
SOUTHEAST ASIA

The 'third force is a fraud

by Daniel Sneider, Asia Editor

A byzantine whirl of Southeast Asian diplomacy has revived the flagging fortunes of the attempt to patch together a front of anti-Vietnamese Cambodian exile groups, which would include the infamous Khmer Rouge of the deposed barbaric Pol Pot regime as well as the non-communist forces of Prince Sihanouk and his one-time Premier, Son Sann.

Those who find the bloody hands of the Khmer Rouge a liability have promoted the so-called Third Force of Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and Sihanouk's band of followers known as the Moulinaka. The two groups command a following of 5,000 armed men at best along the Thai border area. Son Sann himself was in Washington recently to promote his own importance, and *EIR* caught him there for an interview.

For the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, the Third Force is promoted as a "legitimate" anti-Vietnamese entity that perhaps can be built up as a counter to Pol Pot as well. For the Chinese, who seek to drag out a military campaign to "bleed" Vietnam, the Third Force can provide diplomatic and political cover for their Khmer Rouge clients. For the pro-Peking State Department, the Third Force has much the same value as it does for China. ASEAN circles are still angry over the U.S. backing for China during the July U.N. conference on Cambodia.

The Vietnamese, for their part, have no worries about the Third Force. As I saw myself during a visit to Cambodia several months ago, Pol Pot, and anyone with ties to him, is eternally hated by the Cambodian people, and the fantasies of a "coalition" coming to power in Cambodia are increasingly meaningless to the reality of the new life emerging in that country. However, Vietnamese diplomatic sources concede that ASEAN needs the Third Force as a diplomatic bargaining card when they finally decide to negotiate seriously with the Indochinese countries.

Son Sann has the pathetic character of a man who knows his usefulness is only temporary but who nonetheless is trying to sell himself as the man who can make it work. As one sharp-tongued observer told me: "Son Sann is a \$2 whore trying to make it as a \$500 call girl."



Son Sann (l.) with titular Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan in September.

The State Department treats him as such: while in Washington they show him around at cocktail parties but privately, according to sources in the KPNLF, they tell him that unless he gets favorable coverage in the U.S. press they can never get Congress to approve the arms aid he desperately wants.

While Son Sann claims to be a pristine nationalist who hates the Khmer Rouge, he is willing to take the aid, including arms, of the Chinese, controllers of every action of the Pol Pot regime which killed 2 to 3 million Cambodians. When *EIR* posed the issue of Chinese responsibility in our interview, he ducked the question. Sources close to Son Sann tried to claim that Pol Pot was a product of the "Gang of Four," not of the Deng Xiaoping regime, although the Deng group has in fact continued to back the Pol Pot regime in all its actions.

As the coalition has proved itself to be unviable, sentiment has increased within ASEAN to seek avenues for direct negotiations with the Indochinese countries.

Following the September Singapore meeting where the three anti-Vietnamese groups met and, under pressure from their various backers, signed a statement of intent to form a coalition "government," there were nine increasingly fruitless negotiating sessions of the "Ad Hoc Committee" held in Thailand. The Pol Pot gang wanted to ensure control over the mythical coalition; the others were not eager to be so blatantly used without more "benefit," as Son Sann put it to *EIR*. Son Sann withdrew from the talks at one point, provoking a mini-crisis. During this time the Indonesians and Malaysians were sending envoys to Hanoi, and movement toward talks between the Indochinese and ASEAN was increasing.

On Nov. 24, Singapore, which remains a British outpost with Chinese overtones, moved in. Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Rajaratnam unveiled a new proposal for a "loose coalition," actually a paper front, which was to "dissolve" upon achieving withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia. Son Sann and Sihanouk readily agreed, but the Khmer Rouge asked for two months to respond, to allow Peking time to make a countermove designed to keep its butchers in control. Peking may already have answered in the form of a

Khmer Rouge announcement that they have “dissolved” the communist party, indicating that Peking will concede on matters of form, but will not abandon the substance of backing for the Pol Pot guerrilla war.

Singapore also announced its willingness to supply arms to the “coalition” and urged others, obviously the United States in particular, to do so as well. This directly contradicted earlier ASEAN opposition to military aid by its members to the Khmer groups.

The immediate reaction of Indonesia, expressed in an unusual public fashion by Foreign Minister Mochtar, was to denounce Singapore. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ meeting on Dec. 10 in Phatthaya, Thailand was called to come up with a unified ASEAN position. The Thai-Singapore grouping, which has been closer to China all along, gained the support of Malaysian Foreign Minister Ghazalie Shafie, who echoed the Singapore line.

The compromise final statement of the ASEAN ministers supported the “loose coalition” proposal while explicitly stating that they had cleared up the “misunderstanding” about supply of arms, and that “it was agreed at the meeting that ASEAN will not get involved with any military assistance.” The Indonesians threatened to leave ASEAN if such a move were made; according to diplomatic sources in Washington, they are ready to accept the Heng Samrin government but cannot yet do so publicly without splitting ASEAN.

INTERVIEW

Son Sann, former Cambodian Premier

The following interview with former Cambodian Premier Son Sann, now leader of the exile Khmer People’s National Liberation Front, was conducted in Washington, D.C. on Dec. 5 by EIR Bureau Chief Richard Cohen.

Cohen: Could you tell us the purpose of your visit to the U.S. at this time?

Son Sann: I have come here at this time in order to expose the situation in Cambodia. Since I last visited, there is something new—the Singapore meeting, the joint statement [of the three anti-Vietnamese Khmer groups] signed in Singapore in the beginning of September. After that there were many meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee. But now there is a new solution. Recently, Singapore and Thailand proposed a loose coalition agreement. I have come here to expose the new solution to our American friends and to our countrymen. I have to go to the West Coast to meet with my countrymen,

and as usual, I have the possibility and the privilege to see some official personalities in the State Department.

Cohen: I understand you met with Mr. Holdridge [Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia] and Mr. Stoessel [Undersecretary for Political Affairs]?

Son Sann: Yes; we need now very urgently humanitarian aid because the people come more and more in our zone from inside Cambodia because of the famine.

Cohen: So you have not come for military aid, just for food and medical aid?

Son Sann: Food and medicine and some equipment so the people can grow vegetables and other things. These people want to work for themselves but we do not have the money or the means and what we receive in U.S. military aid is now essential. I want to tell you that my requests met with a sympathetic answer.

Cohen: In the negotiations going on between your organization, Sihanouk’s group and the Khmer Rouge, have there been points of disagreement following the Singapore meeting on the question of the coalition?

Son Sann: I have to tell you very frankly, we were very reluctant to go to Singapore because the people inside [Cambodia] and our countrymen outside, they don’t like us to be in a coalition with the Khmer Rouge. But after consulting the people inside I was allowed to go to Singapore.

I went there knowing in advance we had nothing to gain in Singapore. But we wanted to show our good faith. The benefit was to the Khmer Rouge because they can sit in the U.N. with increasing recognition, and they could use my name inside Cambodia to make propaganda telling the people that I am now with them. But the people know the truth.

Cohen: So you fear that the Khmer Rouge is using your name for their own purposes?

Son Sann: Yes. They are using my name in order to get into the villages. You see, they are stronger than us now because they receive large amounts of aid from where you know [China—D.S.] but they have no new recruits.

We have plenty of men, but we do not have enough weapons. We have 9,000 soldiers with weapons but we have 3,000 others without arms.

Cohen: The Khmer Rouge is getting arms from the People’s Republic of China. Where are you getting arms?

Son Sann: I can tell you the truth. Last year I was in Peking with my friends here because Deng Xiaoping used to say we are willing to help every movement fighting the enemy [the Vietnamese—D.S.]. I went there after Christmas time last year and I said we want arms. They agreed to give us a small contribution. Now this