

# Khmer Rouge on the march in Cambodia

by Linda de Hoyos and Uwe Parpart

The Beijing-backed Khmer Rouge, whose leaders carried out the auto-genocide of Cambodia during their short tenure in power 1975-79, is on its way to re-establishing its power in Phnom Penh. Responsibility for such a victory must be laid at the doors of Moscow, Washington, and Beijing, which have used the Cambodian people as nothing but cannon fodder since the multi-power agreement to dispose of Cambodian head of state Prince Sihanouk in 1970.

In the last two months, the Khmer Rouge has managed to duck negotiations for a ceasefire, initiated by Japan and Thailand, while steadily making headway on the battlefield. According to the London *Financial Times*, the Khmer Rouge has made the most significant gains its 11 years of fighting the Hanoi-backed Phnom Penh government. The Khmer Rouge, along with the U.S.-backed KPNLF and Sihanouk's ANS, have reversed the defense of the key provincial city of Battambang put up by the Phnom Penh government earlier in the spring, with the reported aid of Vietnamese troops. In mid-June, the Khmer Rouge bombarded Battambang with heavy artillery, used by the Pol Potists for the first time. The capture of Battambang, the Khmer Rouge believes, will clear the way for its troops to proceed down Route 5 to Phnom Penh.

The Khmer Rouge has also opened up another front, acting to cut Route 6, which straddles Tonle Sap on the other side. On June 6, the Khmer Rouge captured two district towns in Kompong Thom province, Stuong and Sandan. The Khmer Rouge also claims to have seized 70 villages in northwestern Siem Reap province and has opened a battlefield around Kompong Thom, in the vicinity of which they claim to have taken control of 35 villages. Between Kompong Thom and Siem Reap cities, Route 6 is coming increasingly under Khmer Rouge control. Five bridges have been destroyed. The Khmer Rouge has also succeeded in cutting Route 10 to the west. Simultaneously, according to Bangkok sources, the Khmer Rouge has issued directives to its guerrillas to increase political propaganda (accompanying terror of peasants), harping on the themes of Phnom Penh corruption and nationalist fervor against the Vietnamese.

## Advantage to the Khmer Rouge

From all appearances, the Khmer Rouge is better equipped than its Phnom Penh opponents. Despite public

(and toothless) protests from Washington, the Beijing government has recently sent shipments of supplies and armaments to the Khmer Rouge, whose troops have been long prepared and built up by Communist China for the day of Vietnam's troop withdrawal from Cambodia last September.

Money is reportedly no object for the Khmer Rouge leadership, which has also begun sending its children to European universities. Ieng Sary, number six in the Khmer Rouge hierarchy, has millions of dollars at his disposal, according to sources quoted by the *Washington Times*. The money reportedly comes from Beijing or from the sale of gem mining rights in Pailin, the key town in western Cambodia seized by the Khmer Rouge last winter. The Khmer Rouge has enough money to buy rice from the peasants at inflated prices, paying in U.S. dollars or gold. Cambodian sources also told this news service that in the eastern battlefields, the Khmer Rouge simply carries money in from its western bases, buying weapons and materiel on the spot from either corrupted Vietnamese or Cambodian outpost commanders.

Adding to the Khmer Rouge's material clout, the U.S. House of Representatives voted June 28 to continue aid to the "non-communist" resistance forces. This aid, as reported by Peter Jennings's ABC television documentary in May, finds its way into the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Second, as Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon let slip during an interview on the Jennings show, such aid includes armaments, despite Congress's "non-lethal" provision. The House bill was promoted by Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-Mass.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Far Eastern Affairs and an apologist for Beijing. It and was heavily lobbied for by the Bush administration.

In sum, the Khmer Rouge and its assisting KPNLF and ANS are poised to bring their military operations to successful completion.

## Troubles in Phnom Penh

On the other side, Phnom Penh has few resources to meet this challenge. According to the Hong Kong press, a prior decrease in Soviet aid had already produced a condition in which the Phnom Penh army lacked spare parts for its heavy equipment. The Soviet Union and Eastern European countries are planning to cut off most of their economic aid to Cambodia, according to a confidential report of relief agen-

cies obtained by the *Washington Post*. That aid provides the Phnom Penh government with 80% of its revenue; 40% of the budget goes to defense. Economic relations with the U.S.S.R. will be strictly commercial, meaning that Cambodia must now pay on delivery for its oil and petroleum supplies, without the normal three-year postponement. Eastern European advisers have been recalled home.

The government has been forced to lay off 56,000 civil servants and to sell government gold reserves to meet civil and military requirements. The author of the report states: "When adding up all the factors, one must seriously question whether the country can survive longer than six or 18 months."

There are also signs of extreme tensions in the Phnom Penh regime. At the end of May, the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen reported an attempted coup, announcing the arrest of key personnel, including Ung Phan, Minister of Transport, Communication, and Posts; Kan Man, the deputy director of the European and American bureau of the foreign ministry; and Col. On Sum of the Defense Ministry's research department.

There may also be questions as to the military's reliability. According to *Bangkok Post* columnist Jacques Beckaert, the police are playing an increasingly important role in national defense and "their special A3 units are considered better trained and disciplined than regular army forces."

### Washington blows up ceasefire

The opportunity for Khmer Rouge military breakthroughs was handed to the Pol Potists by the United States' sabotage of negotiations among all four Cambodian factions in early June in Tokyo. The talks had been painstakingly prepared, primarily by Thailand in conjunction with Japan. Thai Defense Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, in coordination with Japan, had prepared a draft ceasefire agreement and successfully prevailed upon all four Cambodian factions to signal their concurrence by initialing the document in advance.

Enter Assistant Secretary of State Solomon. After years of no objections from the State Department to the United Nations' seating of the Khmer Rouge as the official Cambodian representative, Solomon, along with Pansak Vinyaratn, adviser to Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, insisted on changes in various clauses of the Chavalit draft, to the effect of "reducing the Khmer Rouge role." Presented with the changed document in Tokyo, the Khmer Rouge's Khieu Samphan claimed he had no mandate to sign it. The talks essentially collapsed. Further confirming the deliberate U.S. role in sabotaging the talks, on June 8, the military wing of the KPLNF announced that it did not feel bound by the Hun Sen/Sihanouk Tokyo "self-restraint" agreement.

One immediate reason for Washington's detonation of the talks is the Bush administration's consistent policy of kowtowing to Beijing, which is not interested in any settle-

### Khmer Rouge forces cut Route 6



*The Khmer Rouge are now simultaneously bombarding Battambang with artillery fire and pressing on Kompong Thom, with the aim of cleaning the path down Routes 5 and 6 to Phnom Penh.*

ment that might block the Khmer Rouge's return to full power or remove the Khmer Rouge as a Beijing power card in the region. Washington's interest in bolstering Beijing's regional concerns in this case was further compounded by the Bush administration's reluctance to see any settlement evolve under the coordination of Japan. Japan's Minister of State for the Defense Agency had met in Bangkok with Prime Minister Chatichai to affirm Japan's support for Chavalit's mediation efforts.

In its drive for a settlement in Cambodia, to which Japan has pledged development funds once the war is ended, Tokyo was also mediating between Vietnam and the P.R.C. The Thai-Japanese effort, which saw major meetings in Bangkok between Thai leaders and leaders of all Cambodian factions and Vietnam, additionally had the backing of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The entire effort had shoved to the sidelines the 1989 intervention of the Australians, which, backed by the United States, was also aimed at establishing a British Commonwealth franchise over Indochina.

There may be a domestic motivation for Washington's blow-up of the Tokyo talks. U.S. embassy sources in Bangkok indicate that since early settlement of the Cambodia issue would put normalization of U.S./Vietnamese relations on the agenda before the 1992 elections, and since a majority of the 2.7 million Vietnam veterans would not look kindly on normalization, George Bush is in no hurry to draw the war in Cambodia to a close.