

Southeast Asia by Sophie Tanapura

Solarz meets the Khmer resistance

A flurry of visits by U.S. dignitaries to Thailand and Vietnam in January intersects a bitter factional battle within Kampuchean anti-communist resistance groups.

Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, arrived in Bangkok on Jan. 3 for meetings with the two rival factions of the Khmer resistance group KPNLF. Solarz is the sponsor of a \$5 million aid package, to be allocated to the competing factions of Son Sann and Prince Norodom Sihanouk. At stake in the quarrel among the Khmer leaders is, among other things, how the Solarz money is to be spent—and by whom.

It seems that for Solarz, U.S. aid has become an instrument to sow political divisions among the ASEAN nations of Southeast Asia. Solarz is currently working to cut U.S. aid to the Philippines.

Prior to the arrival of Solarz in Bangkok, the factional debate within the KPNLF broke out into the open. Dr. Abdul Gaffar Peang Meth and Hing Khunton, both former members of the executive committee of the KPNLF, temporarily split from the movement at the end of 1985 to form a Provisional Central Committee for Salvation, challenging the leadership of the American-backed Son Sann. The dissident group was joined by Gen. Dien Del, commander-in-chief and chief of staff of the KPNLF Army.

The "Salvation" group claimed that Son Sann had blocked plans to create a joint military council with the Sihanoukists. Son Sann was also blamed for the military setbacks of last year. For Son Sann, however, the dissidents were guilty of "insubordination and indiscipline," and, according to

KPNLF sources, are spending too much time at Bangkok's night-spots and not enough with the troops on the border.

Other observers say that the quarrel was also over how to distribute the \$5 million aid package between the two non-communist resistance movements. Son Sann favors channeling the funds directly to the Khmer resistance movements after the factional situation is settled. Dr. Gaffar, however, would like to see the American aid given through the new joint military command. As for the Thais, the authorities would prefer that the sum be processed through an ASEAN entity.

For the moment, nothing is being dished out. As of the meeting of the KPNLF's 10 base commanders held on Jan. 28, Jacques Bekaert of the *Bangkok Post* reported that a compromise is being worked out between the dissident Provisional Central Committee of Salvation and those loyal to Son Sann. Son Sann is to remain president of the KPNLF, while the reorganization of its military hierarchy is being discussed.

Henry Kissinger met back in November with both KPNLF factions. According to informed sources, he tossed out an outrageous proposal to the Thai authorities, that a "free zone" be carved out of Thai border territory for the settlement of Khmer resistance groups. Needless to say, the Thai military establishment, stunned, replied with a flat "no." Nothing would be more inviting for the continuation of border clashes and confrontation, than to set aside such a zone.

Here are some of the questions now being asked: Is the Kissinger proposal similar to that floated by the United Nations secretary general, which would involve stationing U.N. peace-keeping forces in a designated demilitarized zone along the border area? Was this "free zone" proposal discussed between Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, when the latter stopped over in Thailand on Jan. 18 following his two-day visit to Burma?

With his proposal, Kissinger is transposing to Southeast Asia the same negotiating method that he employed so successfully in the Middle East, that led to the destruction of the nation of Lebanon and of American influence in the region. Kissinger's standpoint continues the superpower chess games that he played during and after the Vietnam War. Carving a Khmer enclave out of Thailand sets up conditions of permanent instability in the region. And to whose benefit? To the satisfaction of China and of the Soviet Union—at the expense of Thailand.

Meanwhile, during the same period in January, visits by U.S. officials to Hanoi concerning the question of U.S. MIAs, according to Pentagon sources, indicate a thawing of relations. In the first week of January, a delegation composed of Paul Wolfowitz, then assistant secretary of state and now ambassador to Indonesia; Richard Armitage, assistant secretary of defense; Richard Childress, National Security Council staff member; and Ann Mills Griffiths, executive director of the National League of POW-MIA families, met with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach and Deputy Foreign Minister Hoang Bich in Hanoi. A liaison office in Hanoi may be established in the not-so-distant future.