
Southeast Asia Policy

China Card faction boosts Pol Pot

by Richard Katz

Alexander Haig and the Carter leftovers in the State Department are attempting to use a proposed "united front" between the Chinese-dominated Khmer Rouge and the much smaller Cambodian forces of Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk as a means to force a China Card policy on a resistant White House.

Thus far, President Reagan has kept under indefinite "review" any attempt at more direct increases, through arms sales and so forth, in the U.S. security partnership with Peking. But the White House has done nothing to halt the process leading to active U.S. backing for Pol Pot's mass murderers.

During the first week in May, while American officials met with Sihanouk in Peking, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia John Holdridge pressured visiting Khmer Serai leader Son Sann to join a front with Peking's Khmer Rouge. Giving the Khmer Rouge a figleaf from Sihanouk and Son Sann would pave the way for direct U.S. arms and logistical supplies to the Khmer Rouge, under this State Department scheme.

Arming the Khmer Rouge

With Son Sann controlling only 3,000 men to the Khmer Rouge's 35,000 men, Son Sann feared the Pol Pot forces might murder their allies as in the 1975-78 period. He insisted that the U.S. build up his forces with arms and supplies before he joined efforts with the Chinese-dominated Khmer Rouge.

"I told the U.S. officials," Son Sann related to sympathetic Washington figures, "that they were trying to put me in a cage with a tiger. I didn't want to go in the cage, but if I had to go in, I wanted to be given a stick first. But the U.S. officials said I had to get into the cage first and then they would give me the stick."

Holdridge's assistant Dennis Harter told *EIR* that Son Sann would not get arms supplies from the U.S. until he formed the united front and that Son Sann was informed accordingly. "There is no united front at this time. So to give arms to one group and not another would be inappropriate. . . . Once a united front is made, then I don't see any reason why we shouldn't consider supplies."

Washington sources opposed to Haig's scheme revealed the process by which Haig and the Carter holdovers are putting Ronald Reagan in the position of aiding the Peking puppets who murdered 2 to 3 million of Kampuchea's population. Back in February, prior to the appointment of former Kissinger NSC staffer Holdridge, two Carter holdovers presented Haig a memo on Southeast Asia policy. They were Acting Assistant Secretary of State Michael Armacost, now Holdridge's deputy for North Asia, and John Negroponte, another Kissinger associate who is now deputy to Holdridge for South Asia.

In their memo, the two Carter holdovers complained that Carter had been content to let China run the anti-Vietnamese show in Indochina. They proposed more direct U.S. support for the Khmer Rouge by pressuring the tiny forces of Sihanouk and Son Sann to join a united front with the Chinese proxies. According to the sources, the long-time China Card advocacy by Negroponte and Armacost explains why they rejected the alternative of building up Son Sann and Sihanouk independently of the Khmer Rouge. The two also reportedly believed heating up Indochina would keep Southeast Asian nations in a pro-Peking "mode."

During the first week in March, CIA Director William Casey made a secret trip to Asia to chair a meeting of CIA station chiefs in Asia and to meet with Japanese Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki. The two subjects of the meetings, according to Washington sources, were an assessment of the stability of Deng's regime and the prospects for getting Sihanouk and Son Sann to join a united front with the Khmer Rouge.

By April 29, the State team felt sufficiently confident to have department spokesman Dean Fischer tell the press that the United States is "encouraging the formation of a united front in Kampuchea" and "is considering arms supplies to the noncommunist elements of the front." Harter then corrected this statement to indicate possible supplies to the entire united front once it was formed. The following Sunday, *New York Times* reporter Bernard Gwertzman cited State Department sources as saying, "the U.S. has decided to support efforts by China and other Asian countries to put together a more unified resistance against the Vietnamese-backed government now in control of Cambodia."

The stability of the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh makes it very unlikely that the resistance groups, either together or separately, can dislodge or seriously destabilize it. The united-front gambit simply provides China Card factioneers in the United States with an excuse to arm China's proxies in Kampuchea and escalate an alliance with Peking. It remains to be seen how far the White House will let Haig and Casey go in this operation.