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Asia

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# Cambodia vote will be lost in United Nations morass

by Mary M. Burdman

The courage of the population of Cambodia, which defied the violent threats of the Khmer Rouge to turn out *en masse* to vote in national assembly elections May 23-27, could now be rendered meaningless by the combination of Cambodian politics, brutalized by 20 years of war and the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge, with the machinations of the United Nations and United States. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's nominal head of state during the period of U.N. rule, had attempted to form a coalition government after the June 3 elections, but, just six days later, he announced that this would be impossible. Sihanouk said on June 9 that he would have no part in any new attempts to end the current impasse in Cambodia, and expressed utter contempt for the United Nations, United States, and other foreign governments for their role in undermining the proposed government.

No one won a decisive mandate in the elections, which were to elect a National Assembly with the task of writing a national constitution for Cambodia. The royalist party, Funcinpec, headed by Sihanouk's son Prince Ranariddh, was credited with 45.2% of the vote, and the governing Cambodian People's Party of Prime Minister Hun Sen (CPP), 38.6%. Smaller parties took the rest. Thus, Funcinpec does not have the mandate to write the constitution by itself.

Perhaps the only chance for Cambodia was Sihanouk's coalition, which he proposed to head with two vice presidents, one from Funcinpec and one from the CPP.

On May 25, before the election results favoring Funcinpec were announced by the U.N., CPP spokesman Khieu Kanharith said that his party was prepared to form a new government with representatives of opposition parties "to work for the benefit of the country," the *Bangkok Post* reported. While the Khmer Rouge "rank and file" could "come back and lead normal lives," its core leaders, who had "masterminded massacres," would have to be tried before an international or Cambodian court, Khieu said.

When it emerged that Funcinpec was getting most of the vote, CPP president Chea Sim claimed that there were election irregularities and announced on June 1 that it would not accept the results unless the vote were recounted in Phnom Penh and at least three of the larger provinces. Sihanouk offered to negotiate between Prime Minister Hun Sen and Ranariddh. Sihanouk's offer prevented immediate clash-

es, but now the situation is at an impasse.

Sihanouk's greatest offense was that he attempted to assert sovereignty he does not have. Power in Cambodia rests with the U.N. Transitional Authority (UNTAC), not the Cambodian Supreme National Council which Sihanouk heads, nor the CPP government in Phnom Penh. In February, the U.N. announced that Cambodia "does not have a government." UNTAC had taken total control over every important ministry and unprecedented internal police powers for itself, violating existing Cambodian law and establishing a new form of colonialism. Sihanouk did not consult UNTAC head Yasushi Akashi, and was accused of attempting to stage a "constitutional coup."

The United States has been indicating that it wants to keep things under control in Cambodia. The British *Daily Telegraph* reported on May 25 that U.S. and U.N. officials were letting it be known that the Hun Sen government could not automatically expect international support even if won the elections. Charles Twining, head of the U.S. delegation in Phnom Penh, stressed that the election might be considered only "technically free and fair," amid accusations that the Hun Sen government had murdered opponents and terrorized voters during the campaign.

## **Khmer Rouge military buildup**

Not far in the background is the Khmer Rouge, which had refused to participate in the elections and carried out violent attacks on civilians, especially ethnic Vietnamese, and U.N. forces up to the eve of the elections. The situation was so tense that the U.N. gave the parties, which the "peace process" had earlier disarmed, the right to defend themselves and voters against Khmer Rouge attack.

The head of the U.N. Authority in Cambodia, Yasushi Akashi, announced on May 19 that the Khmer Rouge military strength had "increased by at least 50%" in the last year to 15,000 fighters, due to "remobilization" of guerrillas who had returned to farming in Khmer Rouge zones. "They have new weapons, they are operating in bigger units, they are led by commanders who are more extremist than past leaders," Akashi said, and "more disciplined, more single-minded, and more hard-line" commanders have emerged in key positions. Akashi said he was "not so sure" that the U.N. would

be capable of taking on such major operations as Cambodia in the future. He said that the U.N. structure is inadequately equipped for such tasks as "peacekeeping" in Cambodia, and that he has had "many battles with New York."

Although the guerrillas held their fire during the elections, committing only minor violence—by Cambodian standards—rather than disrupting them, they were saving ammunition for after the elections and particularly after the U.N. mandate in Cambodia ends in August. "Once the result of the elections shows the CPP was defeated, violence will break out," a Khmer Rouge source told the British daily the *Independent* on June 2.

The Khmer Rouge is demanding a part in a coalition government with Funcinpec. Khmer Rouge spokesman Mak Ben demanded on June 8 at the guerrillas' headquarters in Phoum Malai in the northwest, that the CPP hand power over to the Funcinpec. "If you are to adhere to democratic principles, you have to accept defeat in the election and hand over power to the winning party," he said. If the CPP refuses to hand over power, "We will have to fulfill our duty as patriots." On the same day, Khmer Rouge forces renewed their attacks on U.N. soldiers.

### The potential for war

The situation in Cambodia is extremely complicated, with centuries-old "national" issues being played by modern genocidalists to render it near impossible to reach a national consensus and rebuild after years of war. The Khmer Rouge, which murdered *one-seventh* of Cambodia's population during four years of rule (1974-78), used ultra-nationalism, directed against Vietnam and Thailand, to justify its crimes then; now, Khmer Rouge spokesmen still claim to be Cambodia's greatest patriots. They denounce the ruling CPP, which was installed with the backing of the Vietnamese Army after it invaded and drove the Khmer Rouge from power in December 1978, as run from Vietnam. Sihanouk himself had allied with the Khmer Rouge against the CPP during years of civil war after 1978, which was supposedly brought to an end by the U.N.-sponsored peace accord signed in Paris in 1991. For the Khmer Rouge, the war never ended; it only lowered the intensity.

Funcinpec leader Prince Ranariddh is also playing the ultra-nationalist card. He said at an election rally on May 9 that for centuries, "our country has been shrunken step by step because of our neighbors to the east and to the west," meaning Vietnam and Thailand, the *Bangkok Post* reported. He was referring to the Khmer empire which reached its height in the 12th century, when the great Angkor temples complex was built. "If the [CPP] regime wins the upcoming elections it would be impossible for them to recover" the land, he said. If Funcinpec wins, he will seek to recover the lost territories "by peaceful means. The Funcinpec is not the enemy of the 'Yuong' [Vietnamese] but they have to respect us."

Ranariddh told BBC on May 24 that there would be "no

real national reconciliation for Cambodia without the Khmer Rouge." The U.N. has not created reconciliation, because it had not brought the Khmer Rouge into the process, he stated.

Sihanouk on May 24 expressed his wish to include the Khmer Rouge in a government of national unity, claiming that the guerrillas had "now turned to a respect for Buddhism," and that "we must take out of our hearts all spirit of vengeance." But only a day later, he reversed his policy—nothing unusual for him—and said that he would *not* seek to include the Khmer Rouge in a coalition. Sihanouk told former French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson in Phnom Penh: "The election is a great success for Cambodia and the world, and an unbelievable defeat for the Khmer Rouge." In a separate statement he said, "I definitively renounce my earlier proposition for the formation of a government of national reconciliation that included the participation of the Khmer Rouge."

### Economic disaster

All this is being enacted amidst economic disaster. "Cambodia's economy, long held hostage to violence, radical politics, and ideology, is teetering on a knife-edge," the *Bangkok Post* wrote on May 13. Of the pathetic \$880 million promised by the industrialized countries, including the United States and Japan, only \$100 million has so far been disbursed. Inflation is approaching 100% per month. In March, inflation was 338% higher than the same period the previous year, due to a sudden devaluation of the local currency. Electric power can only meet one-third of demand even in the capital city. Industry makes up only 16% of GDP, and this figure is falling. The Khmer Rouge slaughtered the country's educated people, leaving it without trained intellectuals. Also, Cambodia has no modern financial system.

The past few months has seen "a serious deterioration in the state of the economy and in the state of expectations," UNTAC senior economist Michael Ward told the *Bangkok Post*. Nothing is being invested to develop and maintain farms and fisheries, mines or forests, and Cambodia's valuable lumber is being stripped so rapidly that it could be gone in 15 years, Ward said.

The economy is also hit hard by the fact that at least 20,000 Vietnamese, who had lived there for generations, have fled the country, driven out by Khmer Rouge violence. The fishing industry, the key source of protein for the Cambodian population, has been damaged, as well as construction and industry requiring skilled labor and artisans. Many construction projects in Phnom Penh have stopped for lack of labor. The price of fish has jumped by 25% in just one month after the Vietnamese fled after several Khmer Rouge massacres of fishermen on Cambodia's great lake, Tonle Sap. The lake was one of the most productive inland fisheries in the world. But, Deputy Minister Cham Prasidh said, the lake is now endangered. "Because of 20 years of war we have not been doing any dredging." The water is shallower, and thus too warm for egg-laying, and fish are dying out.