietnamese-installed puppet regime of Heng Samrin. Vietnam submitted an alternate draft resolution calling for the seating of the PRK but is was turned down. On Indian draft resolution which attempted to narrow the Kampuchean conflict was withdrawn. It was a triumph for Asean that the General Assembly adopted its resolution with a 91 to 21 vote victory with 23 abotentious. The resolution sought three fundamental pledges:

- that all parties to the Kampuchean conflict should fully observe fundamental human rights,
- that all differences should be settled peacefully,
- that the Kampuchean people should be allowed to

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* Official documents, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
choose their own government without outside interference, subversion or coercion."

To help implement the above resolution, the United Nations Secretary General was requested to explore the possibility of holding an international conference on Kampuchea.

Vietnam’s bitterness at the loss of the diplomatic struggle in the United Nations was reflected in its foreign minister’s statement of 14 November 1979, which rejected the United Nations resolution as absurd and illegal while claiming the situation in Kampuchea as irreversible.\(^9\)

To further enhance the United Nations recognition of DK, the Khmer Rouge announced a reshuffle of its leadership. Pol Pot was to be stripped of the title of Premier which would be passed over to Khieu Samphan, who also retained the title of President and chief of state of DK. Pol Pot would have no political role but would remain commander in chief. It was also announced that the socialist constitution of DK would be abrogated.\(^10\)

The revoking of the communist ideology and other cosmetic changes was designed to improve the image of

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\(^9\) Asean draft resolution for UNGA, November 1979, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

\(^10\) K.K Nair, "Words and Bayonets: Asean and Indochina". P. 119.

the Khmer Rouge and thereby to render it more amenable to attracting the Khmer Serei (non-communist Khmer) resistance groups to join the anti-Vietnamese struggle.

In the meantime, Thailand was feeling increasingly apprehensive with the increased tension along its border with Kampuchea, where the masses of refugees and Kampuchean resistance forces were poised against encroaching Vietnamese troops. Concerned with possible spillaners of violence onto Thai territory, Thailand broached the idea of a safe haven zone along the border. Such a zone would arguably halt hot pursuits of Kampuchean resistance fighters by Vietnamese troops. This would help reduce spilloners of clashes into Thai territory and thus diffuse tension along the border. A safety zone would also provide shelter for the burgeoning numbers of Khmer refugees which had increased to more than half a million by end of 1979. Certainly it would help in focussing international aid for the refugees.

Suspecting that the Thai proposal would provide a safe haven for establishing operational bases for the Kampuchean resistance, Vietnam rejected the offer. Instead it proposed, through a joint communique issued after the first of a series of annual Indochina Foreign Ministers meeting, held in Phnom Penh in January 1980, to initiate dialogue with Asean and Burma as a first step towards organising a conference of Southeast Asian nations to discuss broad regional issues. On the
question of Kampuchea the communiqué reiterated the irreversibility of the situation and warned Asean that its interests would be harmed by collusion with the Chinese hegemonists who desired to exert influence in Southeast Asia. Vietnam also offered to sign non-aggression pacto on a bilateral basis with Asean states. This was rejected by Asean for it would be tantamount to recognition of the Vietnamese installed regime of Heng Samrin.

Vietnam was however determined to succeed in seating the PRK at the 35th session of the UNGA. To this end, it undertook a public relations exercise by offering, towards the end of its second regular Foreign Ministers meeting in Vientianne on 18 July 1980, a number of proposals were designed to demonstrate its reasonableness. In line with this strategy it also indicated its willingness to partially withdraw its troops from Kampuchea, to discuss the Kuantan Principle for precluding major power rivalry within Southeast Asia and also the Asean initiated concept of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (Zopfan). In return Vietnam sought a cessation of Thai support for the Kampuchean resistance and Asean recognition of the PRK. While the Vietnamese offer in no way diluted its determination to be the dominant force in Indochina, however given past Vietnamese intractability, the latest offer appeared to be a moderation of the Vietnamese

position. This perception added further obstacle to Asean attempt to get continued United Nations support for its position. Many Western nations which agreed to DK seating in the United Nations in 1979 were becoming increasingly resentful of being seen to be supporting the brutal regime of Pol Pot.

It is testimony to Asean's astute diplomatic skill that it succeeded in getting the United Nations credentials committee to recognise DK. Due other factor which help Asean was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Taking advantage of the general anti-Soviet sentiment among many UN members, Singapore distributed among the latter a 52-page booklet "From Phnom Penh to Kabul" which portrayed the spectre of Soviet encroachment. Asean also sponsored a resolution for holding an international conference on Kampuchea (ICK) in 1981 to discuss a comprehensive political settlement of Kampuchea. The resolution was overwhelmingly supported with 97 votes against 23. It proposed a total Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Kampuchea followed by general elections. The United Nation would be tasked with ensuring law and order in Kampuchea, non-interference from extra-regional powers and supervising general elections.¹³

¹³ New Straits Times, 24 October 1980.
Non-Aligned Summit

Notwithstanding its defeat at the United Nations, Vietnam set about lobbying for support in view of the seventh Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference scheduled for February 1981, in New Delhi. To pre-empt Asean attempt to secure recognition for DK, both Hanoi and Phnom Penh invited NAM representatives to visit Phnom Penh in early February, to convince them that the situation in Kampuchea had return to normal and the Heng Samrin regime enjoyed the general support of the population. Two weeks before NAM meeting the Indochina foreign ministers met in Ho Chi Minh city and proposed a partial withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea in return from Thai cessation of support for the anti-Vietnamese resistance. The foreign ministers also proposed a regional conference between Indochina and Asean leading to a treaty on peace and stability in Southeast Asia.¹⁴

The proposals were not meant as serious initiatives towards the Kampuchean settlement, and was thus rejected by Asean. The latter had already secured UN approved for the ICK and which thus reduced the need for a regional conference as proposed by the third Indochina foreign ministers meeting. Indeed such a conference would be irrelevant since it precluded any discussion on Kampuchea. Asean also had no intention of

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¹⁴ New Straits Times, 30 January 1981.
participating in a conference in which the PRK was represented for it would imply a recognition of the latter.

The fact that the NAM conference was to be chaired by India - are of the few non-communist countries that recognised PRK, was hardly assuring to Asean. The latter apprehension was greatly increased when India refused to provide entry visas for DK representatives and instead invited the PRK representatives for the opening session of the conference. Both Vietnam and Asean (the non-align partners) engaged in verbal clash during the conference with Vietnam taking to task those countries that opposed its military role in Kampuchea. It was argued that those same countries raised no objection to the Indonesian military occupation of East Timor in 1976.\textsuperscript{15} Malaysia on the other hand critised NAM for supporting policies inconsistent with the objectives and principles of non-alignment. It accused for being blatantly pro-Soviet during the 1979 NAM conference in Havana. Objection was also raised against India's non-support for DK's representation. The final document adopted by the foreign ministers of NAM countries reflected success for Asean as it called for withdrawal of all foreign troops from Kampuchea and re-affirmed the right of the Khmer to self-determination.\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{15} Indonesian Times, 12 February 1981, produced in K. K Nair. p. 147.
\textsuperscript{16} New Straits Times, 10 February 1981.
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Flushed with the success at NAM, Asean set about preparing for an international conference on Kampuchea (ICK) scheduled for July 1981, in New York. As a requisite to convening the ICK Asean had managed to persuade China to drop its insistence on a partial Vietnamese troop withdrawal as a precondition to holding the said conference. Asean had less success in persuading the Vietnamese to attend the ICK. Asean had earlier proposed to Hanoi the holding of a regional conference of all factious involved in the Kampuchean conflicts as preparatory to the ICK. Hanoi had rejected the proposal since it was to discuss only the Kampuchean question and offered to attend only if the agenda was broadened to include all regional issues of mutual concern. On 8 May 1981, after an informal meeting of Asean foreign ministers, it was decided that the ICK should be held as planned, irregardless of the absence of representatives from Vietnam or the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{17}

After the two-day deliberation in Manila on 17 and 18 June, Asean foreign ministers drew up a tentative draft resolution for the ICK. The draft, which took into consideration Vietnam’s sense of security, reflected Asean’s readiness to reconcile its conflicting interests with Vietnam. It also testified to Asean’s desire to bring the Kampuchean conflict to an amenable political settlement, which would not only lead

to regional stability but also prevent the region from being embroiled in the Sino-Soviet rivalry. The general compromising theme and tone of the draft was unacceptable to China. The latter was particularly irked with four key resolutions. The first was with regards to Asean’s proposal to invite all the principle parties and factious including PRK’s People Revolutionary Party. China strongly objected to the latter’s participation claiming it to the merely a puppet of Vietnam. China was reportedly also not well disposed towards involvement of the Khmer Serie representatives – namely Prince Sihanauk and Son Sann. The only relevant parties, according to China, were the KR and Vietnam.

Secondly, Asean had proposed the disarming of all factious pending a negotiated settlement. This was to ensure against any possibility of the Khmer Rouge seizing power after the Vietnamese withdrawal. China was vehemently opposed to disarming its principle ally, the KR. It also objected to the proposed establishment of an interim administration after Vietnamese withdrawal. Finally China insisted that such Vietnamese troop withdrawal should be set within a certain time limit which Asean considered to be impractical.

The basic difference between Asean and China lay in the fact that while Asean sought a quick end to the

Kampuchean conflict, China was quite conted to allow the protracted conflict to carry on indefinitely, consistent with its policy of bleeding Vietnam. Asean was fully sensitive to the need to appear neutral in the Sino-Vietnam conflict but also it turned out, the final resolution adopted by the United Nations hardly bore this out. China's reticence and Thailand's willingness to give in the former's demands for fear that it might stymie the conference, lead to a rewording of the draft resolution.19

While the ICK agreed to the basic elements ceasefire and withdrawal, maintainance of law and order, general elections and the establishment of a new government, there was however no call for either disarming of all the protogonists or for setting up an interim administration following Vietnamese troop withdrawal. Even the draft resolution on the offer of aid to Vietnam after the pullout was altered. The word "Vietnam" was omitted and replaced with "all states of the region". The conference also agreed to establish an ad hoc conference committee to pursue the implementation of the resolution and to serve as the advisory body to the United Nation Secretary-General. Members of this committee were Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, Nigeria, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Sudan. Vietnam rejected the ICK resolution thereby dimming the prospects for resolution of the Kampuchea conflict.


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The conference was singularly significant for crystallising the difference in objective between Asean and China. Notwithstanding their tactical alliance, Asean (with the exception of Thailand) had always entertained scepticism of China’s intentions on settling the Kampuchean conflict. While Asean viewed the conflict as one single problem, China saw it as only one of a series of problems in the framework of its conflict with Vietnam. Aside from Kampuchea, there was other issues such as border incidents and rival claims over the South China Sea islands that aggravated relations between the two countries. China believed that the Vietnamese were acting as Soviet proxies and providing the latter the opportunity and the means for Soviet encirclement of China.

Diverging Perception Within Asean

With increasing Chinese involvement in the anti-Vietnamese struggle, there appear to develop a perceptible difference in perception among Asean on the solution to the Kampuchean conflict. Asean acknowledged China’s significant if major role in providing vital logistical support to the Kampuchean resistance. Indeed China presented the only power capable (and willing) of frustrating Vietnamese attempt to complete domination of Indochina. China was also the only country prepared to provide a countervailing force to any possible Vietnamese intrusion into Thailand. Notwithstanding the strategic alignment between Asean
and China in supporting DK and withholding recognition of PRK, there was apparent weariness especially among Indonesia and Malaysia about Asean being seen to be playing the China card on the question of Kampuchea. Both Asean member countries would prefer to be seen to be pursuing an independent policy on Indochina. Both do not subscribe to China’s policy of bleeding Vietnam white. Cognizant of China’s dubious if ambivalent position with regard to local subversive communist movements, both desire to see Vietnam emerge as a strong force in the regional strategic equation. A Vietnam strong in defensive capability was arguably believed to be able to act as a strong buffer to any extension of Chinese hegemonism in South East Asia.

But Thailand, thrusted into the position of a front line state, was convince that only China could provide the necessary deference against the perceived Vietnamese threat. Despite Malaysian and Indonesian reservations, Thailand continued with the policy of a close rapport with China, believing that the strong resilience among Asean members states would prevent the break up of the organisation.

Vietnam was quick to take advantage of apparent split within Asean. It instigated Malaysia against Thailand during the Malaysian foreign ministers visit to Hanoi in early January 1980. Thailand was
alleged to be covertly working in close collusion with Pol Pot and Beijing.\(^{20}\)

Close rapport between Thailand and China and between Vietnam and the Soviet Union would open to both major powers the window of opportunity for extension of their respective influences in the region. This was a cause for growing concern for both Malaysia and Indonesia who felt that regional interests could only be furthered with disengagement of both powers from the conflict in Indochina. This conviction was affirmed in a joint statement issued after a two-day working visit by Indonesia President Suharto to Malaysia on 27 March 1980. The statement known as the "Kuantau Principle" was aimed at excluding Southeast Asia from Sino-Soviet power rivalry and to that end called upon countries of the region to solve their own internal problems.\(^{21}\)

The Kuantau declaration drew angry reaction from Vietnam for it fail to mention United States involvement in the region. Foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach, on a visit to Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur in May 1980 assumed a tough stance and reiterated Vietnam's intention to stay in Kampuchea as long as the Chinese threat remained.\(^{22}\)


\(^{21}\) Official document, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

It would appear by this time that Asean was also split over the policy approach to solving the Kampuchean issue. One option was to abide by the United Nations resolution and to continue demanding for complete Vietnamese withdrawal. The other more flexible option was to seek partial withdrawal and acceptance of a broad-base government even if it was headed by pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin.\textsuperscript{23}

Any illusion that Vietnamese might entertain in taking further advantage of the seeming divergence within Asean was shattered by its premeditated violation of Thai territory on 23 June 1980 when two companies of Vietnamese troops penetrated two kilometres into the Thai province of Prachinburi in an attempt to dislodge the Kampuchean resistance. In the ensuing clash with the Thai military forces, a Thai reconnaissance plane and helicopter were lost. A number of Thai civilians was also killed and wounded, while more than 70,000 refugees were forced to flee for safety deeper into Thailand. Evidently alarmed about the latest Vietnamese incursion, Asean foreign ministers in a hastily held meeting on 25 June issued a joint statement condemning Vietnamese violation of Thai territory and expressed support and solidarity with Thailand in preservation of its security. Vietnamese action provided a most persuasive case for demonstration of Asean unity. It also serve to strengthen the deferrence given to Thailand and which in

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 12.
effect meant continued tactical alliance between China and Asean.

The Vietnamese incursion which happened during Co Thach's visit to Jakarta was possibly intended to send a strong signal to Asean on Hanoi's determination to counter all resistance against the so-called irreversibility of the Kampuchean situation. It had also been argued that Vietnam intended to deny the Kampuchean resistance from issuing the Thai-Kampuchean border areas as bases for their operations into Kampuchea, and to discourage the Thai from pursuing the policy of repatriating Khmer refugees back to the Khmer Rouge strongholds in Kampuchea.24

Faced with a united and almost immediate Asean response, Indochina foreign ministers met in Vientianne on 17 to 18 July 1980. In their joint statement they proposed:

- creation of demilitarised zone (DMZ) along the Thai-Kampuchea border,
- direct negotiation between Thailand and Kampuchea and any agreements arrive therefrom to be internationally endorsed,
- settlement of the refugee problem through disarmament and transfer away from the border areas.

The communique also repeated an earlier call for signing of non-aggression treaties between the

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Indochina states and Asean. It criticised Thailand for allowing itself to the used by China. The latter was condemned for attempting to increase the tension within the area by antagonising Asean against Indochina.\footnote{New Straits Times, 19 July 1980.}

The latest communique was no different from that issued earlier on and was designed to seek Asean’s tacit approved if not recognition of the PRK. Hanoi was under no illusion that the proposals would be rejected by Asean (which did) but went ahead with the communique as a public relations exercise to demonstrate its readiness to settle the Kampuchean problem peacefully. Hanoi was already preparing itself for the 35th-session of the UNGA in which the debate on Kampuchea would figure prominently.

\textbf{Anti-Vietnamese Coalition}

While Asean, through astute diplomacy managed to retain DK recognition on the international stage, it was nevertheless becoming increasingly aware of the need for a tactical change in its approach towards solving the Kampuchean question. This awareness arose out of the realisation of the difficulty in maintaining world support for DK especially because of the close association with the Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. There is also increasing wariness among Asean on the tactical alliance with Beijing bearing in mind the long-held
perception of the long-term threat posed by China to South East Asia.

Asean’s new strategy called for the formation of a broad-based coalition of anti-Vietnamese resistance. Such a coalition would undermine one of Vietnam’s principle argument that the only alternative to Heng Samrin was Pol Pot and the murderous Khmer Rouge. It would also remove the moral repugnance among many Western Nations and organisations about supporting DK. China, as the principle ally in opposing Vietnamese occupation had to be persuaded that a DK strongly associated with the Khmer Rouge would have little chance of continued support in the United Nations and ultimately would lead to the eventual recognition of the PRK. DK’s base need to be broadened to include other non-communist of the Khmer Serei groups, notably the National United Front for an independent Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia (better known under its French initials: FUNCINPEC) founded and led by Prince Sihanouk and the Khmer People National Liberation Front (KPNLF) headed by Son Sann.

Most enthusiastic about the coalition were Malaysia and Singapore who both saw it as a mean of applying the brake to any erosion of international support to DK. More importantly a coalition government would provide legitimacy to the non-communist factions and provide the necessary conduct for channelling of international aid, thereby help to raise their status
and strength. By the same token it would weaken the Khmer Rouge element within DK and hopefully reduce its chance of ever returning to power. A broad-based coalition would provide a more persuasive demonstration of the opposition against the Vietnamese occupation. At the same time, it could encourage Vietnam to seek a negotiated settlement since there was a new prospect of an alternate leadership to the Khmer Rouge.\textsuperscript{26}

Of the three proposed partners of the coalition, the Khmer Rouge remained the best organised and the most powerful. Its strength was variously estimated at between 30,000 to 40,000 fully armed combatants. It was China principle ally, receiving all of its logistical and armed requirements from the latter. Prior to 1970, the Khmer Rouge had been banned by the the Chief of State - Prince Sihanauk, for its activities deemed to undermine the position of the latter. After the March 1970 coup against Sihanauk, the Khmer Rouge entered into an alliance with Sihanauk's Kampuchea's United National Front (KUNF). It was under the banner of KUNF that the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh when the Khmer Republic under Lan Nol fell on 17 April 1975. No sooner was the Khmer Rouge in power they began to systematically eliminate all Sihanoukist elements. The prince was himself virtually held under house arrest until the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978.

\textsuperscript{26} Op cit K.K Nair. p. 150.
The KPNLF represented the biggest non-communist anti-Vietnamese movement. It was against the Son Sann, a one time instructor, confidant and Prime Minister of Prince Sihanouk, in 1967. Relations between them however soured and the two departed as less than friends. The movement which finally came to be known as KPNLF initially began as the Comite de Liaison formed as a French based anti-Khmer Rouge organization. Members was derived from the ranks of Khmer refugees in exile in France. With the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, the organisation took an anti-Vietnamese stance but remain hostile to the Khmer Rouge. It decided to establish an anti-Vietnamese front and sought support from Sihanouk by requesting the latter to lead the front. Sihanouk's rejection led Son Sann to lobby for support from Asean and China. At the same another member of the front, General Dien Del began organising a united armed resistance against Vietnam from among the non-communist Khmer resistance group along the Thai-Kampuchea border. On 9 October 1979 the KPNLF was officially formed with Son Sann as the leader. The date chosen for the inauguration of the front happened to be the anniversary of the fall of the Khmer monarchy. Sihanouk considered this to be a personal insult and further aggravated relations between him and Son Sann.27

27 For greater details on the internal dissension within the component groups of the coalition, please refer to Indochina Report, No 9, Oct - Dec. 1986. p. 16 to 19.
The KPNLF, as a front of a host of political organisation was thus inherently weak. Consensus on policy was extremely difficult to achieve. The front was divided into three main branches - the Executive Committee, the Military Committee and the council of Wise Men, with Son Sann providing the one and only link between them.

This allowed him to manipulate and interpret the decision arrived at, according to his own dictates, much to the resentment of the others. The KPNLF had between 10,000 to 15,000 fully armed fighters and could allegedly increase its troop strength if arms were available.

The FUNCINPEC represented the smallest of the tripartite group with its Armed Nationalist Sihanouk (ANS) having no more than 5000 troops. This Sihanouk group, not unlike the KPNLF was also riven with internal strife and factionalism. The two major factions were the old loyal members who were with the Prince when he headed the Sangkuma and later the KUNF, and the recent adherents who believed the Prince to be the only Khmer able to rally the anti-Vietnamese struggle. Serious split is also developed among the major personalities within the group namely between Prince Ranariddh, head of the political and diplomatic affairs, In Tam the Vice Chairman of FUNCINPEC and General Theap Ben, the commander-in-chief of the ANS. Lack of clear cut functions among the leadership and lack of discipline
within the ANS led to serious erosion in the credibility of the front.

It was formidable exercise bringing the disparate groups and supporters to form a viable, united anti-Vietnamese coalition. Firstly China had to be appraised on the new strategy, particularly since it would lead to a reduced profile of Khmer Rouge. China had also to be reconciled towards giving additional assistance to the non-communists resistance. To this end Thai Premier Prem visited Beijing in late October 1980. A month later Singapore Premier Lee Kuan Yew also dropped by to talk with the Chinese leaders. Both premiers attempted to convince China of the need to be broaden the anti-Vietnamese resistance. At that point neither Sihanouk no Son Sann had given any indication of wanting to join a coalition. Indeed Sihanauk, cognizant of the Khmer Rouge strength and its alliance with China, was apprehensive that Kampuchea might fall back into the hand of Khmer Rouge in the event of the Vietnamese withdrawal.²8

It is to Asean's credit that it was able to persuade the central players towards the formation of a single coalition.

China not only agreed to the formation of the coalition which would be led by Prince Sihanouk but was also not opposed to the eventual establishment of a

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neutral Kampuchea leaving neither toward Beijing nor Hanoi.  

It took no less than nine round of talks among the three proposed coalition partners before finally agreeing to reconcile their differences and to submit to some form of power sharing. Certainly the persuasion and pressure exerted by Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and China contributed in no small way to achieving this remarkable consensus. The coalition government of democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was formally declared on 23 June 1982 in Kuala Lumpur.

Under the terms of the agreement, Prince Sihanouk was appointed President of the CGDK, Khieu Samphan Vice President in charge of foreign affairs and Son Sann Prime Minister. Four co-ordinating committees were established in the area of finance and economy, defence, culture and education, and health and social affairs. Each participating party was represented in each co-ordinating committee in the form of ministerial appointees. CGDK was to operate on the principle of consensus, equality and non-preponderance. Each party would be allowed to retain its own organisation, political identity, freedom of action and the right to receive and dispose of any aid given to it.  

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To overcome the general scepticism that greeted the formal declaration of the coalition, the partners stressed their readiness to set aside ideologies in the greater struggle against the Vietnamese occupation of their homeland. Indeed the Khmer Rouge had earlier on, on 7 December 1981, announced the dissolution of the communist ideology in what was perceived as an attempt to forge the Kampuchean resistance into a common national front in the anti-Vietnamese struggle.\(^{31}\)

The United States welcomed the formation of the CGDK but promised no military support. The Soviet Union labelled CGDK as a provocative creation and criticized Asean's role clamming it to be inconsistent with its ZOPFAN principle.\(^{32}\) Vietnam denounced the coalition and attempted to reduce its impact on international opinion by hastily convening an Indochina foreign ministers meeting in Ho Chi Minh City on 6 to 7 July 1982. It announced a partial troop withdrawal from Vietnam and proposed convening a 15-nation international conference on Southeast Asia. It again offered to sign a non-aggression treaty with Bangkok and to establish safety zones on both sides of the Thai-Kampuchea border. Co Thach even arrange official visits to Asean capitals between 18 and 28 July, in an exercise to eclipses the significance of the CGDK, especially in view of its widely publicised proclamation on Kampuchean soil on 7 July.

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\(^{31}\) New Straits Times 8 December 1981.

That the formation of the coalition managed to stem the slide of international support for DK was evidenced by the increase in the number of votes cast in favour of its seating - 90 for, 29 against and 26 abstain, during the 1982 UNGA debate on Kampuchea. The Asean sponsored resolution was adopted by 105 countries with 23 against.

Fourth Dry Season Offensive

Beginning on 31 January 1983, Vietnam began the first of a series of offensives against the resistance forces along the Thai-Kampuchea border. This fourth dry season offensive - as it came to be known, saw 4000 Vietnamese troops backed by tanks and lights artillery engage in some of the heaviest fighting since the invasion in December 1978. The main objective of the offensive was to destroy the Kampuchean resistance and to discredit the anti-Vietnam coalition government.

The first resistance camp to fall was Nong Chan which functioned as an important KPNLF staging and recruiting area and shelter for some 24,000 refugees. Next were the Khmer Rouge camps of Phnom Chat and Chamkar Kor which were razed in March. By April, the Vietnamese began attacking the ANS headquaters camp of O'smach otherwise known as Sihanoukville.\(^33\)

\(^{33}\) Official document prepared by the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the chronology of events in the Kampuchean conflict.
Simultaneous with the attack on resistance camp, the Vietnamese launched another offensive on 24 March, directed at the Thai province of Sisaket. Backed by Soviet-made tanks, 1000 Vietnamese troops crossed into Thailand and engaged Thai forces in a large and bloody battle. Using air strikes, Thai forces managed to repel the Vietnamese. Responding to the latest Vietnamese offensive, China launched a two-day barrage of artillery shelling across the Sino-Vietnamese border, while the United States speeded shipment of arms to Thailand.

Asean Peace Overtures

Parallel to the military offensive, Vietnam was also intensely lobbying for PIRC at the seventh NAM Summit in New Delhi in March 1983. This coupled with India's impartiality led to the adoption of a vacant seat formula for Kampuchea.

Nevertheless the Summit provided an opportunity for secret talks between the foreign ministers of Malaysia and Vietnam. The two explored the possibility of settling the Kampuchean conflict through direct negotiation between Asean, Vietnam and Laos, without any participation of either CGDK or PRK.\(^\text{34}\) Co Thach was reportedly agreeable to begin through this so-called Five Plus Two formula. So were Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, albeit with different degrees

\(^{34}\) New Straits Times 13 March 1983.
of enthusiasm. Thailand however found the proposed unacceptable on account that it excluded the Kampuchean and because it was not previously consulted. Both China and the Khmer Rouge joined Thailand in chorusing their objection. The proposal was eventually disavowed by Asean.

Following the adopted Five Plus Two formula, Vietnam announced a second troop withdrawal. This was received with scepticism by Asean and China which interpreted the withdrawal as nothing more than troop rotations.

Asean’s peace initiative for the year came in September, soon after Prince Sihanouk had publicly received the credentials of the first diplomatic representatives to CGDK from Malaysia, China, North Korea, Mauritius and Bangladesh. In a more designed two show a flexible posture, Asean issued its "Appeal For Kampuchean Independence" in which Asean for the first time dropped its previously-held unconditional Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Kampuchea before peace talks. Also for the first time Asean was willing to accept a partial and not total withdrawal. Vietnam chose not to respond positively to Asean’s proposal but instead decided to stop challenging the seating of DK at the UNGA. Cognizant of Asean’s diplomatic skill, Vietnam apparently felt that pursuing international recognition for PRK would be futile and alternately

decided to concentrate on consolidating its position in Kampuchea. There have also been others who argued that Vietnam adopted the new position as a quid pro quo against Asean dropping its resolution for Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Kampuchea.\textsuperscript{36}

In an attempt to inject new and fresh impetus into the peace process Thai premier General Kriangsak visited Hanoi in January 1984. Towards the end of his 8 days visit the General noted that Vietnam had ventured no new proposals for political settlement. The following month, Indonesia’s armed forces commander, General Murdani flew into Hanoi for an official visit. On his return he made a statement to the effect that Vietnam posed no security threat to Southeast Asia. While his remarks drew sharp rejoinders from Bangkok it served to give notice particularly to the latter and China, that there was an erosion of patience in the apparent lack of progress in securing a political solution to Kampuchea. It was a reminder to the existing differences within Asean on the perception of the nature of Vietnamese threat and its implication to regional security. General Murdani’s visit led to a subsequent thaw in Vietnam-Indonesia relations and paved the way for a resumption of dialogue between the two. Within a month of Murdani’s visit, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta organised a seminar with its Vietnamese counterparts in

\textsuperscript{36} Bangkok Post 30 September and 2 October 1983 in Opcit K. K Nair. p. 178.
Hanoi in which the question of Kampuchea featured centrally in the discussions.

In a repetition of 1980, Co Thach visited Bangkok, Jakarta and Canberra in mid-March 1984 apparently to take advantage of the differences within Asean. Indonesia reportedly was adopting a new approach which excluded both Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in any political settlement. Any hope that he may have entertained in capitalising upon the seeming Asean divergence were dashed by the Vietnamese military incursion into Thailand at the end of March 1984. This provided a most compelling reason for Asean countries to close ranks behind Thailand as a front line state. In an extraordinary meeting in Jakarta on 8 May 1984 Asean issued a joint statement re-affirming Asean unity and solidarity. Indonesia also called off all overtures aimed at promoting a political settlement of Kampuchea.

Sixth Dry Season Offensive

For the second year running, Vietnam did not make an issue on the seating of DK at the UNGA in the late 1984. While Vietnam may have decided against taking any initiative at the diplomatic level, however a different course of action was being pursued at the military level. This became evident when Vietnam launched its sixth dry season offensive in mid-November. 20,000 Vietnamese troops back by Soviet-built T54 tanks
and heavy artillery struck out at the main bases of all the three Kampuchean resistance groups.\textsuperscript{37}

In the first place of this closely co-ordinated action, Vietnamese troop began a series of devastating attacks against the KPNLF bases situated along the Thai-Kampuchea border. The first camp to fall was Nong Chan, situated about 25 km. Northesat of Aranyaprathe. Next was the KPNLF's largest base at Nong Samet which was overrun on Christmas day. Following this Vietnamese troops went on to capture the front's military headquarters at Ampil on January 1985. Vietnamese troop subsequently overrun seven out of the eight KPNLF bases. The second phase of the Vietnamese assault was directed against the Khmer Rouge bases in Phnom Malai, Phnom Mak Houne and Ban Charat in the rugged Dongrak mountains. Notwithstanding the 10,000 Khmer Rouge fighters, Vietnamese troops overrun all the Khmer Rouge bases along the Thai-Kampuchean border. In the final phase of their onslaught, the Vietnamese troops directed their fire at the main ANS base at Tatum. The latter managed to hold out for only one week, before succumbing to heavy Vietnamese artillery barrage on 11 March 1985.

Not since the December 1978 invasion of Kampuchea had there been such large scale deployment of Vietnamese forces against their Kampuchean fighters.

\textsuperscript{37} Extensive account of the 6th Dry Season Offensive was reported in the New Straits Times over the period from December 1984 to March 1985.\textsuperscript{A}
That Vietnam was able to rout the entire resistance forces was a shocking military and psychological blow to the Kampuchean resistance. Casualties were heavy among the KPNLF and heavy still among the tens of thousands of refugees than began streaming into Thailand. The latter was already burdened with having to maintain some 200,000 old refugees since the Vietnamese occupation of Vietnam. It was had to contend with 22,000 more refugees as a result of the latest offensive. There were also Thai military and civilian casualties. Hot pursuits by Vietnamese soldiers in Thai territory had led to clashes with Thai forces. A Thai airforce A-37 jet was also shot down by Vietnamese artillery fire.

Strengthening the Opposition

The relative ease with which the Vietnamese troops routed the forces of the CGDK only demonstrated the generally held view that the coalition was militarily incapable of resisting the opposing forces. The coalition was also inherently politically weak, evidenced by the fact that since its formation in June 1982, it had lived a precarious existence. It was riven with intense personal rivalry and debilitating quarrels among its three principle leaders. So intense was this internecine conflict that Sihanouk at one point in 1983 had threatened to resign unless Son Sann desist from attacking him. During a trip to Tokyo in July 1983, Sihanauk had proposed a reconciliation of the CGDK with
Heng Samrin.\textsuperscript{38} The Prince felt that the viability and strength of the CGDK would be enhanced if all the Kampuchean factious could unite into one organisation preparatory to free elections. The proposal was however strongly criticised by his coalition partners. Adding to his frustration was the fact that China had not supplied his faction with the material support that was promised.

Asean was equally disappointed that the coalition that it helped organise appeared to be consumed with its own internal squabbles. While Asean demonstrated enthusiastic support to the CGDK in the international fora, it entertained some reservations about the coalition’s long-term viability. During on Asean foreign ministers meeting in Bnagkok in June 1983, the Indonesian foreign minister lamented the fact that the CGDK had yet to demonstrate itself as a truly effective force.\textsuperscript{39}

The intense animosity between the principle leaders had its spill over effects among the followers. There were numerous incidences of Khmer Rouge killing or capturing force members of the KPNLF and the ANS. It was claimed that the Khmer Rouge soldiers were deliberately sabotaging the military operations of its coalition partners. Military friction, tactical

\textsuperscript{38} Justus M Van Der Kroef "Kampuchean: Diplomatic Gambits and Political Realities. p. 155.

\textsuperscript{39} Asiaweek 8 July 1983. p. 7 in Ibid. p. 156.
differences and leadership squabbles, thus painted a dismal picture of the CGDK's effectiveness.

Compounding the disunity of the tripartite coalition was the internal dissension within the KPNLF itself. The leadership style of Son Sann created considerable dissatisfaction among the executive and the military committees of the Front. They contended that major decisions should not be the sole prerogative of the leader. Eventually this led to a fallout between Son Sann and his commanding general Dien Del. In the subsequent restructuring of the KPNLF leadership, military control was turned over to General Sak Sutsakarn with General Dien Del ceding as chief of staff.

ASEAN had hoped that the non-communist faction could merge to eventually change the balance of power within the CGDK. This was essential if the Khmer Rouge were to be prevented from seizing power in the event of Vietnamese withdrawal. But relations between Sihanouk and Son Sann had not improved. Indeed in April 1985, Sihanouk had once again threatened to resign as President of CGDK. However owing to the strong pressure from ASEAN, they agreed in June 1985 to organise a unified military command with General Sak as overall command. It was ASEAN's hope that eventual joint military operations between the 20,000 strong KPNLF and the 5000 men army of Prince Sihanouk would convert the non-communist factious into a more formidable force.
More importantly it would reflect close co-operation between them thereby strengthening ASEAN's lobby for continued international recognition and support for the CGDK.

The severe trouncing of the coalition forces during Vietnam's sixth dry season offensive led to a reassessment by the former of its military strategy. The wisdom of maintaining permanent bases with families living together with soldiers was abandoned in favour of small grouping engaged in the classic hit-and-run tactics of guerilla fighters. Families and dependant were to be removed to safer sanctuaries. There was also recognition that the resistance forces need to be quantitively and qualitatively improved and to this end ASEAN appeal to the international committee in early February 1985 to provide military assistance to the resistance forces. The United States responded with US$ 5 million worth of aid for the non-communist factious.

In July, the Khmer Rouge suggested that it was willing to play a less pivotal role in a future independent Kampuchea. In September it announced the replacement of Pol Pot by Son Sen as chief commander. Pol Pot was reportedly appointed director of Higher Institute for National Defence. The reshuffle in the Khmer Rouge leadership could be an attempt at image building directed at the coming NAM meeting in Angola. It was generally recieved with a fair amount of scepticism even among its coalition partners. Be as it
may, the reshuffle anguished well in the attempt at enhancing the viability of the coalition. This was given added significance when the coalition partners undertook a four-day publicity visit to Beijing, early December 1985.

While measures were being undertaken to bolster the strength of the resistance, political actions were also being pursued to find a solution to the Kampuchean conflict. The UN Secretary General flew into Hanoi but received no new proposals from Vietnam. Australian foreign minister Bill Hayden was also in Hanoi during the height of dry season offensive which inevitably doomed his peace initiative. China attempted to persuade the Soviet Union to pressure Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Kampuchea, as a first step towards improvement of Sino-Soviet relations. With the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev China was keen to establish rapport with the Soviet and partly because of this, China's much publicised threat of a second "lesson" to Vietnam never materialise. Asean also endeavoured to initiate fresh approaches at both bilateral and corporate levels. Indonesia in mid-March 1985, suggested linking the process of the Kampuchean settlement to the normalisation of United States-Vietnam relations in which the settlement of the issue of the POWMIA's would feature prominently. The United States however was not enthusiastic about the proposal. Following this Malaysia proposed holding "proximity talks" between members of the CGDK and Heng Samrin.
through a mutually acceptable intermediary. In difference to objections raised by Thailand, the proximity talks formula was adjusted to substitute Vietnam for the Heng Samrin faction. The modified proposal was promptly rejected by Vietnam.

Towards the end of the year, Asean once again recorded success in its diplomatic battle for the DK, at the United Nations. 114 countries voted for the seating of the coalition government in the General Assembly.