
Interview: Nguyen Co Thach

Vietnamese foreign minister: 'Sihanouk has come to the end of his political life'

The United Nations General Assembly will go through its annual ritual of voting on who represents Kampuchea (Cambodia) in the international body, probably the week of Sept. 27. Since 1979, when Vietnamese-backed national liberation forces overthrew the genocidal Pol Pot regime, the U.N. has persisted in seating Pol Pot as the representative of the so-called Democratic Kampuchea "government".

It has not been lost on the governments and peoples of the world that this is the moral equivalent of seating Adolf Hitler as the representative of Germany. It is precisely for that reason that this year an attempt is being made by Pol Pot's sponsors in Peking, Washington, and Southeast Asia, to paper over the bloody atrocities of their puppet's regime with a "coalition government" headed by the clownish Prince Sihanouk, who now spends his time shuttling between a villa in Peking and one in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. The coalition includes former Premier Son Sann's tiny group, and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

It is expected that the presence of Sihanouk in the coalition will give world governments a handy excuse to vote for genocide again, although none of those governments has any illusions that Sihanouk's presence is any more than a temporary diplomatic figleaf.

EIR's Asia Editor Daniel Sneider talked with Vietnam's Foreign Minister (and Poliburo member) Nguyen Co Thach at the United Nations on Sept. 21, before the vote. He found him relaxed and unconcerned about the diplomatic games going on in the United Nations. Thach's focus was optimistically on the possibilities, which he perused recently in a tour of Southeast Asia, for a real political negotiation and agreement between the Indochinese countries of Laos, Vietnam, and Kampuchea and the ASEAN countries of Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. He revealed for the first time, exclusively, a Laotian-led Indochinese initiative for a new round of ASEAN-Indochina talks at this U.N. General Assembly.

Foreign Minister Thach had visited Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore in August and will go to the Philippines and Indonesia in late October and November. While these visits are not expected to produce any immediate breakthroughs, there is a clear sense of a process of dialogue which is underway. The relatively low key tone taken by Thach in our

interview towards ASEAN, despite its continued promotion of Pol Pot at the U.N., is evidence that the Vietnamese are going to ignore provocations and pursue negotiations.

Within ASEAN there are clear differences of opinion about how to respond to the Vietnamese overtures. Singapore, headed by the anglophilic Chinese leader Lee Kuan Yew, continues to take the hard line against Vietnam. Lee's latest maneuver was to float a statement which suggested that ASEAN members might hold joint military exercises, an idea contrary to the ASEAN stand against making the regional association a military bloc. Lee is a backer of the U.S.-China alliance which he portrays as a necessary defense against Soviet presence in the region.

A less harsh tone can be heard from Indonesia and the Philippines. Indonesian Foreign Minister Mokhtar Kusumaatmaja, in an interview with the *Bangkok Nation Review* on Sept. 6, downplayed the view of Vietnam as a military threat to the region. "As for Vietnam," the Indonesian official said, "I don't think she is a threat now." When the Thai journal questioned this view, Mokhtar rhetorically responded: "If the Vietnamese are dangerous, they would have attacked [Thailand] long ago. Why have they waited so long?"

All this indicates that the events at the U.N. continue to be a sideshow to the realities working in Southeast Asia. It is there that things will be decided, not in the empty speeches and votes of the U.N.

The full text of our interview with Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach follows:

Sneider: The vote is this week [at the U.N.] for the seating of the Kampuchean delegation. All the predictions are that the Pol Pot regime will retain its seat. What is the significance of that in your mind?

Thach: What concerns [us] mostly is to see, to watch the people who are professing for human rights, how they vote—they vote for human rights or against human rights.

During our struggle we were always out of the United Nations and I think the votes in the United Nations are only to show the policies of the governments in the world. But it cannot reverse the revival of the Kampuchean people.

Sneider: But is this a diplomatic setback for you?

Thach: No. In this problem, from 1979 up till now, who are backing Pol Pot? You have China, the United States, and some other countries, for instance ASEAN countries—they were always against us, against the Indochinese countries. And some other countries, they say, for political reasons, that it is only for “technical” reasons that they vote for Pol Pot, that it is not a question of political significance.

So it is not a setback or a victory for us or for them to have Pol Pot seated there. But I think it could be a very embarrassing problem for the people who are voting for Pol Pot in the United Nations.

Sneider: Do you think the presence of Prince Sihanouk changes anything in any way?

Thach: Sihanouk has declared many times that cooperation between Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge could be “political suicide” for Sihanouk. It is the reality, because Sihanouk is only [being] used as a cosmetic for Pol Pot.

Sneider: I am recalling that Sihanouk had a similar coalition with the Khmer Rouge during the years that he was in exile in Peking from 1970-75. The results of that alliance we know quite well. I have a question in my mind as to why anyone should believe that the results will be any different now than they were then.

Thach: I think that the coalition before, against Lon Nol, is another coalition, different from this one. Because now all the Cambodian people, they are afraid and they have a profound hatred against Pol Pot. And now Sihanouk is colluding with Pol Pot. He is now at the end of his political life.

Sneider: When you undertook your recent tour of several of the ASEAN countries [Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore], which was following the formation of the coalition government and following the announcement of the partial withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia—did you detect during that visit any change in the attitude of ASEAN towards the question of direct negotiations between the ASEAN countries and the Indochinese countries?

Thach: Yes. I have recognized that there is change in their attitude—not on the problem of Kampuchea but on the principles for peaceful solution of the problem in Southeast Asia. Before they would like to impose on us a one-sided [solution] . . . they were concerned only for their own interests. They did not care about our interests.

Now we have agreed, when I was in Malaysia and Thailand—they have agreed with us that there are two principles for dialogue, for negotiation. First, both sides must respect the legitimate interests of the other. I think this is very good. For instance, regarding the total withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea: We respect their concern but they must respect also our concern, that is the cessation of the threat from China. So we can agree.

The second principle is we must have agreement and not impose the will of one side against the other side. For in-

stance, the international conference—we would like to have consultations and have agreement between ASEAN countries and Indochinese countries on the membership of the conference, the participants; on the agenda of the conference; for instance, on the place of the conference; on the date of the conference. All these things must be agreed upon by two sides. After that we will have the conference—that means “two hands clapping” and before the [ASEAN-proposed—D.S.] U.N. Conference on Kampuchea was “one hand clapping.”

Sneider: Are you saying that ASEAN is in agreement, or you think they will be in agreement, with the idea of holding an international conference rather than the U.N. conference idea?

Thach: We have not yet discussed in detail what matters—for instance, the international conference or not. But we have agreed on the principles facing us in Southeast Asia: one, respect for the legitimate interests of both sides; second, equality, that means not to impose. We must have agreement between the two sides. I think this is the fundamental, the basic element for a dialogue.

Sneider: In October and November you are going to the Philippines and Indonesia.

Thach: I must tell you that recently the Laotian Foreign Minister had sent a letter to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers to explain to them what are our proposals, what we are thinking in our proposals [made] at Ho Chi Minh City [the Indochinese Foreign Ministers conference earlier this year—DS] and how we dealt with these things. He had proposed to have a meeting or discussion with the ASEAN countries in U.N. headquarters during the General Assembly.

Sneider: Have you received any response to the proposal?

Thach: They have just sent the letter.

Sneider: The sense I am getting from what you are saying is that this Sihanouk game at the U.N. is basically irrelevant to the process of negotiations between ASEAN and the Indochinese countries.

Thach: Not irrelevant because it shows ASEAN is still trying to impose [solutions] on us.

Sneider: Do you feel there are differences of opinion within ASEAN on the question of imposing a solution?

Thach: There are.

Sneider: Do you think that no matter what happens at the vote in this session that that is not going to affect in any way your attitude or ASEAN’s attitude towards negotiations?

Thach: No.

Sneider: You don’t think it might convince ASEAN that they don’t have to pursue such discussions with you?

Thach: I don’t think so, but if they continue such confron-

tation, confrontation is going on for three years already and there is no conclusion, it could not help [them].

Sneider: There are a lot of predictions that the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia will launch a big dry-season offensive [against the Khmer Rouge].

Thach: It is not necessary. If you compare this rainy season with last year's, this rainy season there is less hostilities than before. So they say [the Khmer Rouge] they will launch a big offensive so as to have more credibility regarding their ability, their strength—it is not correct.

Sneider: Which means that the formation of this coalition has done nothing to change the strength of the guerrilla, the Khmer Rouge forces?

Thach: No. Sometimes it is contrary. There are some desertions from the Khmer Rouge to Sihanouk—that means these armed people, they would prefer to have a black market than fighting (laughs).

Sneider: Would you say that ASEAN's major motivation in promoting this coalition was essentially to improve their bargaining position for negotiations?

Thach: I think first it is to maintain Pol Pot in the United Nations and secondly they would like to have a trick, to have Sihanouk and Son Sann in the government and then to drop Pol Pot after[wards].

I think it is too naive. The Khmer Rouge are like a goat and Son Sann and Sihanouk are like a cabbage. The cabbage cannot swallow the goat—it is the goat who will swallow the cabbage.

Sneider: On the question of China. What is your perception of the results of the 12th party congress in China and do you see any change in Chinese foreign policy in the near future, either towards the Soviet Union, or Vietnam, or in the area as a whole?

Thach: I think it is the same policy from 1981 up till now. They have had some readjustments from 1981 since Reagan came to power. I think this [the party congress] is to reaffirm what they have done since 1981. That means continuing collusion with the United States, but slowing down, not as strong as the years of 1979 and 1980. And lowering the tone with the Soviet Union but continuing the policy of anti-Sovietism. It is "less of the same" and with the United States, "less of the same." Not "more of the same" but "less of the same."

Sneider: Do you think there is any change in terms of the internal balance within China? There are forces which are opposed to Deng Xiaoping's "Opening to the West."

Thach: There is a strengthening of Deng Xiaoping on the top but not yet in the army and on the provincial level. It is still a very tough fight within these [past] three years. It is not easy.

SWEDEN

Who has returned to power with Palme?

by William Engdahl from Stockholm

The Sept. 19 electoral victory of Olof Palme's Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) was a surprise to most seasoned political observers here. Following six years out of power, and after two successive electoral defeats nationally, Palme was considered by many to be all but dead. Instead, the Swedish Socialist International spokesman has been accredited 45.6 percent of the vote. By a "strange bedfellows" arrangement, he will be able to form a majority with the tacit support of the Swedish Communist Party, the VPK, which was credited with 5.6 percent.

For the first time in his entire 13-year electoral career, Palme came up with an actual increase in votes. In every successive previous vote, he had lost his party a larger and larger percentage of the SAP's once unchallenged dominance of national politics. Palme reported a gain this time of 2.7 percent, small in real terms, but hailed by the Palme press as a "landslide." In parliamentary arithmetic, the election translated into 166 seats for the SAP, 20 for the VPK, and 163 for the non-socialist parties.

Ominously, Olof Palme rode back to power on sheer demagoguery. He promised no alternative to the previous government's domestic austerity programs. The day after the election, he emphasized that he feels no constituency pressure to find a "positive solution" to the worst economic crisis of the postwar period. "This is a time of very severe international crisis," he told reporters Sept. 20. "We can have no illusions of better times."

The National Wage-Earners' Fund

Palme's campaign, as well as that of his opposition, centered around the issue of his call for a National Wage-Earners' Fund. The Wage Fund idea, which was endorsed by the social-democratic trade union bureaucracy, the LO (Sweden's equivalent of the AFL-CIO), is a Mussolini-modeled corporatist program which would use a tax imposed on every firm's profits as well as every individual and church. The fund would grow rapidly into the largest capital pool in the country and would buy shares in Sweden's private steel, nuclear, shipbuilding, and other industries.

Per Engdahl, aging leader of the Swedish Nazi Party and Hitler's wartime friend, openly praised both Palme and his Wage Fund in an interview last spring (*EIR*, May 25, 1982). He stated approvingly that Palme's economic program is