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Vietnam in Kampuchea: No Withdrawal in Sight

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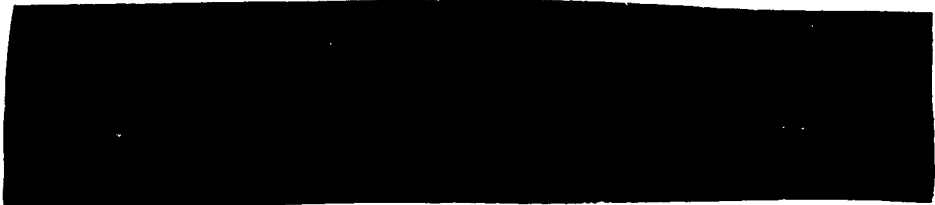
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**Vietnam in Kampuchea:
No Withdrawal in Sight** ■

Summary

Two and a half years after Vietnam began its costly occupation of Kampuchea, Hanoi still shows no willingness to accept a negotiated solution. The Vietnamese leadership believes that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will eventually acquiesce in its dominance of Kampuchea and cease supporting the resistance. Vietnam considers its international isolation and heavy dependence on the USSR caused by the occupation of Kampuchea to be short-term expenses. Hanoi might change its mind only if economic and political difficulties in Vietnam itself threatened the authority of the Vietnamese Communist Party; this is an unlikely prospect for the foreseeable future. ■



Pages: ii

Exemptions: (b)(1), (b)(3)

Vietnam in Kampuchea:
No Withdrawal in Sight [REDACTED]

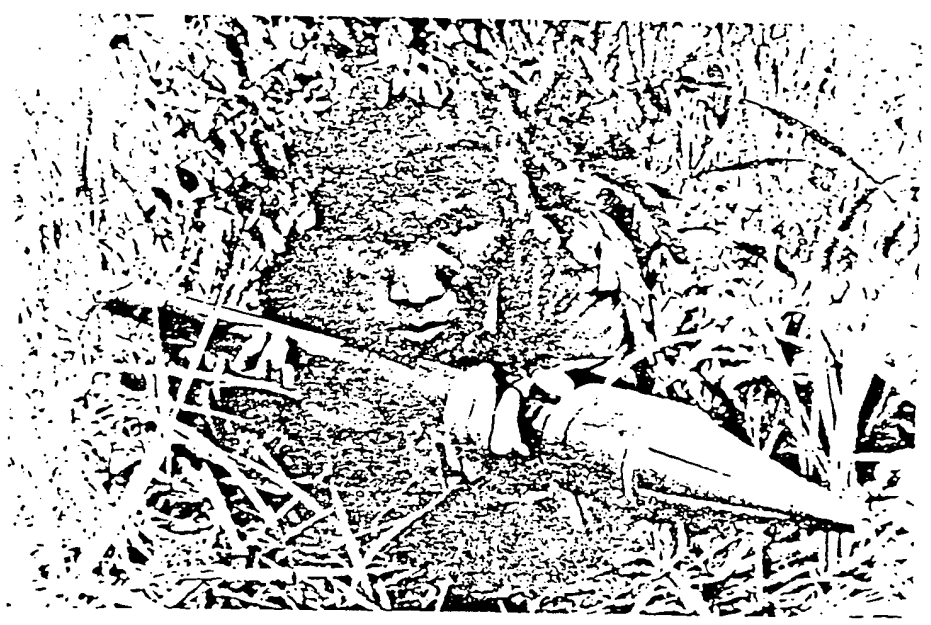
The Military Situation

Vietnamese forces [REDACTED] remain largely in defensive positions near populated areas, lines of communication, and ricegrowing regions. With the rainy season already under way, we believe that the Vietnamese will conduct limited sweep operations but no major offensives until the weather improves next fall. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Pol Pot's DK forces [REDACTED] are the backbone of the resistance. Over the past year or so, DK forces have stepped up their activities; they are now not only harassing Vietnamese positions in northern and western Kampuchea, but also control portions of several districts in the central and eastern parts of the country. The DK guerrillas have paid special attention to interdicting vital lines of communication serving Vietnamese troops; they have ambushed convoys along Route 6 and blown up portions of the Battambang-Phnom Penh rail line. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



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This resistance, however, is not likely to become strong enough to oust the Vietnamese. Only Pol Pot and his DK guerrillas constitute a viable military force, and his unpopularity among Kampucheans not only precludes any significant recruiting effort, but has so far prevented any meaningful cooperation with other resistance groups in Kampuchea. Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) is more popular than the DK in refugee camps. Most Kampucheans who are aware of Son Sann's organization apparently believe that in any DK-KPNLF alliance the DK would eventually overpower its partner. Other non-Communist resistance forces are small, disorganized groups with little experience in guerrilla warfare.

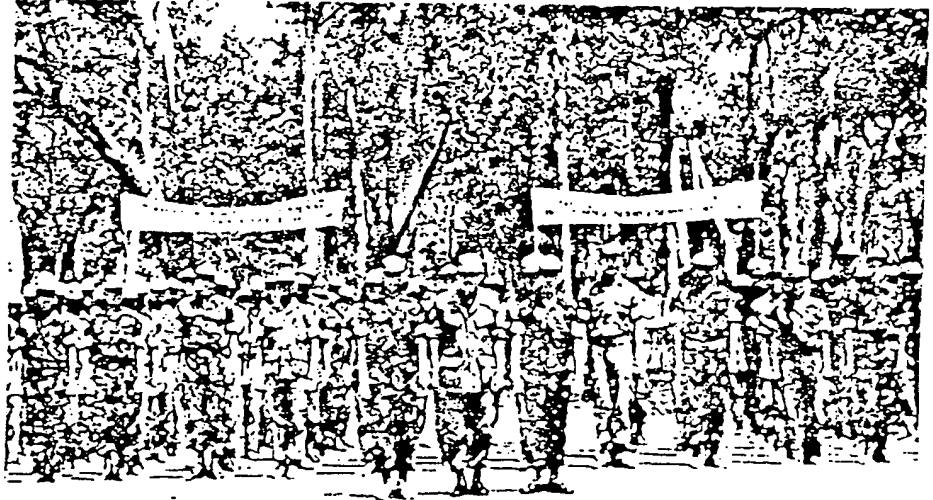
"The People's Republic of Kampuchea"

The Vietnamese could not retain control if they withdrew significant numbers of troops; indeed, the puppet People's Republic of Kampuchea would quickly collapse without Vietnam's backing. Although President Heng Samrin's regime is staffed by Kampucheans, all instruments of state are effectively under Vietnamese control. A recent election for a national assembly allegedly drew nearly 98 percent of the population to the polls, but it did little to gain popularity for the regime. A pro-Vietnamese Communist party, called the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party, recently surfaced, but it is having trouble recruiting reliable cadres untainted by past association with Pol Pot.

Kampuchea's economy is at subsistence level and dependent on external aid for about one-third of its food needs. The infrastructure of the pre-1970 years is still largely in shambles, and all Kampucheans live in varying degrees of poverty. Despite these living conditions and the regime's unpopularity, the Khmer people remain generally docile, in part because of their war weariness and perceived inability to do anything effective to change their lot, and in part because of their fear that ouster of the Vietnamese would lead to the return of the more hated Pol Pot.

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KPNLF soldiers on parade. The banner on the right reads "Defend Our Fatherland To Avoid a Second Champa." Champa was a kingdom in central Vietnam that Vietnamese invaders destroyed in their southward movement in the 18th century, leaving few vestiges of Champa's culture.



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A United Front?

China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are pushing the resistance groups to form a united front against the Vietnamese, but the prospects for its formation are only fair. Pol Pot and exiled Prince Sihanouk say that they are willing to form an alliance, but KPNLF leader Son Sann has long resisted taking part in such a union.

[REDACTED] Son Sann's colleagues in the KPNLF also have a visceral fear and hatred for the DK, which killed many members of their families between 1975 and 1978. [REDACTED]

In recent months Son Sann has agreed, under heavy international pressure, to negotiate with the DK to form a coalition, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] While Pol Pot has already stepped down from the formal DK government structure (but remains the effective power), [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They are on record, however, as being willing to allow the KPNLF to assume the major posts in a revised DK government. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Despite agreement in principle with a united front, Son Sann may, in fact, be sticking to his apparent long-term goals of becoming a credible independent non-Communist force, and [REDACTED]

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being available to form a neutralist regime should Vietnam be forced to negotiate a settlement. [REDACTED]

If a coalition were to be formed, [REDACTED]

would be unlikely to endure. DK and KPNLF forces have an explicit agreement not to oppose each other inside Kampuchea, but they refuse to operate as integrated units and are unlikely to do so in the future. The only significant byproduct of such a united front would probably be the reconstitution of a regime that would be more acceptable internationally. [REDACTED]

Prospects

The Vietnamese are likely to remain in Kampuchea for the foreseeable future. The resistance is likely to go on in some form indefinitely but is unlikely to drive the Vietnamese out. [REDACTED]

Hanoi is nonetheless aware that there is more to the cost of staying the course in Kampuchea than continuing the war effort. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] At a time when Vietnam's economy is in ruins and the party is suffering from corruption and malaise, the regime's Kampuchea policy is indirectly exacerbating these serious internal problems. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Vietnam's international isolation would end, and its total dependence on Moscow, which is grating to Vietnamese nationalism, would be reduced. [REDACTED]

Despite the costs and problems, Vietnam holds on to Kampuchea for two fundamental reasons. Hanoi now has something in its grasp that its leaders have sought for many years—dominance over all Indochina. Because the Vietnamese calculate that the toppling of Pol Pot in 1978 was an act of self-defense against a hostile Chinese surrogate, they also consider dominance of Kampuchea vital to their national security. When historic destiny is combined in Hanoi's eyes with strategic necessity, its motive for staying in Kampuchea is strong. [REDACTED]

Vietnam's leaders believe that they can dominate Kampuchea, along with Laos, and still obtain eventual international acceptance and aid. Their current strategy is to retain their military presence in Kampuchea and seek, through regional negotiations, ASEAN's acquiescence in their dominance in Indochina. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Vietnam's confidence would be shaken only if the economic and social deterioration at home reached the point of threatening the social fabric of the state. Despite the gravity of current conditions, that point does not appear to be near.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]