



## ROAD TO A SETTLEMENT IN CAMBODIA



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A new state – the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) appeared on the political map of the world in January 1979. Under the onslaught of the 150-thousand-strong Vietnamese forces the Khmer Rouge tyranny crumbled. The Cambodian people acquired an opportunity to return to a normal life. However, most countries which verbally condemned the Pol Pot genocide did not recognize the PRK. The Soviet Union and other socialist countries were the only exception. The concept of “humanitarian intervention” has not yet been invented. Vietnam was denounced for the “occupation” of Cambodia. There were demands to withdraw the Vietnamese troops immediately.

A conflict that flared up around Cambodia was a product of the confrontation between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. and between the U.S.S.R. and the PRC, a typical Cold War era phenomenon. The proclamation of the PRK and the events preceding it were interpreted in Washington and Beijing as a drastic violation of the regional balance of forces and a crude manifestation of “Soviet hegemonism.”<sup>1</sup>

The international isolation of the PRK only enhanced its orientation to the Soviet Union, Vietnam and their partners and increased its political and economic dependence on them. The annual volume of aid



granted by the socialist countries to the PRK reached \$100 mln, more than \$80 mln of which came from the U.S.S.R.<sup>2</sup> A quarter of a century later the former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze described the situation as follows: “Apart from extensive military and financial assistance, we exported to Southeast Asian countries our own economic mismanagement, the political regimentation of the economy and Utopian views which made the already poor countries still poorer.”<sup>3</sup>

In any case, there can be no doubt that the Cambodian conflict had seriously destabilized the situation in Southeast Asia for a long time to come. The region had been split into two hostile camps. One of them included the states of East Indochina – Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR), which were supported by Moscow. The other was formed by the ASEAN countries allied with the United States and China.

There were various shades and nuances in approaches to the Cambodian problem within ASEAN due to historical and pragmatic reasons. However, in the international arena ASEAN came out in a united front. On January 12-13, 1979, in less than a week after the proclamation of the PRK the ASEAN ministers of foreign affairs met in Bangkok. They denounced Vietnam for its armed interference in the affairs of the neighboring country and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cambodia.

The Bangkok declaration formed the foundation of the common position of ASEAN expounded at various international forums. According to this position, Cambodia should have been represented in the United Nations Organization and the Nonaligned Movement by the government of “Democratic Kampuchea,” that is, the Khmer Rouge regime.<sup>4</sup> In the autumn of 1979 the UN General Assembly approved this premise by a majority of votes. “I was told to engineer the results of the Credentials Committee, so I engineered the results,” revealed later Robert Rosenstock, the U.S. delegate. The person happiest with the results was Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge chief representative. He came up to Rosenstock after the tally and extended his hand. “Thank you so much for everything you have done for us,” he said. Rosenstock shook his hand –and then told a colleague, “I think I know how Pontius Pilate must have felt.”<sup>5</sup>

The West and its allies realized full well at the time that the presence of the Vietnamese army saved Cambodians from the Khmer Rouge outrages. However, within the framework of the bipolar system, the interests of the superpowers had absolute priority, and the PRK was on the side of the strategic adversary.



In the autumn of 1980 the UN General Assembly approved the ASEAN proposal, which envisaged the holding of an international conference on Cambodia. It took place in New York on July 17-18, 1981, in the absence of the three Indochina, and had no impact on the situation in the region.

In July 1982, three Khmer groups opposing the PRK were officially formed with the active assistance of the PRC, as well as the U.S.A. and the ASEAN countries.<sup>6</sup> These groups set up the “Coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea” (CGDK). China continued to remain the chief sponsor of the Khmer Rouge, whereas the two “non-communist” groups were financed by the United States. External support allowed the CGDK forces to wage a stubborn armed struggle; thus the civil war in Cambodia continued for over ten years.

In the first half of the 1980s ASEAN tried hard to secure international recognition of the CGDK. ASEAN representatives continued to pursue this course at their own various meetings and the sessions of the UN General Assembly. At the same time, a trend to take into account the political interests of Vietnam began to take shape, due to the efforts of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Moscow rendered moral and material support to the PRK, approved the Vietnamese course in Cambodia and denounced the position of the West, the PRC and the ASEAN countries on the problems of Cambodian settlement. Soviet propaganda formed an utterly negative image of *all* leaders of the Cambodian opposition, including Norodom Sihanouk. Although classified publications sometimes contained information urging readers to look critically at the processes going on in Cambodia, it did not change the essence of the official Soviet approach to the conflict right up to the mid-1980s.

Qualitative changes of the situation in Southeast Asia began after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union and began to take steps in the spirit of “new political thinking.”

The lowering levels of military confrontation between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A., measures to normalize the Soviet-Chinese relations, attempts to resolve a whole number of regional conflicts have radically changed the world political climate.

Gorbachev’s speech in Vladivostok on July 28, 1986, was an important starting point. “There are no insurmountable obstacles to establishing mutually acceptable relations between the countries of Indochina and ASEAN,” said he. “Given a good will and without outside interference they might solve their problems for the benefit of general Asian security.”<sup>7</sup> In



fact, the Soviet leadership admitted that it was not possible to resolve the conflict by military confrontation. The only way out was to search for a compromise political settlement with due account of the interests of all parties. That was the beginning of the common path taken by the Soviet Union and the ASEAN countries to peace in Cambodia.

*Perestroika* in the U.S.S.R. plus the reduction of Soviet assistance had rapidly influenced the positions of the three countries of Indochina. In August 1985 the foreign ministers of Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos issued a statement that Vietnam was about to begin the stage-by-stage withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia. It was planned to complete it by 1990.<sup>8</sup> In January 1986 the government of Kampuchea announced that it was ready for negotiations with representatives of the opposition with a view to reaching national accord.

In 1987-1988 Eduard Shevardnadze made a series of visits to the Asia-Pacific countries, including Thailand, Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines. He admitted that relations with a number of countries in the region had been “considerably damaged” and sometimes had to be rebuilt from scratch. The Soviet Union was striving for a dialogue free from ideological stereotypes, democratic in spirit and covering a wide range of problems.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet Foreign Minister tried to promote initiatives aimed at a political solution in Cambodia, as well as a general improvement of the regional situation.

Wishing to avoid direct pressure on the Indochinese countries, especially Vietnam, the Soviet Union tried to influence them by its own example. Thus, while in Thailand in March 1987, Shevardnadze stated that the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan could be a pattern for similar measures in Cambodia.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently he recalled: “No matter where I’d been – Thailand, Australia or Indonesia – everywhere I heard the words: ‘The key to a settlement of the Cambodian problem is in your hands.’”<sup>11</sup> During his trips to the region the Soviet minister met leaders of Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam and explained to them that “the view of the Soviet Union on the Cambodian problem had changed,” and that Moscow was intent on actively moving to a settlement.<sup>12</sup>

The situation in Cambodia was discussed during visits to the U.S.S.R. of the Foreign Minister of Thailand Siddhi Savetsila (1987), the Premier of Thailand Prem Tinsulanond (1988), the Foreign Minister of Indonesia Mochtar Kusumaatmaja (1985), and the President of Indonesia Suharto (1989). After negotiations, the foreign ministers of Thailand and Indonesia officially admitted that “a better atmosphere emerged” for solving the Cambodian



problem and that they felt “a sincere desire of Moscow to improve its relations with the ASEAN countries.”<sup>13</sup>

All this had given a systemic character to the dialogue between the Soviet Union and the ASEAN countries on international and bilateral problems. Indicative in this respect were the words of Corazon Aquino, the President of the Philippines. The visit of Shevardnadze, said she in December 1988, was viewed as a sign that Soviet Russia was finally taking its place among other Asian countries.<sup>14</sup>

As to the consultations on the Cambodian problem with the states of Eastern Indochina, they were especially intensive in the summer and autumn of 1987 when Moscow was visited by the top leaders of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea.

All these efforts ensured a “breakthrough” in the Cambodian direction of regional and international politics. In August 1987 the government of Kampuchea proclaimed the course of “national reconciliation,” in October a program to achieve it was put forward, and in November the sixth withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops, the biggest since 1982, was carried out. The first unofficial meeting between Norodom Sihanouk and the Premier of Kampuchea Hun Sen took place in France in December, while in Manila, at the third ASEAN commemorating its 20th anniversary, its members reaffirmed their desire to settle disputes in Cambodia and the region peacefully.<sup>15</sup>

At about the same time, a series of exchanges of views on the Cambodian problem between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. had convinced them that military aid to all participants in the conflict should be stopped. The U.S.S.R. expressed readiness to change its policy toward Vietnam accordingly. In turn, the United States promised to persuade Thailand to expel the Khmer Rouge from its territory.<sup>16</sup> In February 1989, as a result of the Soviet-Chinese negotiations, the positions of the two countries on the question of the foreign military presence in Cambodia became closer, and Beijing renounced its course of supporting the Pol Pot men.

The activity aimed at searching for a political solution to the conflict was stepped up by the ASEAN countries, especially Indonesia and Thailand. The Cambodians themselves hold the view that precisely in that period ASEAN diplomacy gained a high prestige and wide recognition in the international arena.<sup>17</sup>

Chatchai Chuhavan, who became Prime-Minister of Thailand in August 1988, called for turning Indochina “from a battlefield into a market place” and gained positive shifts in the relations with the three Indochinese neighbors. His statements and actions, as the Cambodian diplomat and



scholar Kao Kim Hourn noted, not only brought the former enemies closer, but also contributed to the strengthening of the regional vector in Thailand's foreign policy.<sup>18</sup>

The two informal meetings called “cocktail parties” have been important stages in the search for a settlement. The first such meeting took place on the initiative of Indonesia in Bogor in July 1988. It was attended by representatives of all conflicting Cambodian factions, the ASEAN countries, as well as Vietnam and Laos, and resulted in direct exchanges of views between the regional forces involved in the Cambodian affairs.

The other meeting took place in Jakarta in February 1989, and in July-August, on the strength of the agreements reached there an international conference on Cambodia was convened in Paris. It was attended, apart from the four Cambodian factions, by representatives of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, all ASEAN members, Vietnam, Laos, Australia, Canada, India and Japan, as well as the nonaligned movement and the UN represented by its Secretary General. The co-chairmen of the conference were the Foreign Minister of Indonesia Ali Alatas and the Foreign Minister of France Roland Dumas. Although it was premature to talk of any comprehensive settlement, the conference mapped out a strategy of restoring peace. Right after that, in September 1989, the last Vietnamese military units left Cambodia.

In the next few months the permanent members of the UN Security Council took the lead. The main diplomatic efforts of the U.S.S.R. aimed at Cambodian settlement were undertaken at that time in this framework. A series of high-level consultations held in New York and Paris in January 1990 was of major importance. The main subject of discussion was the plan put forward by the Foreign Minister of Australia Garret Evans shortly before that. He proposed to set up a civil administration in Cambodia which should have worked under UN control right up to the coming to power of a government formed on the basis of election results. The Australian diplomat Ken Berry paid special attention to the Soviet promotion of the “Evans plan”, both in the Security Council and in the diplomatic circles of Hanoi and Phnom Penh.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the “five” came to a consensus on that initiative.

In February 1990 representatives of the Cambodian factions, the ASEAN countries, Vietnam and Laos, as well as Australia and France, gathered in the Indonesian capital once more. They reached an agreement on how to form the Supreme National Council (SNC), the highest body of power in Cambodia for the transition period. Hun Sen and Norodom Sihanouk met at the Thai



resort Pattaya in May and agreed on the termination of military hostilities. In August the permanent members of the Security Council published a settlement plan, which entrusted the UN with a special role for the transition period, and the Supreme National Council was set up in Jakarta in September.

The agreement on a comprehensive political settlement was drafted during the autumn of 1990. At a working meeting of the “five” in October 1990 the Soviet Union proposed to introduce a moratorium on military supplies to all Cambodian factions, and in March 1991, the U.S.S.R. announced an 80 percent curtailment of all kinds of assistance to Hun Sen’s government.<sup>20</sup>

The long-term diplomatic efforts culminated in peace agreements on Cambodia signed at the second session of the Paris Conference on October 21-23. Among the 19 states which signed the agreements were all members of the Security Council and ASEAN. Boutros Boutros Ghali, who became the UN Secretary General in 1992, emphasized that these agreements were a result of the termination of the Cold War, the rapprochement of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. and the improved relations between China, the ASEAN countries and Vietnam.<sup>21</sup>

After 1991 Russia continued cooperation with ASEAN in implementing peace agreements. At the same time our country, weakened in the process of the Soviet Union’s disintegration was losing its positions in Eastern Indochina. Russia’s participation in the peace-keeping operation that unfolded in Cambodia under the UN aegis was very modest.

The military contingent for this operation was formed by 34 countries. Indonesia was represented by the biggest number of servicemen (1,779), Malaysia sent 1,090, Thailand – 716, and Russia – only 52. There was not a single Russian in the UN civilian police, whereas Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines dispatched 224 men each.<sup>22</sup>

True, the peace-making contribution of Russia as a permanent member of the Security Council should not be downplayed. The ambassadors of the countries of the “enlarged five” (the permanent members of the Security Council plus Australia, Indonesia, Japan and Thailand) accredited to Cambodia were in permanent contact with Yasusi Akasi, special representative of the UN Secretary General on Cambodia, who supervised the peacekeeping operation. The Russian ambassador Yuri Myakotnykh (1937–1997) worked most actively with the UN officials to settle a host of problems on the spot. The practical experience and thorough knowledge of the country accumulated by Russian diplomats during the PRK years turned out to be quite useful.





Along with the ASEAN countries, Russia took part in the activity of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).<sup>23</sup> In 1992-1993 the Russian diplomat Vladimir Yulin held the post of the head of the UN administration in the province of Kampong Speu. His Indonesian colleague Beni Widyono, the then head of the UN administration in the neighboring province of Siem Reap, and from 1994 the special representative of the UN Secretary General on Cambodia, spoke highly about Yulin's work at the UNTAC bodies and mentioned that their relations were friendly.<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly, the process of Cambodian settlement drew the U.S.S.R., and later Russia, closer to the ASEAN countries and helped overcome certain negative stereotypes on both sides. No doubt, this common experience was taken into account when in the latter half of the 1990s it was decided to invite the Russian Federation to the circle of ASEAN's official dialogue partners. ■

#### NOTES:

1. N.P. Maletin, *Vnesbnyaya politika Kambodzhi 1953–1998* [Foreign Policy of Cambodia 1953-1998], MGIMO (U), 2004, p. 118.
2. Op. cit., p. 80.
3. E. Shevardnadze, *Kogda rukhnul zhelezny zanaves. Vstrechi i vospominaniya*. [When the Iron Curtain Crumbled. Meetings and Reminiscences], Moscow, 2009, p. 125.
4. See: Chan Hiep, *Istoriya Assotsiatsii gosudarstv Yugo-Vostochnoi Azii (ASEAN) v 1967-2000 godakh* [History of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967-2000], Moscow, 2002.
5. B. Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge and the United Nations in Cambodia*, Maryland, 2008, p. 29.
6. Opposition factions were represented by the National United Front for Sovereign, Independent, Neutral and Peaceful Cambodia, open for cooperation (FUNCINPEC) headed by N. Sihanouk, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) headed by Son Sann, and the Party of Democratic Kampuchea headed by Khieu Samphan.
7. M.S. Gorbachev, *Izbrannyye rechi i stat'i* [Selected Speeches and Articles], Moscow, 1987, p. 31.
8. N.N. Bektimirova, Yu.P. Dementyev, Ye.V. Kobelev, *Noveysbaya istoriya Kampuchii* [The Contemporary History of Kampuchea], Moscow, 1989, p. 206.
9. E.A. Shevardnadze, Op. cit., pp. 124, 137.
10. Ibid., p. 126.





11. Ibid., p. 130.
12. Ibid.
13. E.A. Fomicheva, *Vnesbnyaya politika Taylanda* [Foreign Policy of Thailand], Moscow, 1991, p.134.
14. E.A. Shevardnadze, Op.cit., p. 139.
15. Chan Hiep, Op. cit., p. 76.
16. See: *Sistemnaya istoriya mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy v chetyryokh tomakh* [Systemic History of International Relations in Four Volumes], Vol. 3. *Sobytiya 1945–2003* [Events 1945-2003], Moscow, 2003, p. 477.
17. See: Kao Kim Hourn, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy and ASEAN. From Nonalignment to Engagement*, Phnom Penh, 2002, p. 50.
18. Kao Kim Hourn, Op.cit., p. 50.
19. See: K. Berry, *Cambodia – From Red to Blue: Australia's Initiative for Peace*, Canberra, 1997, p. 48.
20. Ibid., p. 351.
21. See: B. Boutros Ghali, *Organizatsiya Ob'yedinyonnykh Natsiy i Kambodzha*. [The United Nations Organization and Cambodia], UN Information Center in Moscow, 1996, p. 12.
22. Ibid., p. 32.
23. United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).
24. See: B. Widyono, Op. cit.