

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PEACE PROPOSALS

#### 1. Introduction

A study of past wars would lead us to the conclusion that most conflicts end in one of the three following ways: conquest and surrender, compromise and accomodation and finally partition and separation. More conflicts end through the use of force than through the process of negotiations. The latter is not only usually time consuming but demands difficult political decisions from the national leadership. Such decisions usually involve concessions which inevitably result in losses, and which can be made out to be a betrayal or a sacrifice of fundamental national values such as prestige and honour. The whole process of negotiations is thus rendered agonising.

Most past conflicts were solved bilaterally between the adversaries. It is only when the peace process becomes intractable that a third party is introduced, usually in the form of mediator. More often than not, mediation is effected through an international organisation. International organisations have on occassions managed to reduce the level of conflict, but the more important the dispute, the less likely they are to resolve it.<sup>1</sup> Mediation is only applicable when the

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<sup>1</sup> K.J Holsti "International Politics: A Framework for Analysis" p. 425.

phase of the conflict has moved from one in which the protagonists emphasize their differences, to one in which they begin to underscore agreements and common interests.<sup>2</sup> Resolutions can only be achieved when both adversaries begin to accept the need for concession and compromise.

The Kampuchean conflict is derived from internal politics. But with the fusion of regional and global politics, its resolutions becomes intractable. The declared positions of the main protagonists appeared mutually exclusive. There was no indications of a desire or willingness to compromise. In the face of such obduracy mediations were bound to fail. Nevertheless it did result in a degradation of the conflict towards the end of 1985. Be that as it may, it provides little comfort to the Kampucheans, who continue to suffer the privations, violence and injustice.

## 2. Vietnamese Position

The major forum for the Vietnamese policy pronouncements on Kampuchea had been its semi-annual foreign ministers meeting. In its first regular meeting in Phnom Penh in January 1980, it offered to initiate dialogue with Asean and Burma to discuss the wider issues of Southeast. There was no mention of a Kampuchean problem. Indeed in the early phase of the Kampuchean

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<sup>2</sup> P. Edward Haley "Which Way Out: Reflections on Ways Wars End' p. 4

occupation, Vietnam denied the existence of a Kampuchean problem. Asean's attempts for direct talks on the problem was regarded as "crude interference" in Kampuchean internal affairs. The only issue for discussion was China's hegemonistic designs in collusion with Asean and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, to impose its influence on Kampuchea.

It was only in July 1982 during the sixth Indochina Foreign Ministers meeting that Vietnam appeared to subtly imply the existence of a Kampuchean problem and called for a regional conference between the three Indochina countries and Asean, to be followed by an international conference. By January 1984, the eighth meeting of the Indochina countries accepted for the first time that there was a Kampuchean problem. However it refused to discuss it before settling the general question of peace and security in Southeast Asia. This meeting was noteworthy for the fact that it elaborated five possible directions in which the situation in Southeast Asia - as it applied to Kampuchea can evolve.<sup>3</sup> These directions appended hereunder, underscored Vietnam's definition of the Kampuchean situation.<sup>4</sup>

- i) a global solution involving the withdrawal of all foreign armed forces from the region, an end to

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<sup>3</sup> Karl D. Jackson "Indochina in Early 1984: Doves of Peace or Dogs of War" in Donald E. Weatherbee (eds) "Southeast Asia Divided: The Asean-Indochina Crisis" pp. 124 - 125.

<sup>4</sup> Kusuma Snitwongse "The Issues for Consideration" p.2.

external intervention and establishment of a zone of peace, friendship and co-operation

- ii) a partial settlement involving the three Indochina countries and China aimed at the total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea paired with termination of the Chinese threat, use of Thai territory by the Kampuchean resistance to threaten the Indochina countries .
- iii) a partial settlement involving the three Indochina countries and Thailand on the basis of equal security for both parties and the setting up of a safety zone along both sides of the Thai-Kampuchea border.
- iv) pending the above settlements, an agreement on the principles governing relations between the three Indochina countries and Asean with the aim of checking any escalation of the present conflict
- v) a continuation of the present conflict which could lead to an explosive situation that China could take advantage of to provoke a large scale war in Southeast Asia.

Over the years, Vietnam's basic position on the solution to the Kampuchean conflict had remained substantially unchanged. The three fundamental issues were:

- i) withdrawal of Vietnamese troops would be contingent upon the elimination of the Pol Pot clique
- ii) self determination would be carried out within the framework of the PRK constitution
- iii) national reconciliation would be carried out without the participation of the Pol Pot clique and unrepentent Khmer Rouge members.

### 3. Asean Position.

Vietnam's invasion and subsequent occupation of Kampuchea was regarded as a violation of the cardinal rule of the sanctity of sovereign nations. Asean thus demanded immediate and unconditional Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea. Vietnamese occupation had brought about the involvement of extra regional powers, aggravated the refugee problem and more importantly undermined Thai sense of security. Asean thus sought an overarching political solution which would tackle all these related problems. Asean's definition of the Kampuchean problem was underscored by the ICK Declaration of July 1981.<sup>5</sup> With a view to reaching a comprehensive political settlement, the conference called for negotiation on the following:

- i) a ceasefire of all combatants and withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea under UN supervision

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 5.

- ii) arrangements to ensure that the Kampuchean factions will not disrupt the elections and that they will accept the result of said elections
- iii) arrangements to maintain law and order and the holding of elections following the withdrawal of all foreign forces, pending the establishment of a new government resulting from the elections
- iv) the holding of a free elections under UN supervision and in which all Khmers have the right to participate.<sup>6</sup>

Over the years of confrontation, Asean had upto 1985, proposed some 16 different packages for a peaceful solution to the Kampuchean conflict. While these proposals may appear to have been incrementally modified, their core elements remained unchanged. These include:

- i) total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea
- ii) elections for an independent, neutral, non-aligned and democratic Kampuchea
- iii) national reconciliation of all the Kampuchean factions.

Asean's initiative in the peace process was rendered difficult by China's divergent interests and goals. Basic to China's calculations was that the Khmer Rouge should figure in any future political equation of

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<sup>6</sup> Donald E. Weatherbee op cit p. 109.

Kampuchea. Hence attempts by Asean to undermine this calculation had met with strong Chinese opposition. This was amply testified during the drafting of the ICK resolution, the proposal for the Five plus Two negotiating format and the proximity talks. China had not shown itself to be overly eager to settle the Kampuchean conflict for reasons elaborated in earlier chapters.

#### 4. The Core Issues.

While it would appear that many issues have been raised in the context of finding a negotiated settlement, most could be subsumed under the fundamental issue of power sharing. The parties that would eventually govern Kampuchea would be of crucial importance particularly to Vietnam, China and to a lesser extent to Asean. The other core issues would revolve around the questions of the forum for the peace negotiations and Vietnamese troop withdrawal.

#### 5. The Governance of Kampuchea

In the initial phase Vietnam declared the situation in Kampuchea as being irreversible. By this is meant that the PRK government headed by Heng Samrin was the legitimate government, to be neither removed nor replaced by the Asean - backed tripartite coalition, the CGDK. If at all there should be any elections, it could only be held under the supervision of the PRK, within the

framework of the latter's constitution. Only selected, repentant Khmers could participate in the elections which should not undermine or subvert the dominant position of the pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin. The Khmer Rouge were to be denied any political involvement.

However by the time that the 12th regular Indochina foreign ministers meeting was held in January 1985, Vietnam had modified its position to the extent that the non-communist Kampuchean factions could be allowed some form of power-sharing, on the condition that Pol Pot and his clique be eliminated. Vietnam would not agree to any participation of the United Nations for it held the latter suspect for giving recognition to the DK instead of the PRK.

It is unlikely that Vietnam would ever tolerate an independent, neutral and non-aligned Kampuchea, for this would imply a change in the external affiliation of the country - a situation which would be diametrically opposed to the Vietnamese perception of a single Indochina entity, with Vietnam reigning dominant over a subservient Laos and Kampuchea.

Asean's position on the other hand differed from the Vietnamese in that it called for a change in the regime in Phnom Penh. Asean cannot accept a Vietnamese-imposed government and would only acknowledge an administration established through an exercise of free elections supervised by the United Nations. Asean had insisted that all Kampuchean factions be disarmed to



ensure a free elections. An interim administration would be organised to maintain order pending the establishment of an elected government. All Khmers irrespective of their political or ideological persuasions would partake in the elections.

Asean insisted on a Kampuchea that is independent, non-aligned, neutral and democratic. What this amounts to was that there should be equal power sharing among the various Kampuchean factions - preferably without Pol Pot and his clique. This would of course imply a much reduced role for Heng Samrin.

#### 6. Forum for Negotiations

The fact that both Vietnam and Asean have been unable to agree on the modalities for negotiations was a reflection of the intractability of the conflict. Initially Vietnam had attempted to skirt the issue of its occupation of Kampuchea and focussed attention to the border problem between Thailand and Kampuchea. To this effect it proposed direct talks between Thailand and the PRK. Rejected by Thailand and faced with a sustained Asean endeavour for a political settlement, Vietnam tried to defuse the question of Kampuchea by calling for a regional conference between Asean and the three Indochina countries to discuss the general security problems of Southeast Asia. This was dismissed by Asean which felt that a regional conference without a prior settlement of the Kampuchean conflict, would be premature.

In response to Asean's call for an international conference under the United Nations auspices as provided by the ICK, the Indochina foreign ministers, after its fifth meeting in February 1982, repeated an earlier call for a regular dialogue between Asean and Indochina. This was again rejected by Asean which viewed such dialogue as serving to obscure the central issue. Vietnam modified its position slightly after the sixth Indochina foreign ministers' meeting in July 1982. This time around Vietnam called for a regional conference to be followed immediately by an international conference to include Asean, the three Indochina countries, Burma, Soviet Union, China, United States, France, Great Britain and India.<sup>7</sup> As before, it emphasized the exclusion of all the Kampuchean factions except the Heng Samrin group.

In 1983, during an informal discussion between the Malaysian and Vietnamese foreign ministers, on the occasion of the NAM ministerial meeting in New Delhi a proposal emerged for talks between Asean and Vietnam and Laos, without including any Kampuchean faction. This was the first time Vietnam had agreed to a dialogue without the participation of the PRK. This format, known as the "Five plus Two" formula, appealed to both Indonesia and Singapore but recieved decidedly negative reaction from both Thailand and Philippines. China was equally unenthusiastic. The proposal was thus abandoned.

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<sup>7</sup> Karl D. Jackson op cit p. 33.

By 1985, further modification was seen in the Vietnamese position which had moved from a rigid stance of exclusion to acceptance of the non-communist Kampuchean factions. The 11th meeting of the Indochina foreign ministers in August 1985, issued a communique which suggested initiation of dialogue between Heng Samrin and the other Kampuchean factions to discuss aspects of national reconciliation, and general elections following a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. However the proposed national reconciliation was to be realised only on the basis of the elimination of the Pol Pot clique.<sup>8</sup>

Asean, unlike Vietnam preferred an international forum under United Nations auspices to settle the Kampuchean problem. Thus was the ICK convened in New York in July 1981, which focussed attention on Vietnam's illegal occupation of Kampuchea and violation of the Khmer's right to self determination. Asean's preference however did not preclude bilateral or direct dialogue with Vietnam. This was reflected in the aborted "Five plus Two" formula proposed in 1983. In the aftermath of the 1985 onslaught against the Kampuchean resistance, Asean restated its basis for a negotiated settlement and called upon Vietnam to open direct dialogue with the tripartite coalition.

In July 1985, Asean proposed yet another forum, in the form of "proximity talks". As originally

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<sup>8</sup> Kusuma Snitwongse op cit p. 20.

conceived by Malaysia, the negotiating parties were to be the CGDK and the PRK. This was to allow greater role for all the Khmer factions involved in the Kampuchean conflict. The contending parties would be seated in adjoining rooms with an intermediary shuttling back and forth providing the conduit for the talks. This formula thus neatly side-stepped the issue of non-recognition of the Heng Samrin regime. However Thailand objected to the very presence of the PRK which would be tantamount to accepting its de jure existence. China and the CGDK also showed equal concern. In deference to this, the proposal was modified and the final version called for indirect talks between Vietnam and the CGDK with the PRK representatives to be part of the Vietnamese delegation. Hanoi saw nothing new in this modified version and regarded the proposal as absurd.

#### 7. Vietnamese Troops Withdrawal

Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Kampuchea had increased tension along the Thai-Kampuchea border and had by the same token increased Thailand's apprehension regarding its security. In an attempt to capitalise on Thailand's border concerns with the hope thereby of diluting the central issue of its occupation of Kampuchea, Vietnam had sought to redefine the Kampuchean problem as a Thai-Kampuchean border dispute. At its July 1980 Indochina Foreign Ministers meeting in Vientianne, it proposed a demilitarized zone along the border area, which would entail a pull-back of both Thai and

Vietnamese soldiers from their respective sides of the border. It also proposed direct talks between Thailand and Kampuchea. Asean rejected this attempt at implicit bilateralisation of the Kampuchea problem. However by 1983, as a step towards reducing tension along its border, Thailand proposed that Vietnamese troops withdraw 30 km. from the Thai-Kampuchea border. This proposal was rejected by Vietnam, for it would allow unrestrained infiltration by Kampuchean resistance forces. Instead Vietnam counter proposed the creation of safety zones along the border which would allow the presence of Thai and PRK soldiers but precluded those of the resistance forces. This Vietnamese proposal would imply acceptance of the PRK and was thus promptly rejected by the Thais.

With regards to the removal of the Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea as demanded by Asean, Vietnam had declared that for so long as the "China threat" remained, for so long would Vietnamese troops remain in Kampuchea. However, in mid-1982 the sixth Indochina foreign ministers meeting announced that as the token of good faith, Hanoi intended to carry out a partial withdrawal of its troops from Kampuchea. After the 1983 Indochina summit meeting, Hanoi revealed a plan for an annual unilateral withdrawal of its troops. This so-called withdrawal was described by Asean as nothing more than a mere rotation of troops. It was pointed out that the 1985 dry season offensive did not credibly testify to any degradation of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea.

In 1985, the 11th Indochina foreign ministers meeting issued a communique announcing that the annual troop withdrawal would be pursued till total withdrawal by 1990. It was claimed that by that time there would be no more Kampuchean problem, thus obviating the need for Vietnamese troops presence. PRK forces would by then have been sufficiently strengthened and increased to assume the security burden. However should security conditions warrant it, Vietnamese troops could be re-deployed.

Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Kampuchea formed one of Asean's core demands. Only in the absence of intimidating foreign occupational forces could free national elections and national reconciliation take place. Thus from the very beginning of the conflict, Asean had insisted on a complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops.

This position was subsequently modified when Asean formulated its "Appeal for Kampuchean Independence" in September 1983. It was proposed that Vietnamese troops withdraw in stages, on a territorial basis commencing from the Thai-Kampuchea border. No fixed time frame was indicated, merely that it would be a subject for mutual discussion between the protagonists. A ceasefire was to be observed in those areas free of armed troops, followed by a re-settlement by Kampuchean refugees under UNHCR supervision. An international

peace keeping force which would include representatives from Vietnam would verify the withdrawal and supervise the ceasefire. This was to help allay Vietnamese fears of a return to power of the Khmer Rouge. Finally an international conference would be convened to discuss the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Kampuchea.

Asean's appeal however was not appealing enough for Vietnam which rejected the proposal.

#### 8. Bilateral Moves

Paralled to Asean's corporate efforts towards finding a political settlement, direct negotiation were also being pursued by individual member countries. In September 1981 Indonesia's deputy head of the National Intelligence Co-ordinating Agency (BAKIN) Lt. Gen. Benny Murdani, visited Hanoi for exploratory talks. It was not till his next visit in February 1984 that Indonesia appeared to be playing a more active role as the Asean interlocutor. It has been argued that Jakarta's exasperation with the failure thus far of the Asean position had caused it to pursue direct negotiation with Hanoi. Following Benny's visit a series of high level exchanges were conducted between the two countries.

This resulted in a percieved independent line being pursued by Indonesia, a development which particularly unnerved the Thais. Foreign minister Mokhtar Kusumaatmadja, in his capicity as the official Asean interlocutor had authored a 12-point agenda for

discussion with his Vietnamese counterpart. Among the listed items was a proposal for a demilitarized zone along the Thai-Kampuchea border - an idea first mooted by Vietnam in July 1981 and dismissed by the Thais on the ground that it represented Vietnamese attempt to dilute the Kampuchean problem. Also galling to the Thais was the Indonesian armed forces' seemingly conciliatory attitude towards the Vietnamese, ranging from Gen. Benny's statement that Vietnam posed no threat to Southeast Asia, to the proposed stationing of a Vietnamese military attach to Jakarta. Both Thailand and China felt that this open manifestation of differences within Asean would widen the opportunity for Vietnam to drive a wedge among Asean members, and thus counselled Indonesia to be more cautious.

Indonesia had also suggested that the United States establish closer ties with Vietnam as part of an exercise towards making Vietnam more amenable to the peace settlement. The suggestion was scoffed by the state department as both unwarranted and untimely.

As far as seeking a political settlement to Kampuchea was concerned, the Indonesian initiatives produced no positive results.

When the Australian government came to power in early 1983, the new administration under Premier Hawke carefully chartered a course distancing itself from an



open-ended political commitment to Asean.<sup>9</sup> In line with the Labour party's electoral promises, a policy was advocated, intended to use Australian's good office to help settle the Kampuchean conflict. While the course set by the foreign ministry was with good intentions, it was to put Australia and Asean on a collision course. The Labour government announced that it intended to resume aid to Vietnam and to undertake cultural exchanges with the latter without setting any pre conditions. The Australian proposal was loudly decried by Asean which saw it as undermining the effort to isolate Vietnam.

In April 1983, Foreign Minister Bill Hayden undertook a tour of Asean countries - the itinerary also included visits to Hanoi and Beijing, with the intention of explaining the government's policy towards Vietnam. Hayden also brought along a set of proposals for settlement of the Kampuchean problem. It called for Vietnam to effect a phased withdrawal from Kampuchea and a self-determination exercise to elect a neutral, independent and non-aligned government. Vietnam was to create the necessary conditions for the peaceful return of the Khmers and to finally restore relations with Asean, China and the West.<sup>10</sup> Australia also offered to play a mediatory role between Asean and Vietnam.

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<sup>9</sup> Donald E. Weatherbee "The Diplomacy of Stalemate" in Donald E. Weatherbee op cit p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> New Straits Times 24 April 1983.

Like the Indonesian initiative, Australian's good intentions failed due to rejection by both Asean and Vietnam.

A number of European countries had also variously attempted to draw both Vietnam and Asean into dialogue either directly or through an international forum. In December 1982, Romanian Premier Nicolae Ceausescu visited Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia and suggested a limited international conference on Kampuchea. This was rejected by Asean which preferred a conference within the framework of the ICK. Romanian efforts towards mediating in direct talks between Vietnam and China also met with little success. The same fate befell Belgium's attempts to get Vietnam to talk directly to Prince Sihanouk. There had also been efforts by Soviet Deputy Premier Mikhail Kapitsa in February 1983, the United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and his special envoy Rafeeudin Ahmad, to nudge Asean and the Indochina countries towards the negotiating table, but these have not been fruitful.

#### 9. Stalemate

By the end of 1985, no substantial progress had been recorded in the search for a negotiated settlement to the Kampuchean conflict. Each contending party had over the years offered several seemingly different peace packages. But in truth, their respective basic positions remained unaltered. These positions reflect

fundamental values that neither side appeared willing to compromise. On the surface, it would appear that there were convergences and commonalities in their basic positions. But such similarities were only symbolic, since the definition of terms "self-determination", "independent", "neutral" and "non-aligned" when applied to Kampuchea's future by Asean and Vietnam, tended to indicate something substantially different from each other.<sup>11</sup> With the ensuing diplomatic deadlock, both parties believed that with time, their respective positions would be enhanced. This attitude only served to reinforce the political stalemate in the peace process.

Vietnam had publicly committed itself to withdrawing from Kampuchea by the year 1990. This was a promise made not so much because of the contention that by 1990 there would no longer be a Kampuchean problem but more because of possible weariness with a seemingly endless state of war. After 40 years of violent struggle to gain its freedom, it would appear that Vietnam no longer relished the prospect of another protracted war, and even less when that war had to be fought in a third country necessitating the deployment of troops away from home. It was suspected that there was an undercurrent of desire among both soldiers and

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<sup>11</sup> Donald E. Weatherbee "Asean and Year Eight of the Third Indochina War: A Non-Establishment View". p. 16.

civilians in Vietnam and Kampuchea for an end to the state of turmoil and conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Both Vietnam and Asean did not cherish the idea of Khmer Rouge return to power but both parties have been rather vague in exactly how each intended to eliminate the Khmer Rouge. On the Asean position, it would be hard to imagine how the Khmer Rouge would ever be a willing party to an exercise that would send it into political oblivion. It has been argued that in the event of a Vietnamese troops withdrawal, there is no guarantee that the Khmer Rouge would not attempt to seize power. Asean's contention that an International Supervisory and Control Commission of Peace Keeping Force would prevent such a development sounds less than convincing when it is recalled that the success record of past peace keeping forces in other conflict areas had been rather dismal.

Vietnam on the other hand had neither identified the Pol Pot clique nor specified how it was to be eliminated. It insisted that the matter was internal in nature and should be referred to the Heng Samrin regime.

More than any other power, China held a crucial if not principal role in the settlement of the Kampuchean problem. Thus far it had not demonstrated any serious desire for an early settlement. China's policy of containing Vietnam was well served by the present

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<sup>12</sup> Impression gauged by the writer in discussion with officials and laymen during an official trip to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city in 1986.

conflict. Until and unless Asean is able to convince the Chinese otherwise, the prospects for an early settlement of the Kampuchean conflict would appear to be quite remote.

Asean presently feels that within the context of what is practical and feasible, in contrast to what is desirable and unreachable, the current stalemate constitutes an acceptable temporary solution. While it arguably bears little cost to Asean, it has been otherwise for Vietnam. Over the course of the Kampuchean conflict, Asean had registered impressive economic growth while Vietnam on the other hand, had to labour along with an impoverished economy, wretched living conditions and international isolation.

## CONCLUSION

Local politics alone would not have brought about the Kampuchean conflict, but for the fusion of the dynamics of regional as well as global politics. In the aftermath of its victory over the Replublican government of Lon Nol, Pol Pot launched an intensive campaign to rid the party, the administration and the armed forces of any vestiges of pro-Vietnamism. This was regarded as a necessary requisite in building a new purified Kampuchea. In his attempts to enhance the strength and viability of his newly-won independence, Pol Pot not only rejected Vietnamese proposals for establishment of special relations but decided to secure his definition of the Kampuchea-Vietnam border. Convinced of the Khmer Rouge's superiority and believing Vietnam to be too engrossed in its own domestic troubles, Pol Pot began a series of provocations against his once erstwhile comrade.

Vietnam, for reasons of security had traditionally regarded Indochina as one unified theatre, with itself playing the principal role. Given Pol Pot's ultranationalist stance, friction between Hanoi and Phnom Penh became inevitable. As hostilities increased, Vietnamese concern gave way to alarm when China was seen to be strongly abetting the Kampucheans. China was all too aware of Vietnamese intentions of wanting to be the dominant power in Indochina. But Beijing was too preoccupied in its own internecine domestic turmoil to forge a clear cut policy towards Indochina. As its

relations with Vietnam deteriorated, it saw in Pol Pot's intrasigence an opportunity to get even with Hanoi. Thus when Pol Pot went to war against Vietnam, China threw its full support behind the Khmer Rouge.

The United States showed little care and even less concern to the unfolding drama in Indochina. There was little that could rekindle its interest after its ignominious defeat in 1975. Thus Vietnamese attempts to normalise relations with the United States with the hope of bringing it back to the region as a possible player in the emerging power configuration, were bound to fail. The United States was looking beyond Vietnam, and was hoping to win over the Chinese as a tactical move in its strategic conflict with the Soviet Union. Vietnam thus had no alternative but to seek countervailing support from the Soviet Union which was only too willing to lend a helping hand in return for benefits which would place it at a distinct advantage in the context of its own increasing conflict with China.

The conjunction of such international events exacerbated the Indochina situation which led to a Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and a subsequent Chinese invasion of Vietnam's northern provinces. With the seizure of Phnom Penh, Vietnam installed a pliant regime and began consolidating its position in Kampuchea. But this was at best a difficult if impossible task. Not only had Vietnam to contend with a weak PRK, but it had to continue deployment of massive number of its troops in

the face of increasing opposition from the Kampuchean resistance forces. Vietnam was determined to be the dominant power in Indochina and to this end, it was being actively supported by the Soviet Union. But its drive for supremacy was frustrated by its own economic woes, and the inability to consolidate its position in Kampuchea due in large measure to the opposition provided by the CGDK, China and Asean.

While Asean sought a quick negotiated settlement to the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, China however was determined to punish Vietnam and to pre-empt the latter from establishing its influence in Southeast Asia. The endeavour towards a political settlement, have stalemated into a quagmire of proposals and counter-proposals. But propitious international development may yet bring about an acceptable end to the Kampuchean conflict just as it was the conjunction of international events that escalated the conflict. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev had gone on record as having indicated its desire for an early settlement of the Kampuchean conflict. Given the increasing rapprochement between the super powers and a perceptible trend towards an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, the international climate for possible resolution of the Kampuchean problem appears more encouraging. At a more local level, Hanoi had begun a partial withdrawal of its troops from Kampuchea, and the different Kampuchean factions and other key players have consented to a negotiating



mechanism even if it was only in the form of an informal cocktail.

There is now a new balance of power in Southeast Asia. This is a strategic reality that has to be accepted by all the contending parties. It is also a fact that to secure peace and stability, the security of each contender has to be assured. The super powers are best placed to guarantee such a security, such that Vietnam, China and Thailand will neither threaten nor feel threatened. Japan has publicly declared during the recent June 1988 meeting between Asean and the dialogue countries in Bangkok, its support for a negotiated settlement with a generous offer of economic aid to Vietnam, thus providing the latter with an alternative to total dependence on the Soviet Union.

Countries like men can rise or fall to the level of their circumstances. Vietnam, China and Asean (read Thailand) must have the political will to rise to the occasion, to take advantage of the positive configuration of the dynamics of global politics and to come to terms for a political settlement of the Kampuchean conflict.